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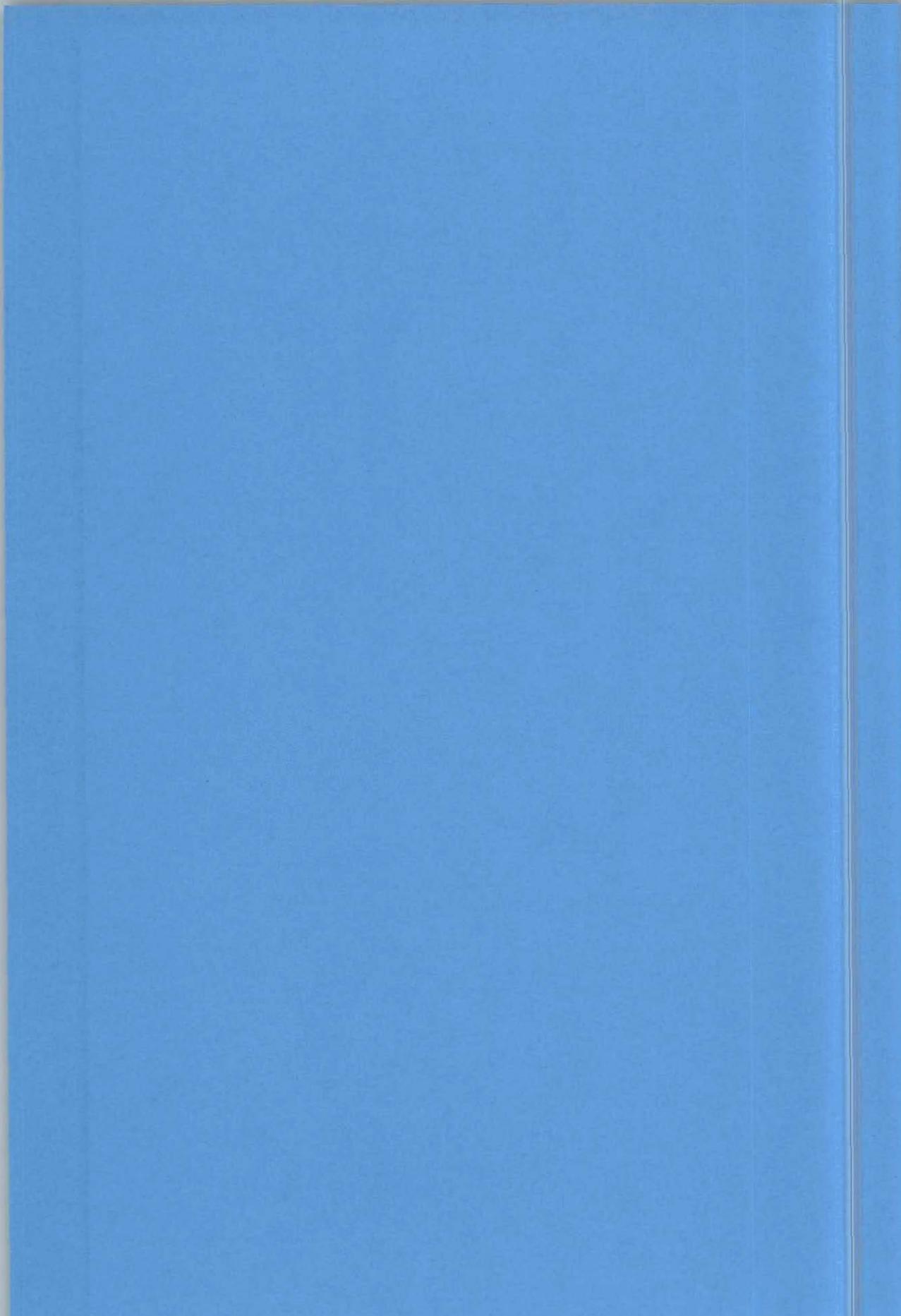
The RAAF in the War in Vietnam



The Proceedings of the
1998 RAAF History Conference

Held in Canberra on 30 October 1998

Edited by John Mordike



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Papers have been printed as presented by authors, with only minor changes to achieve some consistency in layout, spelling and terminology. The transcripts of the discussions which followed the presentation of the papers have been edited for relevance.

My special thanks to Mrs Sandra Di Guglielmo for her dedicated editorial assistance and her valuable administrative support. I wish to also thank Mr John Hunter for undertaking the task of transcribing the conference proceedings.

John Mordike
March 1999

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Air Marshal E.J. McCormack, AO

Air Marshal Errol McCormack joined the RAAF in 1962 as an aircrew cadet and was commissioned in 1963.

As a junior officer he served in Malaysia and Singapore during Confrontation, Thailand as part of SEATO forces, Vietnam during the war and the United States on exchange duty with the US Air Force.

As a senior officer he completed staff appointments in operations and operational requirements and as Air Attache, Washington and Deputy Chief of Air Force. He has commanded at unit (No 1 Squadron, F111), wing (No 82 Wing, F111) and operational (FPDA Integrated Air Defence System) levels.

Air Marshal McCormack attended both RAAF and Joint Services Staff Colleges and served on the directing staff of both institutions.

Air Vice-Marshal B.J. Espeland, AM

Air Vice-Marshal Espeland joined the RAAF on 24 January 1966 as a Cadet Aircrew. On successful completion of No 19 Academy Course and No 75 Pilots Course, Air Vice-Marshal Espeland was posted to No 36 Squadron to fly C130A aircraft before undertaking No 63 Flying Instructors Course in 1975. He subsequently held several flying instructional posts which culminated in him being appointed as Chief Flying Instructor, Central Flying School in 1980.

Air Vice-Marshal Espeland attended the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College in 1981 before taking up a staff appointment within the Directorate of Personnel - Officers. Following promotion to Wing Commander in 1983, he enjoyed a three year tenure as Military Secretary and Comptroller to the Governor-General before returning to flying duties as Commanding Officer of the Central Flying School from 1986 to 1988. During part of this period he also held the position of Officer Temporarily Commanding RAAF Base East Sale.

With the introduction of the PC/9A aircraft into service with the RAAF, Air Vice-Marshal Espeland assumed the appointment of Leader of the Pilot Training Design Team within Support Command. He then attended the United States Air War College before returning to Australia in 1990 as Director of the Air Power Studies Centre. In August 1991, he took up the dual post of Officer Commanding RAAF Fairbairn and Commandant RAAF Staff College and held those appointments until January 1994 when, with the formation of the Australian College of Defence and Strategic Studies, he moved into the position of Deputy Director of Studies (C) on promotion to the rank of Air Commodore. On 11 December 1995 he assumed the position of Air Officer Commanding Training Command.

Air Vice-Marshal Espeland was promoted to two star rank on taking up his current appointment as Deputy Chief of Air Force on 7 May 1998.

During his career Air Vice-Marshal Espeland has served as wingman with, and later leader of, the RAAF Aerobatic Team, the *Roulettes*. He has also held joint command through his appointment as Orange Force Commander in Exercise Kangaroo 92.

In 1989 Air Vice-Marshal Espeland was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Royal Australian Air Force.

Dr Peter Edwards

Dr Peter Edwards is the Official Historian of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975. He is the author of *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965* and *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, as well as being general editor of the series. *A Nation at War* was awarded the Colin Roderick Award by the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies for the best Australian book of 1997.

A former Rhodes Scholar and Harkness Fellow, Dr Edwards has published extensively on twentieth century international history, especially Australian foreign relations, Europe between the two World Wars, and Australian-American relations. Dr Edwards is currently the Executive Director of the Australian Centre for American Studies, located at the University of Sydney. He is also Senior Consulting Historian at the Australian War Memorial.

Major General J.C. Hartley, AO

Major General John Hartley was born on the 5th January 1943 and was educated at Nambour High School. He was commissioned from the Royal Military College, Duntroon into the Royal Australian Infantry in 1965. He joined the 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment in 1966, serving with the Battalion in Vietnam in 1966/67. During this operational tour he was twice wounded and twice Mentioned in Dispatches. On return to Australia in 1967 he was appointed Aide-de-Camp to the General Officer Commanding Northern Command.

Major General Hartley returned to Vietnam in 1970 where he served as an Adviser to the South Vietnam Army. During this second tour he was seriously wounded and, as a result of his wounds, was repatriated back to Australia.

He then served in a variety of staff and training appointments between 1972 and 1984. Highlights of these appointments include postings as an exchange officer in Hawaii, Directing Staff at the Australian Army Command and Staff College, Staff Officer Grade One (Operations) at Headquarters 1st Division and Senior Instructor at the School of Military Intelligence.

Major General Hartley has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Queensland and is a graduate of the Australian Staff College and the Joint Services Staff College.

In December 1984 he was promoted to Colonel and held the dual appointments of Commander, Albury Wodonga Military Area and Commandant of the Army Apprentices' School. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1987 for his services in this dual appointment.

In 1987/88 he attended the US Army War College. On his return to Australia he was promoted to Brigadier and became the Military Secretary, an appointment he held until January 1991.

He was promoted to Major General in 1991 and appointed General Officer Commanding Training Command. In recognition of his contribution during this appointment he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia.

In 1992 Major General Hartley became the Director of the Defence Intelligence Organisation. On 30 September 1995 he assumed the appointment of Deputy Chief of Army.

On 22 June 1998, he assumed his current appointment of Land Commander Australia.

Air Commodore B.I. Lane, AFC (Ret'd)

Air Commodore Bruce Lane graduated from flying training in 1960. In 1964 he was posted to No 9 Squadron at Fairbairn to fly Iroquois helicopters. He served with No 5 Squadron at Butterworth for six months during 1964-65 and was posted to Vietnam with No 9 Squadron when it was originally deployed in 1966. On return he completed the Flying Instructors' Course at East Sale before returning to No 5 Squadron, then based at Fairbairn, as a flying instructor.

On the return of No 9 Squadron to Amberley, he was posted to that Squadron, initially as a flight commander and subsequently as the operations officer. He was appointed Commanding Officer of No 12 Squadron (Chinook) for the three years 1976-78. He subsequently held the staff appointment as Director Reorganisation Implementation Staff before, in late 1981, being posted as Officer Commanding RAAF Townsville. On completion of that posting he served in the Joint Intelligence Organisation in Canberra before being posted as Director Air Force Safety in early 1986.

In May 1987 he was appointed Officer Commanding RAAF Pearce and then in 1989 was post to London as Head Australian Defence Staff. He returned in early 1992 to take up the post of Commandant, Joint Services Staff College. He retired from the Air Force in October 1994. Air Commodore Lane completed RAAF Staff College in 1975 and Joint Services Staff College in 1979.

Air Commodore D.C. Long, AFC

Air Commodore Long trained on the Winjeel propeller and the Vampire jet trainer and graduated from Pilots Course in July 1968. He completed two consecutive tours from August 1969 to July 1971, with No 9 Squadron, Vietnam, flying UH 13/H Iroquois helicopters.

In 1974 Air Commodore Long undertook Flying Instructors Course on the Macchi jet trainer and served as a line instructor at No 2 Flying Training School at RAAF Base Pearce, in Western Australia, until 1976. He returned to rotary wing in 1976 to fly the Chinook medium lift helicopter with No 12 Squadron at Amberley in Queensland for four and a half years, serving as a flying instructor and later Training Flight Commander.

During this tour at No 12 Squadron he was awarded an Air Force Cross for his actions following aircraft in-flight emergencies on two separate occasions. He returned to No 2 Flying Training School in January 1981 as 'A' Flight Commander. In 1983 he was posted to Canberra to complete RAAF Staff College, followed by a five-year term in Air Force Office, Canberra, in Personnel, Policy and Plans and as personal staff officer to two successive Chiefs of the Air Staff.

January 1988 saw a role change with a posting to fly the P3 Orion which included three and a half years as Commanding Officer of No 11 Squadron. In mid-1992 he was selected for Air War College at the USAF Air University in Alabama, following which he was promoted to Group Captain and returned to Canberra to take the post of Director of Air Force Policy. In December 1995 he assumed command of No 92 (Maritime Patrol) Wing at RAAF Base Edinburgh. On 26 January 1998 he was promoted to Air Commodore rank and posted to his present appointment of Commander Maritime Patrol Group.

Group Captain C.A. Beatty, DFC, AFC

Group Captain Beatty joined the RAAF as a pilot trainee in 1966 and after graduation was posted to helicopters for service in South Vietnam where, as a gunship flight leader, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He has completed six operational tours on various types of helicopters, flying extensively throughout South-East Asia, Nuigini and Australia. As a fixed wing flying instructor, he has also served on staff at four different flying training units, including a three year appointment as a flying adviser to the Republic of Singapore Air Force. He has flown in three aerobatic and display teams, including the Roulettes, and in addition to his Distinguished Flying Cross also holds the Air Force Cross awarded whilst flying Chinook helicopters with No 12 Squadron. He has been Commanding Officer of three units, including No 12 Squadron. He retired from the RAAF in 1987 to test fly various types of Bell helicopters, rejoining the RAAF in 1989. Since then he has held staff appointments in the Operational Requirements/Force Development areas of Air Force Office and Headquarters Australian Defence Force, the International Standardisation Office in Headquarters United States Air Force, Plans and Operational Division in the Pentagon, and as Directing Staff at the RAAF Staff College. Group Captain Beatty is a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and a

member of the Chartered Institute of Transport. Prior to his appointment as Commandant of RAAF Staff College he was the Director of Flying Safety for the Australian Defence Force.

Group Captain M.J. Haxell, DFC (Ret'd)

Group Captain Mick Haxell joined the RAAF at 15 as an aircraft engineering apprentice. He served as a ground engineer for seven years on Neptune, Dakota, C130, Sabre and Vampire aircraft in a variety of units.

He was accepted for pilot training, and graduated in 1966. He has served in a number of flying posts on Iroquois and Squirrel helicopters, Macchi jet trainers, as well as VIP flying duties on Mystere 20 and HS748 aircraft.

Group Captain Haxell completed two tours of duty in operational theatres. The first at Butterworth during Indonesian Confrontation and the second with No 9 Squadron in Vietnam. During his tour in Vietnam, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

He completed a number of staff and command appointments in the RAAF, including command of an operational and training squadron. He is also a graduate of the RAAF Command and Staff College and Joint Services Staff College.

Group Captain Haxell left the RAAF in 1990 and joined the then Civil Aviation Authority as a Flying Operations Inspector. He has since become Manager Flying Operations in Flying Operations Branch in the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA).

Mr David Gardner

Mr David Gardner is the Senior Curator of the RAAF Museum. Formerly a member of the RAAF he served on a number of operational squadrons, working on such aircraft as the Dakota, Neptune, Canberra, Airtrainer, Iroquois, Chinook, Phantom and F111. Dave retired from the RAAF in March 1997 after 30 years service.

The hallmark of David's service career was his dedication to duty and loyalty to the Air Force. He was widely regarded as an innovative skilled technician and in 1996, the 75th anniversary of the RAAF, he was recognised as one of the fifty notable personalities of the period.

David was appointed Curator of the RAAF Museum in 1986. During the past eleven years he has taken the Museum from a dusty collection of artefacts to a world class aviation museum, showing the proud history of the RAAF. This development culminated in 1996 with the opening of the Museum's new Heritage Gallery, designed and produced by David.

Not content with simply developing the Museum displays, he has now directed his drive and enthusiasm into developing and implementing Pegasus, the project to construct a large aircraft display facility at the Museum. In the meantime he continues to work on and restore aircraft.

Dave Gardner holds a Graduate Diploma in Museum Management and a Master of Applied Science degree in Museum Studies. He has recently undertaken further studies to attain a Doctor of Technology at Deakin University.

Wing Commander J.W. Bennett

Wing Commander Bennet completed his first operational tour with No 2 Squadron on Canberra bombers in Vietnam over 1969-1970. After flying photographic sorties in Papua New Guinea, he flew F-111s from 1974 and resigned from the RAAF in 1979 to join the Royal Air Force. During RAF service until 1987, he flew Buccaneer strike/attack aircraft based in Germany, and then served as a weapons instructor in England and Scotland.

Over the period 1987 until 1990, he worked as a civilian in the aerospace industry, marketing avionic displays and sensors, primarily in the Middle East. Since rejoining the RAAF in 1991, he has been based in Canberra in weapons systems and operational requirement positions, and in 1996 graduated from the RAAF Command and Staff Course. He currently works in technical assessment at Air Force Headquarters.

Wing Commander A.J. Curr

Wing Commander Alan Curr was born and educated in Stanthorpe, Queensland. He joined the RAAF as a cadet aircrew and was commissioned on completion of navigator training in May 1967. After bomber conversion at RAAF Amberley, he flew Canberra aircraft with No 2 Squadron in Vietnam in 1968-70. On return to Australia, he flew Canberras in the photographic reconnaissance and mapping survey roles before completing F-111 conversion at RAAF Amberley in 1974.

His staff appointments include: Chief Weapons Instructor at the School of Air Navigation, RAAF Base East Sale; Staff Officer Air Power Studies Centre, RAAF Base Fairbairn; Air Warfare Adviser, Force Development and Analysis Division, Department of Defence; and Staff Officer Plans and Training Integrated Air Defence System under the Five Power Defence Arrangement for Malaysia and Singapore.

Wing Commander Curr is a graduate of Joint Services Staff College (1990) and the University of Canberra where he gained an MBA (1995). He is currently Staff Officer Development and Coordination at Air Headquarters, Glenbrook.

Air Vice-Marshal G.W. Neil, AO, DFC (Ret'd)

Air Vice-Marshal Graham Neil served in Vietnam in 1969-70 as the Air Liaison Officer with the 2nd Brigade, 25th Division, US Army at Cu Chi. After Vietnam he served at Air Support Unit, Williamtown, as a tactical support instructor on Joint Warfare and Forward Air Control courses. He retired from the RAAF in 1992.

Group Captain R.J. Connor

Group Captain Connor is a RAAF General Reserve officer having transferred from the Permanent Air Force in January 1998 after 35 years of full time service. He graduated from the RAAF Academy in 1966 and after pilot training served at No 38 Squadron on Caribou aircraft before a posting to No 35 Squadron, Vietnam, from July 1969 to July 1970. His flying experience includes Caribou, Macchi, DC3, Arava, Nomad, Winjeel and Vampire aircraft accumulating over 5,500 hours.

A graduate of RAAF Staff College, Joint Services Staff College, and the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, he has served in several staff positions in Air Force Office, Training Command and the Defence Personnel Executive. He served in India/Pakistan with the United Nations as detachment commander of No 38 Squadron Detachment B in 1977-78 and his command experience includes No 2 Flying Training School, Air Transport Squadron (Papua New Guinea) and the RAAF Staff College.

Group Captain L.A. Naylor, DFC (Ret'd)

After completion of pilot training in 1962, Group Captain Lindsay Naylor was posted to Williamtown for Sabre aircraft operational conversion. He remained in the tactical fighter force for the remainder of his flying career. Flying Mirages and Sabres, he carried out tours of duty and attachments at all Australian RAAF bases, and in Butterworth, Singapore, Ubon, Thailand and New Zealand.

The highlight of his RAAF service was an exchange tour with the United States Air Force. After completing an F4 operational conversion in Arizona, he served for a year with a USAF fighter squadron in Vietnam flying a diverse range of air-to-ground missions. After Vietnam, Group Captain Naylor returned to Williamtown for further tours at No 2 Operational Conversion Unit and No 77 Squadron, commanding No 77 Squadron in 1981 and 1982.

For the remainder of his RAAF career, he served in various staff appointments, in Canberra, including two postings as Director of Flying Safety. He retired in 1996 to take up an appointment with the Bureau of Air Safety Investigation, and recently retired from that position.

Mr David Wilson

David Wilson served with the RAAF from 1961-1967, before resigning to join the Public Service. He is the Assistant RAAF Historian and responsible for the maintenance of RAAF Historical records.

David is the author of numerous books and publications. His first book, *Alfresco Flight - The RAAF Antarctic Experience* was the winner of the 1990 RAAF Heritage Award and his subsequent books on the RAAF fighter defence of Port Moresby in 1942 and operations over Korea have been well received.

His latest book *Always First*, a history of the RAAF Airfield Construction Squadrons was launched in October 1998. David completed a Master of Defence Studies degree at the University of New South Wales in 1997 and is always seeking to further his knowledge of RAAF historical matters.

Dr John Mordike

John Mordike was formerly an officer in the Australian Army. His military career spanned seventeen years of commissioned service and included several regimental and staff appointments. During this period, he spent one year on active service in Vietnam with 12 Field Regiment. After leaving the Army, he was appointed in a civilian capacity as a historian in Army Office. He is the author of *An Army for a Nation: A history of Australian military developments 1880-1914*. John is a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and the Universities of New England and New South Wales.

OPENING ADDRESS

AIR VICE-MARSHAL B.J. ESPELAND

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this seventh annual RAAF History Conference.

Let me first extend to you the apologies of the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal McCormack, who, because of a pressing engagement, is unable to be here this morning to open this conference. But the Air Marshal will be joining us later in the day and he will take the opportunity to close the conference.

The subject of today's conference is the *RAAF in the War in Vietnam*. It is clearly a subject of great interest because, for the first time, we have a full subscription. We trust that you will find today's proceedings interesting and informative.

Last year's conference dealt with the subject of the RAAF's *South-East Asian Commitments 1950-1965* and provided the background to the events which will be discussed here today.

The RAAF's commitment to the war in Vietnam involved the deployment of three squadrons: No 35 Squadron with its Caribous, No 9 Squadron with its Iroquois helicopters and No 2 Squadron with its Canberra bombers. Each of these squadrons played a vital, but often overlooked, part in Australia's contribution to the war in Vietnam. And, as we shall hear today, RAAF personnel brought their professional expertise and dedication to the war in a number of other ways, as forward air controllers, as Phantom pilots, and in many supporting roles which are vital for sustaining the force and delivering air power into the battle.

We are fortunate today to have Dr Peter Edwards, the Official Historian of Australia's involvement in South-East Asian Conflicts for the period 1948-1975, to present the first paper. Those who attended last year's conference will recall the excellent paper Dr Edwards delivered to set the scene for the discussions on that occasion. Dr Edwards is now back with us today to set the scene for Australia's involvement in Vietnam. We can look forward with great interest to what he has to say.

In terms of the numbers involved, Australia's most intense effort in the war in Vietnam went into the joint operations that took place in Phuoc Tuy Province. We have therefore invited one of Australia's most distinguished soldiers, Major General John Hartley – the current Land Commander and, as a young officer, a former platoon commander in the 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment – to give us a very important perspective of the war: the operations of an infantry platoon.

Operations in Phuoc Tuy Province also involved the RAAF's No 9 Squadron. As veterans of the Vietnam war will tell you, one of the most poignant reminders of their service in the war is the distinctive sound of the Iroquois, or Huey as it was known with some affection. The Hueys were ubiquitous, fulfilling a number of vital roles in the war.

To begin with, Air Commodore Bruce Lane will tell us about the range of 9 Squadron operations. We will then have the opportunity to ask questions of a panel of No 9 Squadron veterans, who will provide us with some insights into their experiences.

This afternoon we will be hearing papers from a number of RAAF veterans of the war, who were involved in the range of activities. They will deal with 2 Squadron operations, forward air control, Caribou operations and Phantoms.

In the final session, we will be reminded that air power operations in Vietnam depended on a number of vital contributions in the air and on the ground. We will also be reminded that the Vietnam war became a deeply divisive issue on the homefront, which was a source of much discomfort and concern for many veterans of the war.

I look forward to a very interesting day, as I am sure you all do. I would also like to say that I am very pleased to welcome the many veterans of the war who are here today. I would encourage you at the outset to participate in the discussion periods which will follow each paper and also the panel discussion on 9 Squadron operations. Today's proceedings will be recorded and will become a part of the RAAF's recorded history. So do not remain silent if you feel that you have something to contribute.

Thank you all for coming and I declare this conference open.

SETTING THE SCENE – AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIA’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE WAR IN VIETNAM

DR PETER EDWARDS

An incident fairly early in the American involvement in the Vietnam War is worth recalling. As often happened a President of the United States, baffled and frustrated by the deteriorating position in Vietnam, sent some trusted advisers to investigate and report. In this case President John F. Kennedy sent two men, a general and a diplomat. After their four-day visit, they reported together to Kennedy. The general, who had spent most of his visit talking to American and South Vietnamese army officers, was positive and optimistic, saying that the shooting war was progressing impressively. By contrast the diplomat, who had been talking to politicians and officials in the cities, reported gloomily on the disastrous political situation, with the Saigon government near collapse. After the two men had presented their widely differing assessments, President Kennedy looked from one to the other and asked: ‘You two did visit the same country, didn’t you?’¹

What was true for observers at the time remains true for historians today. It was then and is now possible to argue both sides of almost any argument to do with Vietnam, and to present credible evidence to support either side of the issue. Almost anything that one says about the Vietnam war will be considered at least questionable, if not plain wrong, by someone. It is not an area to be embarked on by those who claim infallibility. Nevertheless, let me attempt to do what the organisers of this conference have requested, which is to present an overview of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, with special reference to the involvement of elements of the Royal Australian Air Force. I would like to address three main questions:

- Why did Australia become involved in the Vietnam War?
- Why was the involvement incremental - that is, why did it grow from small commitments to become Australia’s third largest overseas military commitment?
- How and why did units of the RAAF become involved?²

First, why did Australia become involved in the Vietnam War? It is now common to assert that the commitment was entirely a by-product of the Australian-American alliance, an expression of the view summarised in Prime Minister Harold Holt’s

¹ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, Penguin, New York, 1983, p. 293.

² This paper draws on material in three volumes of the Official History: Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia’s Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992; Peter Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1997; and Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1995.

famous assertion that Australia was 'all the way with LBJ' and of what critics have often alleged was Australia's excessive willingness to be involved in 'other people's wars'.

There is some substance to this approach, but it is by no means a full or an adequate explanation. Australia's involvement was based on two fundamental arguments. The first is often summarised as 'paying the premium on our insurance policy'. Australian foreign and defence policies at the time were based on the concept of 'forward defence'. This essentially meant that Australian diplomacy and strategy were aimed at countering the perceived threat of communism in South-East Asia by working as closely as possible in that region with the countries that the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, liked to call our 'great and powerful friends', the United States and the United Kingdom. Conscious of the demands facing a small population defending a huge continent, Australia considered it vitally important to keep these two external powers committed militarily to the defence of South-East Asia. In the 1950s and early 1960s Australia had achieved this by providing diplomatic and rhetorical support for America and Britain in international politics, while making only token military commitments in South-East Asia. During this period a tight limit was kept on defence expenditure, which almost halved as a proportion of gross domestic product. Australia was able to concentrate its efforts on what was then known as 'national development', which we would today call the development of our economic infrastructure.

But by the early to mid-1960s, both the 'great and powerful friends' were becoming increasingly tired of carrying a huge share of the burden of the defence of western interests in South-East Asia. They looked to allies in the region, not least Australia, to take up a more substantial portion of the political and military load. American leaders called for 'more flags' in South-East Asia, especially Vietnam, to show that the defence of anti-communist South Vietnam against the Viet Cong rebels, inspired and supported by the forces of communist North Vietnam, was not just an exercise in American imperialism but an international effort to combat the spread of communism. Australia felt that it had to accede to this pressure, or lose the support of the most powerful country in the world.

As the war continued for year after agonising year and political controversy over the war grew to enormous proportions, this argument became the bedrock of the Australian commitment. The Cabinets headed by Prime Ministers Harold Holt and John Gorton, with John McEwen as an influential Deputy Prime Minister, believed that Australia simply had to be seen as a worthy ally of the United States, despite the growing human, financial and political costs. The eventual withdrawal of Australian forces from Vietnam in the early 1970s was shaped far more by the fact and the timing of the withdrawal of American forces than by the military position in the areas of Vietnam to which Australian forces had been committed.

But we cannot explain the commitment to Vietnam solely in terms of paying the premium on Australia's insurance policy, the alliance with the United States. Australia also shared the American belief in the other major argument that underpinned the western involvement in Vietnam, generally known as the 'domino theory'. This contended that the forces of international communism, whose advances in Europe had been halted by the creation and operation of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organisation (NATO), were now seeking new conquests on other continents, most notably in South-East Asia. In this perspective Vietnam was seen, not as a civil war of significance only to Vietnam and its immediate neighbours, but as the crucial theatre in the Cold War battle for all of South-East Asia, and perhaps even larger parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America in what was called 'the third world'.

The merits and weaknesses of the domino theory have been argued with intellectual force and emotional passion for many years. In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, when the phrase was coined, most authorities believed in some form of domino theory, and with good cause. At this time, a communist victory in any country gave both practical support and a boost in morale to communist insurgents in nearby countries. By contrast, we now know that when the anti-communist Republic of Vietnam fell in 1975, the only other 'dominoes' to fall were Laos and Cambodia. Critics have argued that this proves that the domino theory was always unsound. My own view is that there was good reason to believe in some form of domino effect in the mid-1960s, when Australia made its major commitments to the Vietnam War, given the precarious nature of the political and economic stability of many countries in the region. But only a few years later, around 1969-70, a great deal had changed in countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and especially Indonesia, all of which had been so vulnerable only a few years earlier. Given the global and regional position in the mid-1960s, Australia's commitment was understandable, although it could have been handled with a great deal more subtlety and caution. But to extricate the country from the commitment when the international position had undermined much of its purpose and validity proved to be extremely difficult for Australian policy-makers, partly because the rhetoric associated with the commitment had raised the political stakes far beyond what the military effort justified.

Having said that (which puts me at odds with most people with established views on the Vietnam War, whether 'hawks' or 'doves'), I would like to note that, in addition to the general considerations of the 'insurance policy' and the 'domino theory', there were some specifically Australian considerations and experiences which affected the way in which this country became involved. As I noted in my lecture to the 1997 RAAF History Conference, in the 1950s and the 1960s Australia and its allies had to contend in South-East Asia with the combination of two great historical phenomena of the third quarter of the twentieth century - the Cold War and the decolonisation of the European empires. The strategic and diplomatic problems posed by this combination led, among other things, to Australian military involvement in the Malayan Emergency of 1948-1960 and the Indonesian 'Confrontation' of Malaysia between 1963 and 1966. These were only small military commitments, compared with either Korea or Vietnam let alone the two world wars, but they had significant impacts on the way Australia approached both the political and military issues posed by Vietnam. It is relevant here to mention three of the ways in which Australia's approach to Vietnam was affected by the commitments to Malaya and Malaysia.

The first occasion on which Australia came under significant pressure from the Americans to lend some support in Vietnam, the ANZUS Council meeting of May 1962, came less than two years after the successful conclusion of the Malayan Emergency. We know that the comparison between Malaya and Vietnam was fresh in the minds of Australian Ministers, for the Cabinet minute which decided in principle to send Australian Army advisers to Vietnam referred explicitly to Australia's role in

helping to defeat 'Communist bandits' in Malaya. It is understandable that success in the Malayan Emergency gave the Australians some confidence in the prospects for another Western military intervention to oppose a communist-led insurgency in a former European colony in South-East Asia. This is not to say that all the differences between Vietnam and Malaya - including ethnic, political, religious, geographic and topographical contrasts - were disregarded, but they were perhaps underestimated.

Moreover, the Malayan experience seems to have had an important impact on the domestic political consideration of the Vietnam commitment. Many of those who first pointed out the dangers of the Vietnam commitment came from the same academic, journalistic or ecclesiastical circles who had made strikingly similar warnings about the Malayan commitment in the 1950s. Indeed, some of the critics were the same people, and they were addressing their warnings to the same Prime Minister, Menzies, who had made the commitment to Malaya. It seems highly likely that their warnings were undervalued for precisely this reason. To make the point in an exaggerated way, we could say that those who got Vietnam wrong did so partly because they had previously got Malaya right; and those who got Vietnam right were disregarded partly because they had previously got Malaya wrong.

A second major impact of these earlier conflicts on Australia's approach to Vietnam lay in Australia's deep concern about Indonesia's policy of 'Confrontation' of the new Federation of Malaysia, formed in 1963 by Malaya, Singapore and two British territories on the island of Borneo. Australia joined Britain and New Zealand in supporting the new federation against the Indonesians, but the Commonwealth countries were constantly constrained by the attitude of the Americans. Authorities in Washington made it clear that, while they supported the creation of Malaysia, they did not want the United States to be dragged into the conflict. When the Australians asked whether, or in what circumstances, conflict between Indonesian and Australian forces might lead to American support under the ANZUS Treaty, the American responses were less precise and less positive than the Australians had wished. In a crucial meeting in 1963 a senior State Department official told the Australian Cabinet that the attitude of the United States would be shaped both by the way in which Australia handled the Indonesians and also by Australia's 'other activities in South-East Asia'. The official then referred pointedly to the importance of Australian support for the American position in Vietnam.

In short, the Australians were placed on notice that American support under ANZUS in the event of serious conflict with Indonesia, a topic of great importance to the Australian Government and public, was dependent largely on Australian support for the Americans in Vietnam. This was a constant element in Australian thinking in the crucial years 1964 and 1965, when the Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation was at its height and when the principal decisions on Australian involvement in Vietnam were made. In May 1964, for example, the Americans presented a list of forms of military support that they would welcome in Vietnam. The Australian Embassy in Washington recommended a prompt and positive response to this request, specifically because of the uncertainty of American support in Confrontation. The Embassy argued that Australia should try 'to achieve such an habitual closeness of relations with the United States' that the Americans would have little option but to respond as

Australia would wish to a request for support in Indonesia. Vietnam, it was suggested, was an area where Australia could 'pick up a lot of credit with the United States' without undue cost.

The significance of this is that the 'insurance policy' argument for Australian involvement in the Vietnam War was not just a general consideration, an attitude that Australia ought to lend support to the United States in case Australia might need American support in some hypothetical future crisis. As far as the Australian Government was concerned, it had an urgent and immediate application. Until the end of 1964 or early 1965, both the public and most members of the Government were more concerned with the Indonesian Confrontation of Malaysia, which repeatedly seemed about to escalate into a large and threatening conflict, than they were about the relatively distant although rapidly deteriorating position in Vietnam. It would be an exaggeration to say that Australia became involved in the Vietnam War solely as a way of ensuring American support in the event of serious hostilities with Indonesia, but that was a significant part of Australian thinking that is too often overlooked or forgotten. By the time of the radical changes in Indonesian domestic politics in late 1965, which led to the formal end of Confrontation in August 1966, Australia was locked into a commitment in Vietnam which had a momentum of its own.

There is a third way in which Australia's involvement in Malaya and Malaysia affected its approach to Vietnam. The approach to the commitment of forces by the United States and its allies was incremental: that is, they first sent relatively small numbers of advisers, then increased numbers of non-combat elements, then small units of combat forces, then ever-increasing commitments until huge forces were involved. This approach is now widely seen, especially in American military circles, as one of the fatal weaknesses of American and allied policy. Accordingly, the Americans adopted precisely the opposite approach to Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991, building up a huge and obviously invincible array of forces in the Gulf before a single shot was fired in anger. Why, then, did the western countries adopt the incremental approach in the 1960s?

There were probably many reasons, but one that should not be overlooked again concerns the Indonesian-Malaysian Confrontation. As I have mentioned, the Americans were anxious that this small-scale conflict should not escalate. They put considerable pressure on Australia and the other Commonwealth countries to limit their military responses to Indonesian tactics. Accordingly the Australians developed a policy which became known as 'graduated response'. In other words, they would take whatever measures were necessary to counter the Indonesians, but not take any more severe actions which might precipitate a larger war. The Australians urged the same approach on the British, who at times seemed quite willing to engage in a major conflict with the Indonesians. The result was that the Commonwealth countries allowed it to be known that larger operations could and would be undertaken if necessary - and even the use of nuclear weapons was hinted at - but the actual fighting on the ground was limited to what was necessary to contain the Indonesian threat. They would not use a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

This seemed an entirely appropriate way to handle a situation like Confrontation, or the Emergency before it. The approach was designed to reduce the risk that an insurgency or guerrilla war might escalate into a limited war or perhaps something even larger. Moreover, in the case of Confrontation, the approach was successful. Australia kept open diplomatic relations with Jakarta and maintained civil and military aid programs, even while Australian and Indonesian troops were shooting at each other. With the change of regime in Indonesia, it was much easier to establish good relations with the new government than if there had been large-scale casualties. It is not surprising, therefore, that both the Americans and their allies were happy to adopt a similar approach to the growing war in Vietnam. Whether a Gulf War approach would have been possible, let alone successful, in the case of Vietnam is a matter that can be debated at length, but this is not the time or place for that.

Before we look at the commitment of elements of the Royal Australian Air Force in the Vietnam War, let me make a couple of general points about the commitment of air forces to overseas conflicts. Governments often find it preferable to send air force or navy elements rather than army units to a conflict which, for one reason or another, is considered politically sensitive. Air and naval forces are often perceived to be 'cleaner', because they are less likely to be involved in direct contact with the enemy. This is especially true if the forces are used for transport, medical evacuation, or general logistical support, but even the use of bombers, while controversial enough, seems to attract less political opprobrium than the commitment of infantry or other ground troops. Thus it was the case in the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s that 'troops to Malaya' became a highly sensitive political issue when troops were first committed in 1955, even though both transport aircraft and bombers had been operating in Malaya since 1950. In the case of Vietnam, however, the same sequence did not apply. The use of forces from all three services was considered together and it was always understood that control of the ground, requiring Army forces, was essential.

There was a further political sensitivity in the case of Vietnam. From 1965 onwards, Australia had a selective system of national service - 'conscriptioin' in common parlance - which, although not specifically introduced for the Vietnam commitment, soon became inextricably linked with it. National servicemen served only in the Army, not the Air Force or the Navy. From that perspective, there was less political sensitivity attached to committing air or naval units than there was in sending battalions of troops.

How, then, did all these considerations operate to lead to the commitment of RAAF elements to Vietnam and neighbouring countries? The first major approach by the United States for assistance in the region came at the meeting of the ANZUS Council in Canberra in May 1962. The Australians went into that meeting uncertain about the determination of the Americans to stand firm in South-East Asia against the threat posed by communist-led insurgencies in South Vietnam and Thailand. The Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, who had been Sydney's most formidable barrister before entering politics, took the opportunity to cross-examine the American Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, on whether the United States would defend South Vietnam, 'come hell or high water'.

In reply to persistent questioning along these lines, Rusk referred to the fact that the United States already had 8,000 men in Vietnam, and was looking for some support from its allies. This ANZUS Council meeting happened to coincide with a renewed crisis over Laos, the focus of repeated crises during the previous three years. The Americans reinforced their forces in Thailand, especially those close to the Laotian border, and they sought the support of their allies in the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in these measures as well.

Thus the Australian Cabinet simultaneously faced two questions: first, what to do over the immediate crisis affecting Laos and Thailand and secondly the longer-term issue of involvement in Vietnam. The Ministers decided on the same day to send 'a small contingent' to Thailand and also a group of Army instructors to South Vietnam. This latter group, soon to become known as the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), were the first Australian service personnel to be committed to Vietnam. There had been some discussions with the Americans concerning the form of this commitment, but the Cabinet was obviously uncertain who would constitute the 'small contingent' to be sent to Thailand. Not until nearly two weeks later did the Minister for Defence announce that it would be a squadron of RAAF Sabre jet fighter aircraft, to be based at Ubon, a Thai air force base 80 kilometres from the Laotian border.

At the same time, both Britain and New Zealand, who were also SEATO allies, committed air force units to Thailand. A year later these units were withdrawn, but the Australian Cabinet decided to leave the RAAF Sabres, designated as No 79 Squadron. Despite the perceived risk of offending opinion in other Asian and African countries, the Australian Government thought it more important to keep faith with the Thais and the Americans. The squadron remained at Ubon for six years, being withdrawn in 1968.

In 1963 the Americans first informally, then formally requested that Australia provide a RAAF squadron of Dakotas, together with an additional 16 pilots. The Australian Government had sought to discourage this approach and rejected the formal request, on the grounds that the Dakotas were being replaced by Caribous. Another request soon afterwards, for pilots only, was strongly pressed by the American military commander in Vietnam and supported by the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Australia, but was also turned down. The principal concern in Canberra, in all probability, was the political difficulty in explaining to the Australian public this degree of Australian involvement in combat operations. The use of Dakota transport aircraft or of pilots was evidently seen as more sensitive politically than the commitment of the Army Training Team, who were supposedly advisers but who were inevitably becoming involved in direct combat.

In 1964 the position deteriorated and the Americans reiterated their wish to see 'more flags' in Vietnam. (This was the time when the Australian Embassy in Washington recommended that Australia could 'pick up a lot of credit with the United States' in Vietnam, with a view to strengthening its claim for support over Indonesia's Confrontation of Malaysia.) The Australian response was to increase the size of the Training Team from 30 to 83; to recognise the fact that members of the Training Team would be involved in combat; and to commit a detachment of six of the new Caribous, newly acquired by the RAAF to replace the ageing Dakotas. Officially

known as the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) or No 35 Squadron, they were widely known as 'Wallaby Airlines'. Operating from the American base at Vung Tau, the RAAF Caribou pilots of Wallaby Airlines soon gained an enviable reputation for their work throughout South Vietnam.

Australia therefore had a squadron of Sabre jet fighters in Thailand and the Caribous of Wallaby Airlines in Vietnam before the commitment of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR) in April 1965, which is usually taken as the start of Australia's military commitment to the Vietnam War. From this time onwards, the attention of most Australians was focused on the Army's activities. Some RAAF leaders were keen to see the service gain operational experience in Vietnam, but many were reluctant to become involved. They saw the RAAF's highest priority as the replacement of the Canberra bomber, the protracted and controversial issue which eventually resulted in the acquisition of the F-111.

In March 1966, soon after Harold Holt had replaced Sir Robert Menzies as Prime Minister, the level of the commitment was raised to a task force which included the Caribou flight and the Training Team as well as two battalions of The Royal Australian Regiment. Holt also announced that national servicemen would be committed to the task force. At this time a further RAAF commitment was added, a flight of eight Iroquois helicopters. Designated as No 9 Squadron, the helicopters supported the task force and operated daily from Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province, but the squadron's support and maintenance base was at Vung Tau.

During the weeks before these decisions were taken, the Americans had indicated that they would like the RAAF aircraft based at Ubon to be used in southern Laos, where the communist forces were sending supplies from North Vietnam to the South along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Americans were themselves operating from Thailand into Laos, although denying it publicly. During a visit to Canberra in February 1966 the Thai Prime Minister indicated that his government would turn a blind eye to such operations. Nevertheless, the Australian Government quietly rejected this option. If detected, the violation of Laotian neutrality would have been highly controversial, and more difficult for Australia than for the United States to deny.

In December 1966, soon after winning a huge electoral victory on the issues of Vietnam and conscription, the Holt Government again increased the level of the Australian commitment. As well as sending 940 additional soldiers to augment the two-battalion task force, the Government committed the RAN destroyer HMAS *Hobart*, making Australia the only ally of South Vietnam other than the United States to contribute forces from all three armed services. It also deployed RAAF bombers for the first time, transferring a squadron of Canberra bombers from Butterworth in Malaysia to Vietnam. The Canberra bombers of No 2 Squadron operated from Phan Rang, a large American air force base near the coast of South Vietnam about 250 kilometres north-east of Saigon.

The commitments in 1966 were made by the Government in a spirit of confidence and optimism. Holt was especially willing to identify himself with Australian involvement in the war and, amid the warmth of a welcome at the White House, to declare that he was 'all the way with LBJ'. By late 1967 the mood had drastically changed. The Holt Government was now most reluctant to further increase the Australian commitment,

but the American pressure was enormous. In October Holt announced another increase which he told Johnson 'puts us at the full stretch of our present and planned military capacity'. This increase added a third battalion group and a tank squadron to the task force, as well as several other units. The strength of No 9 Squadron of Iroquois helicopters was doubled from eight to sixteen. To help meet a shortage of RAAF aircrew, the RAAF pilots in this squadron were joined by pilots from both the Royal New Zealand Air Force and the Royal Australian Navy's Fleet Air Arm. (In addition, a flight of RAN helicopter pilots served with a US Army unit from 1967.)

This was the last increase in the level of the Australian commitment. This is not the time or place to discuss the role or the value of the units whose commitment I have described. Nor have I the time to refer to the various other RAAF personnel who served in Vietnam - the technicians, the airfield construction squadrons, the forward air controllers, and those involved in security, airfield defence, photographic interpretation, logistics and administration. Again, I have no time here to relate the service of the RAAF Hercules pilots who, amid the stressful and controversial circumstances of the last days of the Vietnam War, brought Australian personnel and Vietnamese orphans out of that war-ravaged country. You will have highly qualified speakers discuss these matters throughout the day, but I also commend to you Chris Coulthard-Clark's volume in the official history, *The RAAF in Vietnam*.

What I hope to have done here is to indicate some of the geopolitical context in which the decisions were made to send RAAF personnel and aircraft to the Vietnam War. All war, as Clausewitz has famously reminded us, is an extension of politics, and Vietnam was a highly political war. I hope this has given you at least some idea of the geopolitics which placed men and machines of the RAAF in harm's way in Vietnam.

DISCUSSION

Air Marshal Ray Funnell: My question is a very general one and it relates to the 30-year rule that includes open access to so much of the documentation that is the ground in which people like yourself toil. I just ask for your reaction to that rule in this day and age. It was put together in a different time and a different era, a time of different tempo in politics and a different tempo in international relationships. To what extent do you think that it serves us well to have those documents put away and inaccessible for three decades?

Dr Edwards: First, can I make the point that as official historian I'm not bound by the 30-year rule. One of the great privileges of being an official historian is that one is exempt from that, so that my colleagues working on that project and I did, and do, have access to material less than 30 years old including those with very high security classifications. Having said that, I have some sympathy with the thrust behind your question in that I think there's an increasing expectation that even classified material will be available soon after it's created. That has been fostered partly by the fact that there have been so many exceptions made to the 30-year rule, ever since that rule was imposed with the enactment of the Archives Act.

Nevertheless, I think there would also be considerable nervousness in diplomatic circles and probably other circles, if people thought that advice they were giving to governments in confidence on highly sensitive issues was likely to become public too soon after the event. You will recall that the 30-year rule was in fact a major shift from the earlier norm which was a 50-year rule. In fact, I arrived in England to do my graduate work at precisely the time the British Government was changing its archival rules from 50 years to 30 years, which meant that a whole 20-year period, effectively the period between the two world wars, became open at one time. I think 30 years was imposed for a number of reasons, one of which is that it's likely to cover the maximum career of any reasonably senior person. Some of you may recall the episode of *Yes Minister* where a certain indiscretion by Humphrey Appleby in the past was in danger of being revealed to his intense embarrassment. But there is a more serious point behind it, if for example somebody was shown to have taken a particular line on a controversial issue, that could still be used against that individual embarrassingly up to 30 years afterwards.

So there is a very difficult balance I think to be struck here by any government. There are legitimate interests and there are legitimate security interests in protecting certain types of very sensitive information for a reasonable length of time. At the same time we historians want to get into the material as soon as possible afterwards and journalists would like to be writing about what happened yesterday. I don't know that I have a simple answer to that, but I do think that there does need to be some sort of reassessment made of the operation of the Archives Act to see whether a 30-year rule continues to be valid today and continues to be operating effectively.

Dr Alan Stephens: You mentioned the early mission sent by President Kennedy in the early 1960s to try to find out first-hand what was happening in Vietnam, and he got those conflicting answers. Quite a number of authoritative references since then - and I'm thinking specifically of Robert McNamara's memoirs - give quite alarming representations of the level of ignorance in the most senior levels in the United States regarding Vietnam: the country, the culture, its history, to the extent that some of the most senior officials didn't even know where it was. How well were the subtleties of those kinds of issues understood in Australia in our Department of External Affairs, Defence and so on, and did we really know what we were getting ourselves into?

Dr Edwards: I think ignorance, relative or complete ignorance, about Vietnam was fairly widespread in Australia as you say it was in Washington and many other parts of the world at that time. I have heard many Australian service personnel relate that they were told that they had been posted to Vietnam and their first reaction was to go to an atlas and find out where it was they were being sent. Having said that though, one can be too scathing about the level of advice that the government was receiving at the crucial time in the mid-1960s. The dangers, the complexities, the difficulties were, I think, reasonably well outlined in advice from senior levels of government and what was then called the Department of External Affairs and the Department of Defence. I think, for example, of a major strategic assessment in late 1964 which was just at the time when the government was in fact making the decision to introduce selective national service. The assessment seemed to assume that in fact the war in Vietnam was effectively lost.

Although this wasn't spelt out, it seemed to be assuming that the Americans faced the choice between accepting the fall of Saigon or massive intervention. And, as I read the document, it seemed to assume that the Americans would probably not intervene massively, that Saigon would fall and the crucial question would then become the defence of Thailand. There were also frequent statements that the Viet Cong were very strong in South Vietnam, that even without North Vietnamese intervention there would be major continuing strife in South Vietnam. So I think the advice from those people whose job it was to give detailed advice was not as bad as it is sometimes tempting to indicate.

The real problem, as far as the government ministers who had to make the crucial decision were concerned - and this basically came down to a Cabinet committee of just six men - was the geo-political issue, not least the question of the relations with the United States. Even in that body of six people, two at the crucial moment in 1965 were expressing severe doubts. One was Paul Hasluck, the Minister for External Affairs, who is always seen - and usually correctly - as a hawk on Vietnam, but he was very conscious of the number of peace moves that were being made at that time. The other one was the Minister for Labour and National Service William McMahon, who was probably the least highly regarded and the least trusted by his colleagues and that may have had something to do with the attention that was given to the points he was making. But they were overruled by Menzies, McEwen, Holt and the Defence Minister Shane Paltridge³ who thought that we simply had to support the Americans at this time for the sort of reasons that I outlined in my paper.

Squadron Leader Gary Hale: In the modern era we are taught about commanders' intent and political intent and end states. Before the Vietnam war, what sort of advice was given to the commander from the Australian side? We've certainly seen the political limitations on the US side, but what sort of advice was the senior commander given? Did it hamper our ability to undertake operations?

Dr Edwards: The directions given to a number of the commanders have been set out in the official history. In fact the documents have been set out in full in *To Long Tan*, the first of the two volumes of the Army's involvement in Vietnam. I think they're fairly clear, and I think there was a clear understanding right from the outset on the Australian side, that this was a highly political war. What may have been underestimated, as I hinted at in my paper, were the degrees of difference that Vietnam had compared with earlier experiences in Malaya and Borneo. I don't want to make too much of this point, but I think that it is fair to say that a lot of military commanders or their advisers came to Vietnam with views very much formed by experience in Malaya and Borneo, and took some time to appreciate the military differences in the situation in Vietnam. However, I don't think there was an undue amount of political constraint on the way the guidelines were set out. It was a highly political war and that was made clear right from the outset.

Air Vice-Marshal Mac Weller: This may be of more interest later in the day, but you suggested that perhaps the commitment in Vietnam might have been of questionable interest from an Air Force view point. The period of the 1960s was a pretty heady time for Air Force with its involvement in Malaysia, Ubon, and Vietnam. You could hardly

³ R.G. Menzies - Prime Minister 1949-1966; J. McEwen - Deputy Prime Minister 1958-1971; H. Holt - Treasurer 1958-1966, Prime Minister 1966-1967; S. Paltridge - Minister for Defence 1964-1966.

say that the commitment of the forces to Vietnam, and the aircraft involved - the Iroquois, Caribou and Canberra - were the primary interest of the Air Force of the day. I think of the aircraft that we were trying to introduce, the Mirage, the F-111, P-3s, C130s and suspect that these were the centre of the Air Force's attention. From my own perspective on the ground in Vietnam on the ground, you started to wonder whether, 'Hey! the nation was hardly with us but was the Air Force also with us?'

Dr Edwards: I'm sure there are people in this room who know much more about this than I do, so I feel somewhat apprehensive in responding to your observation. I certainly have the impression that there was a division within the Air Force at senior levels. On the one hand, some said, 'This is the only war we've got; we need operational experience; we'd be foolish to turn down the opportunity to get what operational experience we can in real fighting circumstances; and this is where we must do it'. On the other hand some people said, 'This is not really an Air Force war; it's essentially an Army war'. As you say, it cuts across the Air Force's priorities in its own development at that time. There was a great deal of attention at that time on redeveloping the Air Force. The mid-1960s was a time of defence expansion across the board, partly in response to the pressures from our great and powerful friends that I referred to in my paper. It was a time when Defence budgets rose enormously after a period of quite tight constraint and there was great attention to acquisition of new capabilities. So as you say, I have the impression that there was a great deal of tension between those who wanted to focus on force acquisition questions and those who wanted to get operational experience. But I'm sure there are others here who can comment more extensively on that.

Wing Commander Ken Semmler: I've got no quarrel at all with being in Vietnam, I've only got quarrels with the way in which it was fought. I seek your comment with reference to the domino theory. In practice I believe that the involvement in Vietnam bought time, albeit at great cost, but that in fact it put an end to the domino effect. It eased the pressure on Thailand and so forth, particularly in reference to the things which were happening in Laos and Cambodia. And subsequently we've seen the collapse of communism. So it begs the question in the long run, who won the war?

Dr Edwards: Certainly, the most effective argument that has been put up by the hawks, people who supported the war, is precisely the one that you outlined - that it gained ten years, that there would have been an enormous difference to the whole future of South-East Asia and perhaps even wider in the world if Saigon had fallen in 1965 instead of falling in 1975. What I have indicated is that I partially accept that argument. I think certainly that it is true that, had Saigon fallen in 1965, the regional implications would have been very much wider. Now I don't think the dominoes were going to fall in some predetermined set order, but the implications, both for practical reasons and for morale reasons, throughout the whole region would have been very much more extensive, and it would have seriously affected countries like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and above all, Indonesia. There is an argument which I don't think is provable one way or the other, but can be advanced, that the Indonesian Army and its leaders would not have had the courage to take on the PKI⁴ in late 1965 if, for example, mainland South-East Asia had seen the fall of Saigon and perhaps other so called dominoes earlier in that year. We'll never know the answer to that question, but it's certainly one that can be raised.

⁴ PKI : *Partai Komunis Indonesia* - the Indonesian Communist Party.

Having said that, I think it's interesting that one hears this argument sometimes from Americans who are defending their role in the Vietnam war. Some of the leading hawks of the 1960s point to Indonesia in particular, and the stronger position of other countries like Thailand and Malaysia in 1975 compared with 1965. Yet it is a point that they were not making strongly at the time. They were focusing very much on Vietnam per se as the crucial theatre, and not giving as much attention to the international context. It tended to be Australians and others who were making that point about the international context more strongly than people in Washington.

Group Captain Arthur Skimin: Peter, picking up on your earlier comment in response to Mac Weller (Air Vice-Marshal Mac Weller). The conflict of priorities of the Air Force at the time were predominantly on the re-equipment program. The decisions in terms of what was assigned to the early days of the Vietnam conflict were balanced against the Mirage program. In particular, the numbers of pilots available and balancing the sensitivities of the SEATO commitment under Plan Six which took 79 Squadron into Ubon, and the other commitments that were still carrying on from the Commonwealth strategic reserve. It was these balancing acts that the Joint Planning Committee had to consider in advising the Defence Committee with regards to which was the agenda item that went forward with the Cabinet submission on the escalation, or the increasing incremental increase of the commitment into Vietnam from the Air Force. All of those arguments are well and truly identified in the Joint Planning Committee report to the Defence Committee, which formed the supplementary document to the Cabinet submission by Fairhall⁵ at the time.

Dr Edwards: Yes, thank you for that Arthur. I think the wider context of that is what I've discussed in the closing chapters of *Crises and Commitments*.⁶ You refer to the SEATO Plans. The early 1960s were a great planning era and SEATO produced Plan One, Plan Two through to about Six or Seven, I think. Each plan forecast certain scenarios and what the SEATO allies would agree to do if these scenarios eventuated. And Australia would say, 'Well under Plan Four we'll commit X, if China does X we'll do this and we'll commit this battalion here and we'll commit these Air Force elements there'.

What became apparent was that the same very small packets of forces were being committed to different plans under different scenarios. And if two or more things went wrong at any given time, there was the potential for, to put it mildly, extreme embarrassment, because the same battalion was supposed to be in about three different places at once and mutatis mutandis, the same thing was the case with Air Force and Navy elements. So this was the context in which there was the defence re-equipment program and a very considerable expansion of defence. There was a constant problem as to how much one allowed that to be shaped by the commitment that was actually going on at the time, namely the Vietnam war, and how much it should be shaped by considerations as to what was the desirable long term approach for Australian defence.

⁵ A. Fairhall - Minister for Defence 1966-1969.

⁶ Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1965*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992.

Squadron Leader David Millar: I have a question on French involvement, noting that in 1967/68 one of the greatest critics at the political level of the war was General de Gaulle. The French had in actual fact set up the Bao Dai government, the original South Vietnamese government, and at the same time Air Force was buying the Mirage, a French aircraft. I was wondering if you'd throw some light on the French. Was there any impact on Australian politics from France? Was there any pressure exerted through military sales?

Dr Edwards: I'm not aware of any direct link between the Mirage sales and the political pressure over Indochina. Certainly Australia had been closely aligned with the French in the 1950s and we even sent a certain amount of military support, although I think it was of a fairly poor order, technically speaking. I think this was done under the Colombo Plan which was quite extraordinary in itself and occurred around the time of Dien Bien Phu. But by the 1960s, as you say, the French had become amongst the greatest critics of the American and Western approach to Vietnam. The Americans found that, if you'll forgive the pun, particularly galling because they felt that the French had set up this situation and there was a tendency for the Americans to feel that they didn't have to listen to French advice. The French had failed and it was the Americans who were going to have to sort it out. So de Gaulle's criticism of it was not only rejected, but was resented very strongly and his plans for neutralisation of South-East Asia, which he put forward on several occasions were dismissed out of hand by the Americans. But I can't draw any direct link between French political pressure and the Mirage sales.

Air Vice-Marshal Bob Richardson: You commented on the intensely political nature of this conflict and I would like to make an observation on the personal consequences of that incrementalist approach that was adopted in the early stages especially. I spent eight months in Ubon between 1963 and 1965 when the Americans brought first one squadron of F4 Phantoms, and then two, and then three, mainly to conduct operations in the far north of Vietnam. I was astounded as a junior officer to realise what was actually happening in those early days. We spent a lot of time with the Phantom pilots, talking with them, learning about their method of operations and that incredible aircraft capability so far superior to our own in those days. They told us how they were prohibited from bombing in certain areas around Hanoi and yet they were required to take photographs from their reconnaissance aircraft of the build-up of guided missile defences around the city. Over a period of months, we saw the despondency of these pilots who were photographing these missile defences being erected, but they were prohibited from taking action against them, although they were at the time bombing other areas in the near vicinity. I remember on one occasion being told by a group of pilots that they were going to have to come under fire before the White House would approve their taking action. And that's what happened. As I recollect, the missiles were finally fired. Three out of the four Phantoms that were hit by proximity or direct hit at the time were lost either directly or in transit back to Ubon. After that the rules of engagement were changed. It struck me at the time that this was an extraordinary way to fight a war and I've never forgotten the personal consequences for those aircrew involved.

Dr Edwards: Thank you for that comment. I can only make the wider point that the main reason why Washington was so sensitive about what could or could not be done in and around Hanoi and anywhere, particularly in the northern parts of North Vietnam,

was shaped by the consciousness that China was just across the border. And what Washington did not want to precipitate was the equivalent of the Chinese reaction to the march on the Yalu River (the border between North Korea and Manchuria) in the Korean war. There was so much consciousness that the Americans wanted to fight North Vietnam, but the issue was doing it in a way that would not bring the Chinese in. That was a constant battle which the Americans never really resolved satisfactorily. I think they never came to terms with the fact that any major action against North Vietnam was almost certainly going to precipitate some form of Chinese reaction. Hence the duality of aggression and restraint, if you like. This vacillation characterised American policy on the sort of issues that you've mentioned.

Flight Lieutenant Tim Anderson: I am interested in the historiography of the war. This was a war that was extensively reported by the media and very available to the public. How different is the history that was written immediately after the war to the history that we write now, and obviously there's been a lot of books just written recently?

Dr Edwards: Vietnam seems to be the exception to the classic phrase that the history of the war is written by the winners. Vietnam must be the only war about which such an enormous amount has been written by the losers. There's a huge outpouring of material which has gone on ever since the war. So it's hard to know how to characterise it briefly. I would say though to some extent that one can see the influence of political opinion on the sway of historiographical arguments. Most of the writing that came out immediately after 1975 asked how did we get it so badly wrong? What were all the mistakes? Barbara Tuchman's book *The March of Folly* is fairly typical. How did we manage to misunderstand Vietnam so badly? How could we have made such a terrible strategic error? There was then something of a reaction against involvement in Vietnam. About that time, President Reagan said that Vietnam had been a noble cause, with the implication that the cause was fine, but the implementation had been faulty. And some of the histories that came out at that time tended to support that sort of view. They argued that if only the Americans had used better and wiser tactics, and better strategy as well, perhaps then it was a good cause which could have been won. More recently, I think there's been something of a swing back to the prior view. Robert McNamara's⁷ memoirs, in particular, have gone back to something of the 1970s interpretation. That's a fairly crude summary, but I think it's something that will be continually argued over, back and forth, for a great deal of time.

Air Marshal Ray Funnell: I want to make a couple of comments, Peter. I think it came out very well in your presented paper that there was a linkage between what Australia was doing as part of the effort against Confrontation and its involvement in the war in Vietnam. Those of us who were serving in Butterworth at the time - this is in 1966 - could see that as the pressure came off Confrontation, the movement of equipment and personnel, both Iroquois and Canberra, from Malaysia into Vietnam increased. Those linkages were very strong across the board, not only at the political level, but right down to the operational level. But Bob Richardson's remarks about Ubon reminds me of another point you mentioned in your paper. You said that the possible use of 79 Squadron in Laos and Vietnam in early to mid-1966 was rejected on the basis that it would be politically difficult to work without the breach of Thai

⁷ Robert McNamara – United States Secretary of Defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

neutrality. I don't know where their heads were. They must have been in the ground. For years the Thai neutrality has been breached. The Americans had huge forces, not only in Ubon but in Udon Thani, Korat and Utapao that operated 24 hours a day out of Thailand into Laos and Vietnam. It was a feature, almost a nightly feature on the news, so why were they so sensitive to a breach of Thai neutrality?

Dr Edwards: It wasn't so much a breach of Thai neutrality because the Thais were known to be on side. They were among the strongest hawks if you like. It was Laotian neutrality. Laos had been supposedly declared neutral under a very flimsy tripartite government of communists, anti-communists and neutralists under a Geneva convention in the early 1960s. The Thais indicated that they were willing to turn a blind eye if Australians flew over Laos and bombed the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, which the Americans were doing, but denying. But the Australians felt that they couldn't get away with that sort of denial. Could I just link that also with the previous question by saying that the different perspectives that are emerging on the Vietnam war are quite interesting. When I'm engaged in discussions with Americans, it's quite interesting to see how little they know or understand about Malaya, Malaysia, Indonesia and related regional elements. The American tradition has been to focus very much on Vietnam, the French heritage and then America picking up the French responsibility and how that was handled. The Americans until quite recent times have known remarkably little about the regional context which is something that we Australians have tended to emphasise very heavily. Next month I'll be going to a conference dealing with the Vietnam War from an international perspective, organised by the Germans, who may have their own reasons for wanting to look at another war. There will be papers given by people from the Netherlands, Finland, Italy and, I think, Spain. It will be quite intriguing to see what perspectives the European countries have on the Vietnam War.

THE PLATOON COMMANDER'S WAR

MAJOR GENERAL J.C. HARTLEY

I graduated from the Royal Military College at Duntroon in December 1965. Our contribution to the war in Vietnam had increased significantly with the deployment of 1 RAR earlier that year. We had also, as very junior cadets, seen two of our highly respected Warrant Officer instructors depart with the first contingent of the Training Team in 1962. I think most of us hoped to see active service; I certainly did, and you can imagine my chagrin and disappointment when I was notified of my posting, in mid-1965, to 8 RAR which, as far as I knew, had no short-term prospect for deploying to Vietnam. Indeed the unit was still in the process of being raised. At least half of the infantrymen in my class were off to the exotic Pacific Islands Regiment while the rest of us were rationed out one to each of our nine infantry battalions.

Some weeks before graduation, I was summoned to see Paul Greenhalgh, the adjutant. I think I enjoyed his confidence but, as the senior cadet of Sovereign's Company, most of our discussions had revolved around my Company's and my own inability to satisfy his high expectations of us. I therefore approached his office with some trepidation. His first words were 'What can I tell you that would make you happiest'. Without consideration, I immediately replied 'You could tell me that I am going to Vietnam'. 'Congratulations', he said, 'you are posted to 5 RAR'. 5 RAR was to go to Vietnam in April to replace 1 RAR. Paul also told me that he, too, was posted to 5 RAR as a Company Commander.

I knew of no one who had been to Vietnam. We had, of course, studied the origins of conflict and our understanding of revolutionary warfare was, I think, pretty comprehensive. Many of our instructors had served in the Malayan Emergency. We certainly understood the military political nature of revolutionary warfare, the stages of a communist insurgency, Maoist doctrine and the concept of People's War. We had also studied the French experience in Indo-China. I received a number of prizes on graduation which included Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy* and Jean Laterguay's *Yellow Fever*. So I guess, at least psychologically, I was ready and most desirous of a posting to Vietnam.

In early January, after three weeks leave, I marched into 5 RAR. I was posted to A Company and, to my delight, appointed to command the 1st Platoon. I went through the rare but memorable baptism of meeting my first platoon. My platoon sergeant was an experienced soldier who was the quintessential senior non-commissioned officer: demanding of standards, intolerant of any form of slackness, exemplary in his own personal performance, firm but extremely fair; he was also highly respected but, I think, probably not particularly popular. To me he was a marvellous blend of coach, confidante and critic. I learnt from him every day. The Company Sergeant Major was another old soldier and a rarity - he had seen service in Vietnam in the Training Team. Indeed, at that time he was the only man in that battalion of 800 soldiers who at that stage had seen service in Vietnam. I enjoyed his company immensely. He would regale us endlessly with stories of panji stakes (a panji stake was a piece of

bamboo which had been hardened by fire, pointed at the end and pushed into the ground, and if you didn't watch out, you could impale yourself and cause a nasty injury). I must say that I don't think that I ever saw a panji stake in Vietnam. The CSM talked about booby traps, mines, and the cunning Viet Cong who appeared to have suborned most of the population. It was a land of snakes, cannibalistic ants, bar girls who charged much, promised more but gave little. To me it all seemed remarkably exciting and extraordinarily exotic. And much of it was.

The soldiers were first rate. Three quarters of my platoon of about 35 were National Servicemen - men of the first intake. They had been in the Army for about nine months. All were about 21, they appeared to accept their lot as national servicemen, and had shared recruit and initial training and generally were great friends. None was married; few had girlfriends. They largely came from Victoria and Tasmania. Having served subsequently in the post-Vietnam Army, I believe their age (about two to three years older than the post-National Service platoons) was a telling factor; the difference between a platoon of 20 year-olds and a platoon of 17 year-olds is quite remarkable. They were generally well educated, most appeared to have completed Year 12.

My three section commanders were an interesting mix. The oldest was 38 and the other two also had long service, much of it in a peacetime, garrison environment. None survived the rigours of the training regime over the next three months.

I was generally less impressed with my officers. My Company Commander was in his mid-forties (unheard of today when most company commanders are about 30). He had been wounded in New Guinea in World War II. Nor was I impressed with many of my fellow platoon commanders. Only two of us were from Duntroon. Half the remainder were graduates of the National Service Officer Scheme and, together with their Portsea colleagues, seemed to lack the maturity, knowledge and toughness that our four years had given us. Something like 10 of the 12 rifle platoon commanders marched in at the same time. As we were to go to Vietnam in about four months' time, an intense period of learning and training was required. We also embarked on an intense period of learning to live with each other; 'bonding' in the modern parlance. For me that required that I gain the confidence and respect of my platoon.

For the next four months training was intense. About half the time was spent at Holsworthy where we were based. Typically we were trained from six in the morning until six at night. Many evenings were taken up with administration: drafting wills, inoculations, receiving new dog tags and so on. Training involved much fieldcraft and shooting. Physical training was an every day feature. We received lectures on the origin of the war, the history and customs of the people of Vietnam, the Geneva Convention and a lengthy session from a group of chaplains on character guidance. Soldiers were required to attend but not the officers. I thought this odd. I attended throughout not because I was particularly convinced of much of what I heard, but because I wanted to share my troops' experiences. The result was I got to read the lesson at the end of the session.

New weapons were introduced. The American Army's Armalite - light, firing plastic coated 5.56 ammunition and a vast improvement on the World War II Owen gun, which I carried for the first two months in Vietnam. The M79 - a grenade launcher,

also made its appearance. We were intrigued by this weapon which fired the grenade over several hundred metres, a bit like a shotgun. For those of us who had fired the Energa grenade launcher from the old .303, and then watched the bruises fade over the next two weeks, the M79 was indeed a rarity. We were also introduced to the Claymore anti-personnel mine and a new type of trip flare, the proper combination of which could result in a highly lethal and effective ambush. The phonetic code for radio procedure changed, probably for the first time in about 50 years (Alpha Bravo Charlie Delta replaced Able Baker Charlie Dog). The VHF 25-set made its appearance and replaced the cantankerous 9 and 9A sets which seemed forever to require tuning. We trained with APCs, did much first aid work, and for a week jogged to the School of Military Engineering and back where we were introduced to the vagaries of mines and booby traps. And all this time, I learnt more about my NCOs and soldiers.

We went to Canungra. The Jungle Training Centre had a reputation to live up to. I had been there before as an RMC cadet and close country held little in the way of surprise. But many soldiers had no experience of such a tropical place and the sound and smell, the rain and heat, and the constant proximity to trees and scrub, frequently dense and almost impenetrable, needed to be mastered. The jungle could never be seen as a threat; it was at least neutral and, ideally, an ally.

Our last exercise at Canungra was held at Wiangaree in northern New South Wales. This was tropical rainforest at its best. We entered the long valley with dozens of ridge lines and smaller re-entrants running off it. Company Headquarters and two of the platoons moved along the northern edge; my platoon was about 500 metres south and we moved along the southern side. I never knew for the next five days where I was, and it was only when we finally emerged at the top of the valley to be met by our transport that I actually recognised my position.

About two hours into our advance, towards late afternoon, a contact occurred across the valley. A desultory exchange of firing ensued; I listened to the radio conversation between the Company Commander and the 3rd Platoon Commander. Inevitably there came a request for a locstat (where are you). John Nelson, the 3rd Platoon Commander, gave his location after a considerable delay, only to be severely reprimanded by the Company Commander who claimed that this was not possible as he was at that location. A half-hour discussion followed. My platoon sergeant and I thought it all quite amusing. He even advised me that we might as well hoochie up; no one was going to go any further that evening. The troops thought this was a great idea, and after a pretty rudimentary harbour procedure, (I would never allow this in Vietnam), proceeded to set up their small tents, start up their brews and generally relax. To my astonishment my Company Commander then asked me for my locstat. I don't know why - possibly we were too far committed to our evening routine - but I answered somewhat flippantly that I had listened to his exchange with great surprise. I believed I was at exactly the same grid reference as he was. Within 20 minutes, having received a right royal rocket, my platoon was now part of the company harbour, too late to have dinner and to drink our brews. The rocket did not worry me; it was more my concern that I had lost face with my platoon.

Before going to Vietnam, we had a week's pre-embarkation leave. It was a time for personal assessment. National Service was still a rarity. We had yet to suffer our first National Service casualty. Street marches were unknown; the Moratorium had yet to emerge. The mother and girlfriend of one of my soldiers were part of the New South Wales Chapter of Save Our Sons. I liked the soldier but I thought he was somewhat influenced by his women folk. To keep an eye on him, I made him my batman; he was competent and cheerful from Tuesday to Friday. On Monday he appeared somewhat confused and concerned. I remember clearly parading on the Company parade ground on a Friday evening after a week's exercise, prior to going on weekend leave. I heard the shrill voice of the girlfriend shouting 'Hey Batman, its Robin here, I hope you poisoned the bastard'. A day before we left, my batman declared himself a conscientious objector. He was the first. He was taken off the draft. We followed his court case with interest. He subsequently was declared not to be a conscientious objector, ordered to Vietnam and went AWOL, served a prison sentence and had not completed his National Service until some 18 months after the soldiers in his intake had finished theirs.

It is difficult to describe our arrival in Vietnam. We flew, via Manila by civil air. Saigon from the air looked tropical and exotic. I noted, however, the numerous small water holes which seemed to be everywhere. Subsequently I recognised these were shell craters. We arrived at Ton San Nhut, spent about two hours there and then flew by US aircraft to Vung Tau.

Vung Tau had been a seaside resort for wealthy French and Vietnamese families. Any sense of insecurity was more than compensated for by the sun, the beach and the very fine sand. We were introduced to the UH-1H, the Huey, the mighty sky workhorse, and surely one of the icons of the Vietnam War. We did a number of operations. Platoons vied with each other to be the first off the helicopter. This resulted in our standing on the skids prior to landing and even jumping off before the helicopter had touched down. Battalion Headquarters soon put a stop to this unsafe practice.

Our tour in Vung Tau was short; we rapidly acclimatised and gained some sense of the terrain - delta mangroves with mud, which clung, sometimes to the waist, open paddy fields with only bunds for cover, bamboo scrub with thorns which gripped to webbing and clothing and flat, featureless scrub where navigation could only be effected by cumbersome pacing and compass bearings. We also worked in sand dunes and quickly appreciated the importance of keeping our weapons clean.

There was little likelihood of contact with the VC. But we saw signs of war all around us. Shortly, we were to be launched on a real operation. We watched with anticipation and heard with increasing concern the lengthy artillery and air bombardment to our north in the general direction of our impending air assault. The night sky was lit with flashes, not dissimilar to a tropical storm, with the rumble of explosions which must have been the hallmark of all armies on the eve of battle. Next morning, after anxiously checking our webbing and weapons, we embarked on about 40 helicopters and flew in tight formation to a landing zone beside a rubber plantation which was secured by American soldiers of 173rd Airborne Brigade. Although we had practised with helicopters, we had never experienced such a concentrated landing

with so many at once. We moved off the helicopters, lay on the ground until they had flown off and then moved to our allotted positions to secure the edge of the landing zone in anticipation of the remainder of the battalion arriving.

As I recall it was a stifling hot day. The wet season had started and the humidity was high. We were soon a lather of sweat. Low scrub and tall grass added to our discomfort. My platoon led the move to the east along a small river. The plan was for us to cross two re-entrants, move north along the second re-entrant and to lay a series of ambushes. Other companies had patrol routes as well. I knew B Company was to follow but I did not know which route it would take.

The whole operation was to secure a small hill - Nui Dat - and the surrounding countryside, ideally out to about five kilometres, to enable the establishment of the task force base. I do not think anyone in my platoon knew this - it may have been kept from us because of operational security. We thought that Operation *Hardihood* was to be a five day operation - it turned out to be nearly three times that long.

Some 20 minutes into the move, the forward scout of the forward section sighted and fired at an armed man. 'Contact front' was shouted. I dashed forward while the forward section deployed with the machine gun group to the right and the rifle group to the left. It was as if we had done this a thousand times before: Canungra, Holsworthy, Wiangaree, Colo, Putty all revisited. We were to have several more fleeting contacts with one or two armed men; I doubt that more than one or two of us caught a glimpse of our enemy but they were there and we saw sufficient sign to be extremely alert.

We eventually reached the second re-entrant. 3 Platoon passed through mine and headed north. The three platoon commanders gathered with the Company Commander to decide our next move. We were to do a series of ambushes. I think I was to return to the junction of the river and the re-entrant and to ambush the track we had made moving into the area. This was always a problem for us, wherever we moved, we left tracks.

Suddenly, a number of shots were fired. 3 Platoon was in contact. The volume of fire rapidly increased; heavy automatic fire started; bullets zipped through the trees overhead. We quickly dispersed. I ran back to my platoon. Without orders, or letting anyone know, I moved my platoon up to the side the firefight. We deployed into an extended order, fixed bayonets and approached the flanks of the firing. Some ten metres from the flank, I heard Australian voices shouting to each other and I realised that the contact was between two groups of Australians. Just as I was to radio this information, the word came through the radio net: 'Cease fire, cease fire, in contact with friendlies.' I backed my platoon off very quietly and returned to our start point some 150 metres to the rear.

Much controversy surrounded this incident which resulted in the death of Private Noack, the South Australian and first National Serviceman to be killed in Vietnam. Many of us believe he was killed by friendly fire. The official version is that he was shot by a VC group which somehow or other had interposed itself between 3 Platoon and B Company's 5 Platoon. The whole incident gave me much to think about. I believe that B Company, which was to come down the first re-entrant after my

company had cleared the area, missed the first re-entrant and mistook the second re-entrant for the first. Certainly navigation was difficult. What appeared on a map as a re-entrant very often was a very small depression. If you did not pace the distance, then there was little confidence in knowing where you were with any accuracy.

I also thought seriously about my independent action. Had I been 30 seconds sooner, I should have opened fire from a few metres onto 5 Platoon's flank with the likelihood that many casualties would have ensued. Clearly I was too aggressive and was prone to act independently too often. But I also determined not to ever do this again. Decisive action was fine; but the consequences needed to be considered, and I thought how lucky I was to learn this lesson so early in the tour. To this day I have only told about three people of this incident.

Operation *Hardihood* was a fascinating start to Vietnam. The battalion became increasingly frustrated. Small groups of VC were everywhere. We had numerous contacts. Yet it was not until the third day that my platoon killed and recovered the first VC in the area of operations.

We had three contacts that morning; all were at long range. By now we were extremely alert and tense. We found a large rice cache (several tonnes I should think, bagged and stacked under a black tarpaulin); rice donated by the United States. We were ordered to destroy it and simply split the bags and tipped their contents into a nearby river. It was hard work in the humid, overcast day. I fired my first artillery mission and called down mortar fire, both against fleeing groups of VCs who were some distance off.

We moved very quietly. Suddenly the forward section stopped. As always when this happened I moved forward trailed by my radio operator. The section commander and forward scout said they had heard voices to our front. We moved forward very cautiously to the edge of a small clearing. About 20 metres ahead, on the other side of the clearing, were four armed men in black pyjama type clothes. They were urgently packing and clearly about to move. I immediately opened fire - for once my Owen gun did not jam on the third round and shouted to those around me to do the same. The VC disappeared, we quickly deployed into an extended line and swept the area. One body was recovered, a handful of ammunition, a Chinese grenade and some webbing.

We searched the body; he had an ID card. He was about 35 and clearly was a local VC. We buried him in situ. We were elated. 1 Platoon had done it. We were the envy of our battalion, or so we thought. I am now much older and have seen too much not to recognise that we were equally happy because we have survived. It is also a salutary business too, to recognise that you have taken a life - an enemy, certainly, and someone who would have no compunction in killing you - but another human being, a friend or relative to someone, perhaps a father or husband.

I think *Hardihood* was our baptism. There would be many similar operations - large, multi-unit with a mix of supporting arms. But much of our time was spent on endless platoon size patrols, usually within ten kilometres of the task force base. This is

where platoon commanders learnt their trade - days on end of independent action, moving silently and alertly, constantly listening and watching, evaluating signs - patiently, but acting with great speed and aggression when required.

There were several types of operation. The large scale search and destroy operations I have partly described. In many ways these were the most interesting. We invariably moved into new territory, usually in the areas where the VC was well established. Sometimes we even came in contact with main force units or NVA regulars.¹ I recall very clearly my first contact with the latter. They were clearly several degrees better than the VC and prepared to stand and fight far more aggressively.

Another type of operation was the cordon and search. We would surround a village or hamlet, at night, then assault the area, usually at dawn, and search the village for arms, or caches of food or any sign of the VC. These operations required great coordination, involvement of Vietnamese authorities and much psyops and civil affairs support. There is a famous story of the psyops aircraft flying overhead and telling the people they are about to have their village searched. People were to report to the village square with their ID cards. They were to take food and water, as they may need to be there for some hours. The only problem was that the aircraft was a day early. I wonder how long the people waited patiently in the square.

A further type of operation was the ambush which could be laid as part of any of the operations. Ambushes could be quick, simply by moving off to the side of a track, or deliberate. The latter could involve extensive use of mines and flares, registration of artillery fire and even digging into defensive positions. As the year moved on, we found ourselves increasingly conducting ambushes. Some were overnight; others for several days. Soldiers would be in groups of three with one fully alert the whole time. When we first went there we tended to do it in groups of two, but as the year wore on and people became increasingly debilitated we found that we need to have three to ensure that one person was fully alert the whole time. Sometimes we would actually relieve soldiers in an ambush site.

Occasionally we sprang an ambush. My platoon's most notable success was at night, sitting on our packs, waiting to cross a wide paddy field. We were just inside the tree line, parallel to a path. The group of about 20 VC, with weapons slung making no attempt to be quiet or secure, walked passed at a distance of about four metres. I could hardly credit what was happening. A wild firefight ensued. Lots of VC were shot and we stayed till dawn the following morning. On another occasion, the VC obviously suspected our position and initiated the contact by walking into the rear of the ambush. We could very clearly smell VC camps, particularly if they had been occupied for more than a couple of days. I dare say they could do the same for us. On the other hand, we were never ambushed. It was a golden rule never to walk along tracks.

Of course you will be interested in our experiences with our aerial support. Initially we flew with the US Army. They impressed us. They appeared quite prepared to take all manner of risk to evacuate casualties. They were also quite prepared to press

¹ NVA regulars were members of the North Vietnamese Army.

home their fire support. Occasionally we had Phantoms in support; their forward air controllers seemed very skilled. We also deployed on occasion by Chinook.

In hindsight, I suspect we equated risk and daring with professionalism. I am not nearly so sure that should be the case. We always saw an experienced unit; their rotation of people did not see a whole unit change at once. Equally, though, I do not think they achieved quite the level of skill that our pilots did in later years.

So we grew to admire and like our US Army helicopter people. On *Hardihood*, for instance it was not unusual in late afternoon to have a helicopter deliver our mail, another to bring us cold chocolate flavoured milk, another to deliver a hot box dinner and still another to take away the empty hot boxes. A bit like Pitt Street on a Sunday afternoon. Of course, there were attendant security problems. In our case we wanted to find the VC and not frighten them off. Our own Air Force arrived and we were disappointed. Again in our ignorance, we thought the RAAF pilots were extraordinarily cautious. They even wanted us to fly with closed doors. No self-respecting fighting soldier ever wants to fly in a helicopter with closed doors. A door gunner discharged a belt of ammunition just as we were to be lifted from an LZ. Of course, we conveniently forgot the dozen or so accidental discharges that we had had in our first three months. But I do not think we ever quite developed the same rapport with the RAAF as we did with the US Army Aviation Corps. Later battalions certainly did. And I freely admit to owing my life to the RAAF in a later tour. But it was something of a pity because I saw the Air Force in action some years later, and they were a very professional, fighting organisation.

I remember one incident which did not have a happy ending and which could have completely soured relations between my battalion and 9 Squadron. For nearly 40 days we had been in the field. It was the dry season so we were not constantly wet. But we slept on the ground in the same clothes (indeed we wore out three sets), never fully washed, ate hard rations the whole time and probably lost about 15 kilograms in the process, had about six casualties and numerous contacts. We spent many days combing booby-trapped tunnels and it was all extraordinarily tiring and intense.

The operation finished on the top of Nui Thai Vai, a 1,000 metre mountain, with a pagoda on the top. The best part of the battalion was to be air lifted from one pad, because this was on top of a rock, and helicopters lined up one behind the other way off into the distance to do so. This part of the operation required several hours. Mine was the last platoon. My job just before I was to be evacuated was to protect a small engineer party which was to detonate a number of charges to release several tonnes of CS (tear gas) crystals in the caves near the top of the mountain. I had carefully rehearsed this with the sapper officer. I deployed my platoon to cover the area. The sapper would enter the cave shout 'fire on' and come out through the entrance where I stood. We would then move smartly to an area some distance from the cave in anticipation of the CS that might leak out.

The sapper officer entered and a few minutes later I heard an explosion. My first thought was that he had prematurely set off the charge. I turned to move into the cave only to be overwhelmed by a cloud of CS gas. I could not breathe; my lungs were on fire. I fell to the ground and slowly the CS lifted. My radio operator was equally affected. My platoon sergeant dragged us clear. The sapper officer and his offsider

then appeared; they had become confused and exited by another tunnel. We then moved to the old landing zone on top of the hill. We were evacuated. The pilot complained of being gassed at 500 metres! Instead of flying to Nui Dat, we flew to Vung Tau. I asked why this was so and was told that the crew was going to afternoon tea and would return in 30 minutes. I protested with some passion. I figured just as well I did because my six soldiers were murderous. I said we would come to afternoon tea with them, but was told we stank too much. We duly flew to Nui Dat in a very sombre mood. As we left the helicopter, I did not thank them or wave as we would want to do. Instead I walked away only to hear the pitch of the rotor change dramatically. I looked back and saw a plume of purple smoke billowing from the helicopter. I knew who had done it and I grabbed the recalcitrant. 'Why did you do that?' 'Because I had no bloody CS grenades left' was the answer. It was something that all of us needed to forget. There is much I could say about Vietnam. It was the high adventure of my youth. I am conscious of the aphorisms that say that all Generals fight the wars of their youth and that no two wars are ever the same.

A third of my platoon became casualties and about half did not finish their tour. Many suffered for years after with poor health and emotional discomfort. It was a long year. Of the first 100 days, we spent 92 in the field, on average we lost a third of our body weight, we were constantly wet and on hard rations. We had little affinity with the local people and were intolerant of anybody else's war. I developed an enormous respect for the Vietnamese people, but it required another tour in a different setting for it to happen. Politics did not enter into it; that came later.

I was very fortunate; I stayed on as a Regular soldier. The experience certainly coloured my attitudes to soldiering. Overwhelmingly, I was imbued with a sense of responsibility towards my soldiers; this required me to be fair and compassionate but also to demand high standards. I have no tolerance for officers who seek to further their careers at the expense of others and who put their interests ahead of their subordinates' welfare. I also respected the enemy. His was a very difficult life: there was no respite, no R&R, no air evacuation; he was a proficient, skilled, patient and committed foe.

It was a hard year. But I would not have missed it for anything. I hope I have given you a snapshot of what it was like. It was certainly the greatest privilege I have had - to command Australians in war.

DISCUSSION

Group Captain Arthur Skimin: I was wondering if you could elaborate a little more on the difficulties of command and control in the Headquarters 1st Australian Task Force. It has been reported on a number of occasions the difficulties the 9 Squadron rotary wing people had operating with the Task Force, to the point that Brigadier Jackson, on one occasion, had threatened to have 9 Squadron withdrawn from the Task Force. There were also conflicts arising from the tasking orders from the Task Force, when rotary winged support was required. The tension got to such a point that on one occasion he'd threatened to court martial the next airman that questioned the tasking.

General Hartley: Thank you for that question. I must say that as a platoon commander that was way outside my competence to answer, and thank goodness. From my level I don't think we had any sense of that concern that clearly existed at that time. I think it was very unfair for us to compare the American support we'd had, from pilots who'd been in-country for a long time, and who I don't think at the end of the day were all that skilled. Nevertheless they had a gung-ho attitude and we were used to working with them. In the case of the Royal Australian Air Force, I think what we saw was an organisation that arrived with a great deal of peacetime experience behind it, but one that clearly very quickly adapted. And I see no reason why that shouldn't have been the case, after all, we were all Australian servicemen and very clearly this was a very competent, professional Air Force which was going to find out its problems and resolve them quickly. In my later tour, I had quite a lot of experience with the Royal Australian Air Force, and certainly I've also had a lot of experience with the American air force. I even actually called in an air strike from the Vietnamese Air Force at one stage – although I think the fact they hit the target roughly where I said it was, was more by coincidence than by good management. But certainly I had the ability to make comparisons later and I would say there was no doubt which air force I'd much rather have flying with me. So I'm sorry I really can't answer that question. Certainly I've read the history of it, but from a personal point of view in Vietnam at that time I was not aware of those tensions.

Wing Commander Tom Morrissey: One of the problems I see towards the end of the conflict was the way in which the conscripts were looked after when they came home. As you said yourself, you were a regular Army man, so you had a career to get along with. The Air Force for the same reason didn't have as much of a problem because we were all volunteers and members of the permanent Air Force, so we had jobs to go to that were related to what we were doing when we got back. But this was not the case with a lot of the conscripts, certainly in the Melbourne area, like in Altona for instance. I think they had 30 or so ex-Vietnam Veterans that joined the RSL after the war. And of those there are only two left today. Was there any effort by Army to try and help stabilise these people after they came back?

General Hartley: I think that's an interesting question. First of all I don't think there was much effort by Army as such. I think other people were seen to primarily have that responsibility. Army certainly looked after those that stayed in the Army, after all this was part of our profession. We were all hailed as heroes because we'd done it all and clearly were passing on the lessons that we'd learned. Those that got out were always very interesting. I mean it is a fascinating study, and I think it can yet be run to ground as to why the Vietnam Veterans have survived or not survived the way they have. My sense is that there was a considerable breakdown in community attitudes - the community was frustrated with the war. There was also I think that impending thought that your son's marble might come out of the bag the next time round, and therefore there was some frustration about all of this. It was a war that didn't seem to have an end. Clearly, we were influenced by the American peace movement and so on it went.

Talking to Vietnam Veterans, and I've kept contact with large numbers of them, I think their main concern was that when they came home they weren't treated like the heroes they thought they should have been. Their experience was probably quite different to what had happened at the end of the first and the second world wars for instance. Their fathers and grandfathers had come home as heroes. They didn't, and they were held as

the scapegoats for what was seen as probably a poor policy. It was most unfortunate and most unfair. As I said in my presentation, these men were in their early twenties, they had been very carefully selected, they were physically very fit, they certainly had an above average education as a group of people. Yet I find it surprising that so few of them seemed to find the potential they should have had when they came back.

My first thought was that we had a very hard physical year. Much combat in previous wars had taken part in short bursts of high, intense activity. We really remained tense for long periods of time. My platoon had about 30 contacts during the year. On some occasions we had three or four together. But we were always exhausted and it always seemed to me that we always had a contact just as we were just about out on our last legs. People would sit down and if you didn't watch them carefully they'd all fall asleep, and, as I said, we lost a lot of weight. Taking hard rations for 100 days at a time is just simply not the way to go, and I suspect that the full measure of that long drawn out business has a lot to answer for. But having said that I've also noticed people who have got equal problems who didn't have that experience. People who essentially worked in a field hospital in Vung Tau for a year, for instance. So I'm not sure at the end of the day where this went wrong. I think we are yet to find the full answer to that issue. But it is important and I think it's largely the non-Army, the RSL and other organisations, through which we kept alive the spirit of how we should look after these people. I might add that today there is a great sense of trying to look after the soldiers of the past, and the Army today pays a lot of attention to this issue. Next month we're going to open The Royal Australian Regiment Memorial in Brisbane. There will be literally thousands of people who will come to that, although it's all a bit late I feel. I'm not sure I can answer your question much better than that.

Dr Alan Stephens: The division between the professionals and the militia, I think, has been one of the dominant themes of Australian military history. On reflection, do you think that influenced your unfavourable impression of some of your Portsea and Scheyville contemporaries when you first joined your regiment? And then as your experience in Vietnam was extended, what kind of opinion did you have of those other entrants into the Army and also the National Servicemen?

General Hartley: I think my comparison was between a very elite group of young officers who spent four years training to be young officers, and others who spent considerably less time - the National Service officer, for instance, had spent six months. Now there would have to be something terribly wrong with the four-year-long course if we were not a whole lot better. We were also a touch older and I think it was just simply a matter of having a better preparation for the process. Having said that, they performed most admirably. It probably took them another month to come to terms with things that we might have been able to do much more quickly. But at the end of the day it would be very hard I think to separate a national service officer from a regular officer.

The soldiers were likewise. My first set of non-commissioned officers were regular soldiers. By the time I came out of Vietnam, all my NCOs were national servicemen. The old soldiers you could only tell by the number of tattoos they had, otherwise they didn't look much different at all. So the comment I made was my initial impression rather than something I would have made say six months later. I thought you were going

to ask another question there for a minute about the militia. Why didn't we send a CMF² unit to Vietnam. That's the question I thought you were going to ask. If General Cullen had been here, he would have asked that question before I'd finished speaking. It's an interesting issue. In fact General Cullen was the CMF member of the Military Board when that decision was taken and he regrets greatly not standing up more firmly and saying that we will put a CMF Battalion into Vietnam. I suspect - and we'd have much the same situation today - that unless you had very extensive legislation that actually mandated a call up, and more importantly protected the interests of those who volunteered, then I think it would be very hard to produce a unit of 800 men from the CMF. I think the other issue was that because of that concern there was no guarantee that we would be able to provide all our commitment over many years through that source. Therefore, I think that's one of the reasons why National Service was obviously an attractive option to the government of the day. That's my understanding of it. Without proper legislation it's very hard to get Reserve³ troops to come forward and to continue soldiering. Right now we have a Company in Butterworth where about 70 of them are Reserve soldiers, but they're Reserve soldiers who can find three months away from their job and can put that sort of commitment in. A lot of Reserve soldiers without call out and legislation to protect their occupations could not afford that.

Wing Commander Ken Semmler: Sir, in preparing to go to Vietnam, how thoroughly were you schooled in the use of close air support in a contact situation and what were your experiences of that way during both tours of service?

General Hartley: Thank you. I don't think that we had any formal education at all in the use of close air support, apart from the lectures I would have received at Duntroon and a display of close air support that I think I saw at Puckapunyal, probably in my third year at Duntroon. Indeed all our close air support - certainly in the first six months in Vietnam - was controlled through forward observers and fire controllers who were either on the ground or who we could talk to in the air. Subsequently, when I went back as an adviser, I had extensive training in being able to control fire support from the air. But in preparation for Vietnam, I don't think we had any training at all.

Dr Peter Edwards: You referred to the incident which led to the death of Private Noack. Were you interviewed as part of the investigation into that incident? What was your feeling about the investigation that took place and what was the feeling of your contemporaries at the time?

General Hartley: No, I wasn't formally interviewed at all. As I said, no one knew that I was as close to the left flank of that organisation as I was, and indeed I didn't volunteer any information because I realised what I'd done. After the incident, which was late in the evening, we moved into a harbour position. A harbour position is where basically you go into all round defence. Dig a shell scrape, put out some perimeter wire and that sort of thing. It's not a defended position. It was late at night and I listened for about two hours to my Company Commander who was explaining his side, his version of the incident. We were then part of the United States 173rd Airborne Brigade. We were not part of the Task Force. And therefore all our radio procedure and particularly our call signs were all daily changing American call signs. And American daily changing call

² CMF : Citizen Military Force.

³ The former terminology Citizen Military Force has been replaced by Army Reserve.

signs are never simple. I think we were Sydney Cones 1 - 2 or something and my dear old Company Commander was getting himself highly confused. It was Sydney Cones 1 - 2; Sydney Cones; Sydney Cones Sydney; Sydney Cones 1. At the end of it he said something and went on and talked as if there was no call sign, which is what he should have done in the first place. The sense I got was that there had been a contact with B Company a little earlier in the afternoon, somewhere north of us. And B Company felt that the people they'd had a contact with had proceeded to withdraw ahead of them. But notwithstanding that, certainly the scuttlebutt in the Company, including the soldiers who had initiated the contact, was that there had not been any VC between them and B Company. Now I know there was a very extensive investigation into that, even to the extent, I understand, where the soldier was taken for an autopsy. I got involved slightly about five years ago when I was interviewed for the official history and I said what I said this morning. Basically I thought there were no VC there, but at the end of the day I don't think we will ever know conclusively. It was a shock to shoot one of your own soldiers. The first casualty we had in the battalion was from the possibility of own fire. At that stage we were in an extraordinarily tense situation. I think we'd probably had about ten contacts in a couple of days. Sooner or later someone was going to get shot. There's no doubt about it. And I think this just added to the tenseness of the thing. And I recall that night thinking, I'm not going to sleep tonight. And of course we were all so thoroughly drained and exhausted that we went to sleep very quickly. Indeed it was a challenge to make sure that we had sufficient people alert to retain the necessary sentry process. So I don't think I would want to say any more than that. My sense is that probably he was shot by our side, but I don't think that we could ever prove that conclusively. We in the two Companies that were involved certainly thought that was the case.

NO 9 SQUADRON OPERATIONS

AIR COMMODORE B.I. LANE

Introduction

For the greater part of this century air power has been used in support of ground forces. Helicopters as one expression of this power first made a fleeting appearance during World War II. Their value, particularly in the evacuation of battle casualties, was recognised during the Korean War, but it was not until the Vietnam conflict that they really came of age. Gas turbine engines largely overcame earlier power limitations, resulting in reduced vibration levels and improved reliability. Other developments greatly improved stability. Helicopters could, with some limitations, provide tactical mobility for an Army in the third dimension. Perhaps the strongest memory that many people have of the Vietnam War is of helicopters and in particular the distinctive sound of the Iroquois.

Background

No 9 Squadron operated as a Fleet Cooperation Flight/Squadron from 1925-1944 and was re-formed in 1962 principally as a search and rescue unit equipped with eight Iroquois helicopters. By 1964 orders were placed for a further 16 aircraft and the primary role for the squadron was changed to that of providing air support for the Army including troop movement, casualty evacuation, reconnaissance and logistic support as well as search and rescue.¹ The pilots initially selected to fly the aircraft were all experienced, with the majority being flying instructors, although only three had had previous helicopter experience. It was considered necessary for the initial pilots to have this level of experience in order to ensure that the introduction of helicopters as a main stream type went as smoothly and safely as possible and to provide a solid basis for future training and development. These initial pilots all went to the United States Army for training. It was not until 1964 that a conversion course was formalised and Australian-based training really got under way.

In 1964 No 5 Squadron, consisting of four aircraft, four pilots and one crewman was formed and deployed to Butterworth. The squadron provided support to a number of ground forces operating in the area of the Thai/Malaysia border, including an Australian battalion. Also briefly in November 1964, it provided support from Singapore to Singaporean forces operating against Indonesian forces during Confrontation. The experience gained was invaluable in terms of operating in a tropical mountainous environment but it was really not relevant to the development of procedures for operating with the Australian Army.

Before Vietnam, No 9 Squadron supported both large and small Army training exercises in Australia. The tasks flown included the movement of troops and field guns, resupply and casualty evacuation. Familiarisation training was a major activity,

¹ George Odgers, *Mission Vietnam*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974, p. 24.

as frequently it was the first time that troops had flown in or worked with helicopters the size of the Iroquois. No training was carried out in conjunction with the Special Air Service Regiment beyond one move in Papua New Guinea. Additionally, no air-to-ground weapons training was carried out as aircraft kits were not available. The squadron deployed in the field for some exercises and, in order to be as self-sufficient as possible, it developed maintenance workshops mounted on four-wheel-drive vehicles and trailers. The normal crew composition at this time was one pilot and one crewman.

On the 8 March 1966 the Prime Minister announced an increased Australian commitment to Vietnam which included helicopters. The Defence Committee had put a submission to Cabinet in February 1966 proposing an increased commitment, including Iroquois helicopters,² but despite this the RAAF was not consulted in advance of the prime ministerial announcement. The inclusion of helicopters was an Army initiative³ and left little time to organise the deployment. Eight 'B' model aircraft with equipment, which were to provide six on-line, were transported to Vietnam on HMAS *Sydney* arriving at Vung Tau on 6 June. The main group followed by air on 12 June.

Left behind in Canberra was the reformed No 5 Squadron that was to become the training squadron for both ground and aircrews destined for Vietnam while at the same time continuing to provide support for the Army. Few qualified pilots were left for No 5 Squadron as No 9 Squadron had deployed with two pilots per aircraft against the earlier Australian requirement of one. There were even fewer crewmen available and No 9 Squadron had deployed with only one per aircraft. Similarly ground crew numbers and experience were depleted so more training programs were required and the number under training accelerated. This placed considerable strain on the RAAF as a whole and No 5 Squadron in particular. Air and ground crews, who had no background in the operation or maintenance of helicopters, were posted to be trained as replacements for No 9 Squadron. Not all were willing volunteers.

Upon arrival at Vung Tau, the squadron had anticipated having a few days to acclimatise, settle-in and modify the aircraft with gun mounts, armoured seats and the other protective equipment that had been ordered from the United States. Also it anticipated carrying out some trials and training in air-to-ground gunnery for the crewman. Further it had to train as second crewman airfield defence guards who were co-opted upon the squadron's arrival in country. Most of the additional equipment required was not readily available because of the large build-up of the US forces. As a result, No 9 Squadron frequently had to scrounge for its needs. This resulted in the squadron taking longer than desirable to be operationally ready. No 9 Squadron was not alone in being deficient in equipment. The situation was compounded when it was discovered that squadron stores, which had been colour-coded and palletised when loaded on the HMAS *Sydney*, had been broken down and scattered on-board and then further scattered on unloading at Vung Tau. The Army suffered a similar problem. The squadron had deployed with its mobile workshops and these, together with tents, were utilised for aircraft maintenance for a number of months until better facilities were established.

² Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1993, p. 187.

³ Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1995, p. 141.

Despite the problems encountered, the first task was flown the day after the main party arrived when 5RAR urgently need an ammunition resupply. The squadron flew in over 4,000 kilograms of the RAAF's own deployment ammunition to satisfy the requirement.

Relationship between the Air Force and the Army

The Directive to the Commander Australian Force Vietnam stated that he was to exercise overall command of units and personnel of the Australian Army and RAAF assigned for duty in the Republic of Vietnam and that command of the RAAF units was to be exercised through the Commander RAAF Component. The latter was also appointed as the Deputy Commander Australian Force Vietnam. It also stated that the RAAF Caribou and Iroquois Squadrons were to be placed under the operational control of the Commander Australian Task Force and that both the Squadrons were to be based at Vung Tau.⁴

The organisational directive issued to No 9 Squadron by the Department of Air authorised the squadron to conduct '... the lift of troops from a secure staging area to a landing zone that was relatively secure and [where] enemy resistance was not expected ...' and '... from an operation area to a secure staging area when enemy resistance was anticipated only on the last lift from the landing zone ...'.⁵

These documents raised a number of issues in the early days of the deployment and some of these were never satisfactorily resolved. But at the same time there never appeared to be any serious problem with the relationship with the combat elements of the task force. That is not to say that things were always sweet and rosy, as on occasions both the Air Force and Army were not completely happy with each other. Realistically you could not expect otherwise when there was a war on and lives were at stake.

To facilitate tasking, an Air Transport Operations Centre (ATOC) was established at Nui Dat and an operations room at Vung Tau. The problems, certainly in the early stages, appeared to arise at the level where the ATOC and base operations interfaced with the task force and particularly the tasking agencies. At this time the task force rejected any approach for joint planning.

One somewhat contentious issue was in locating the squadron at Vung Tau rather than with the task force at Nui Dat, which was eight minutes flying time away. For the initial months it would not have been realistic for it to be based at Nui Dat as that area was not secure and the presence of helicopters would have made it an even more attractive target. Further there was no fuel available. The squadron would not have been capable of defending a segment of the Nui Dat perimeter, which it would have been required to do, unless it had been supplemented by a significant number of Airfield Defence Guards. Further, facilities were very basic and the Army engineer construction unit had other priorities than just a helicopter squadron. The other significant consideration was that for very good security reasons, there could be no

⁴ McNeill, *To Long Tan*, pp. 466-467.

⁵ Quoted in Alan Stephens, *Going Solo*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, pp. 292-293.

visible lights or noise at night. Under these conditions it would have been impossible to service aircraft at night and hence the number that would have been available each day would have been reduced; an aspect that some were reluctant to accept.

In due course, good maintenance facilities were established at Vung Tau with the squadron obtaining logistic support from the US Army on a repayment basis. To have moved the squadron's maintenance facilities and support to Nui Dat once the area was considered secure, would have lengthened the logistic tail to the US Army, where personal contact played a very important role, and would have resulted in a reduced aircraft availability. A compromise could have been reached by moving at least part of the operational element and some servicing support to Nui Dat on a permanent basis. Response time would have improved slightly, but as aircraft were deployed on standby to the task force each day, the difference would not have been that great. However, it can be argued that this would have fostered a closer relationship with the Army and hence a better understanding by each of the other's problems and operational methods. It must be remembered that 1966 was the early days of helicopters and there was not a great depth of understanding of their operations or requirements. On a personal note, and I emphasise *personal*, because not everyone agrees with me, I believe at least the major part of the operational element of the squadron, including operating level maintenance, should have deployed to Nui Dat once the area was secure, the problems of lights and noise were overcome and the Army capable of supporting it with fuel and other stores. This would have left major and schedule maintenance at Vung Tau but there would have been an additional cost in manpower.

Early domestic accommodation arrangements were far from satisfactory with the airmen living in US Army tents on the Vung Tau airfield and the senior NCOs and officers in rather run-down, cramped and, in my view, very insecure accommodation in Vung Tau itself. In late 1966 the airmen moved to Australian-built accommodation on the airfield, followed the next year by the senior NCOs and officers. This accommodation was more secure in the sense that a terrorist attack was less likely, but at the same time it was still subject to occasional rocket or mortar attacks.

Another issue was the emphasis placed on the words in the directive to No 9 Squadron 'relatively secure and where enemy resistance was not expected' and 'when enemy resistance was anticipated only on the last lift from the landing zone'. Associated with this, the Army wanted the squadron to adopt US Army helicopter tactics. One of the reasons (there were others⁶) that the Army in 1965-66 wanted to establish an Australian task force with its own area of responsibility was that the Australian troops would be able to employ their own operational concepts and procedures which they regarded as superior to those of the United States' doctrine in South Vietnam⁷. This preferred approach was evident in many ways, not the least being that when the task force was being established at Nui Dat, as many trees as possible were retained to aid concealment as well as provide shade. The US forces normally seemed to take a bulldozer to everything. Differences also occurred in the tactical arena. In 1965/66 1 RAR⁸ experienced the US emphasis on concentrated massive firepower, mobility

⁶ Brief discussion in McNeill, *To Long Tan*, p. 188.

⁷ Alan Stephens, *Power plus Attitude*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1992, p. 133.

⁸ 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment.

and large forces. By contrast the Australian preference was for small unit tactics and the expertise of the individual soldier.⁹ For both military and political reasons Australia was not prepared to accept the enormous casualties that the American forces, at least early in the war, were prepared to accept so the Australian tactics were tailored accordingly.

I do not believe that there was ever any intent of Australian troops carrying out a helicopter-borne assault into an area that was thought to be insecure because of the potential cost in lives. The exception to this would have been if a relief force had to be inserted. The matter at issue here was that the Australian Army wanted to use its own tactics and methods but at the same time expected No 9 Squadron to adopt the helicopter tactics and methods used by the US Army. There seemed to be two standards at play, which to say the least, ignored the small size and hence limited capability of No 9 Squadron. However, the squadron did participate in airborne assaults, sometimes on their own and on other occasions in conjunction with US Army helicopters. Large formations of helicopters are not very manoeuvrable or flexible but were necessary for the first lift in and the last lift out in order to maximise security. On occasions the task force tried to insist that the mass formation be retained throughout all the sorties of the lift for no valid tactical reason. The alternative was to operate as single aircraft in a racetrack pattern, greatly reducing the time required to complete the task.

In the event the squadron did insert troops into areas where the security situation was unknown and very frequently lifted out troops from areas where the enemy was very active. Also the squadron frequently winched troops or casualties out of areas where fighting was still occurring and on more than one occasion had subsequently to lick its own wounds. The bottom line here is that the words used in the directive were ignored in practice.

The squadron's contribution towards the outcome of the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966 has been cited by some as a turning point in the relationship between the Air Force and the Army.¹⁰ It probably was a turning point but more because the Army changed its attitude to the squadron. I do not believe that the squadron changed the way it went about its business. That is not to say that the squadron had not learned from its experiences since arriving in the country and applied those lessons to the way that it conducted its operations. It did, and its operating procedures continued to evolve throughout the period it was in Vietnam.

However, the niggling undercurrent did not altogether go away. In October 1966 the squadron lost its first aircraft in a major accident that resulted in serious injuries to some of the crew. At the time the rescue mission was being mounted, one of the task force operations officers commented to me that it was about time the 'squadron got blooded'.

⁹ McNeill, *To Long Tan*, p. 172.

¹⁰ Stephens, *Power plus Attitude*, p. 134; and Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam*, p. 143.

Tasks

Use of No 9 Squadron's helicopters allowed the Army much greater tactical mobility. Although their use was not necessary or desirable for all operations, they were always available and frequently used. Tasks included the positioning and extraction of troops, the resupply of both munitions and stores to troops in the field and the administrative movement of personnel. Casualty evacuation was an important role and in the early days the squadron was frequently called upon to supplement a US Army dust-off helicopter. Later when more aircraft became available it took over that role. The squadron aircraft were fitted with rescue winches, which was not the case for US Army helicopters other than the specialist dust-off aircraft.

Squadron aircraft were occasionally fitted out for aerial spraying, used to drop leaflets as part of psychological warfare, fitted out as command and control aircraft or specially equipped for 'people sniffing'. In 1969, after considerable development, they were utilised as armed helicopters, or gunships, as they were known. Whilst the carriage of field guns and their stores as external loads was practised extensively in Australia, the role was taken over by US Army Chinook helicopters in Vietnam. Most tasks could be classed as routine but care had to be taken that they did not become too routine or crews get too confident, otherwise accidents could result. For example, aircraft, both fixed wing and helicopters, generally flew at about 1,500 feet above ground level (AGL) because at that altitude they were considered relatively safe from small arms fire. If intelligence indicated that heavier weapons might be in the area then obviously that advice was heeded. If the cloud base was at 1,500 feet or lower then life became more interesting with in places a multitude of aircraft, including strike aircraft, flying on a see-and-be-seen basis, all trying to get as close to the cloud base as possible. Other ever-present hazards were air strikes and artillery. The latter was fired not just in support of operations but also on the basis of planned harassment fire. Checking artillery control agencies, which also provided information on air strikes, was an on-going requirement. However, this information was not always timely or accurate and on more than one occasion was found (or more correctly, heard) to be incorrect.

Of the eight aircraft that the squadron possessed, the requirement was to have six on-line each day. On most days aircraft were required to be on standby by first light or shortly after. The number needed would depend on possible requirements for that day, including the likelihood of the need to extract or insert Special Air Service (SAS) reconnaissance patrols. It frequently meant that when crews departed each morning they had little idea of what they might end up doing. Other aircraft could be required for pre-planned tasks with the remainder being placed on standby at Vung Tau.

Leaflets were dropped over areas that were thought to conceal Viet Cong or their sympathisers. They contained messages aimed at enticing the anti-government forces out of the jungle and other areas of concealment and voluntarily giving themselves up. It met with some limited success.

On the 'people sniffer' tasks, an Iroquois fitted with air sampling equipment was flown at low level escorted by gunships. If people, or activities indicating the presence of people, were detected and were identified as Viet Cong then the escorts would engage them or artillery directed into the area.

The insertion and extraction of Special Air Service (SAS) patrols was a new task for the squadron and one that was not practised by the US Army so the squadron had to develop its own tactics. The requirement was to insert small patrols, usually shortly before sunset, into a landing site at a specified map reference. Maps were detailed but the appearance of the terrain changed markedly between the wet and dry seasons. The SAS would indicate the area into which they wished to be inserted and unless there was insufficient time, a reconnaissance would be flown the day before by the pilot who was to direct the insertion, together with the patrol leader. Whilst helicopters were common, their very presence could put the Viet Cong on the alert so if a reconnaissance was flown in advance of an operation, observation could only be carried on a single flypast. If a follow-up was required then there would have to be a *time gap between the events, with the approach being flown from a different direction*. The insertion technique that evolved was to have the control aircraft fly at a normal altitude (1,500 feet AGL) and direct another aircraft, flying at tree-top height to a position close to and abeam the intended landing point. On the run-in it was necessary for the low-level aircraft to avoid over-flying any open areas, land into wind but at the same time not into the setting sun. Such insertions could never have been called clandestine, but from the ground it was very difficult on sound alone to determine just where a helicopter was landing or operating. On occasions, empty aircraft would land at other sites in the area in the hope of sowing some seeds of confusion. The condition of the landing site was always something of a gamble and on occasions it was found to be marsh land with water a metre or more deep. On other occasions the landing site was found to contain tree stumps or bushes. There was also always a thought that as the Viet Cong became aware of the nature of these operations, potential landing sites would be booby-trapped. During the insertion of patrols, aircraft were accompanied by US Army gunships. This frequently caused problems, until the squadron got its own gunships, as the insertion technique developed by No 9 Squadron and the SAS was not, at least initially, used by the US Army. An additional issue was that as the US gunship crews had usually not been involved before, the briefing had to be quite detailed and there was always the issue of language (accent). Apparently the US Army later adopted this technique although it differed as they generally poured suppressive fire from escorting aircraft on to the landing site immediately before the helicopters landed. This clearly illustrates the different approach taken by the two countries.

The extraction of patrols was frequently more complex as many resulted from the patrol having been detected and therefore requiring an emergency recovery. These were known as hot extractions. Until the squadron had its own gunships a US Army team had to be called up and briefed. On some occasions extractions were completed without an escort as the delay in waiting for the gunships to arrive could have compromised the success of the task. When calling for an extraction, the patrol would normally be moving to an area that appeared from the map or from previous knowledge to be suitable for a pick-up. But on occasions the patrol was actually being chased so could not be certain where it would end up. The problem, of course, was to locate the patrol. The SAS, for good reason, were not keen to use smoke and whilst mirrors were useful they did have significant limitations. Not the least of these was knowing who was actually doing the flashing. Radio communications were initially a problem as the patrols only carried specialist radios. This was in part overcome by giving them some of the squadron's SARBE personal survival beacons. However, these had a very short range when operating from the jungle, had very poor

voice communication qualities and transmitted on the international distress frequency. However, they were better than nothing. In due course these were replaced by the URC-10 which had a better range and voice capability and could operate on a different frequency. The extraction procedures that were developed utilised a higher aircraft to make contact with the patrol and guide in the pick-up aircraft. Using this method the time spent at low level over an area where the Viet Cong was known to be active was kept to a minimum. No two insertions or extractions were the same and were never considered as routine tasks. They all required detailed individual planning. On occasions patrols had to be winched out but both parties saw this as the last resort because it required the aircraft to hover for a considerable period, making it very vulnerable. Patrols could be rappelled in on ropes and a technique using long ropes for an extraction was developed. This involved the patrol members fastening themselves to the end of ropes dangling 50 metres or so beneath the aircraft as it flew from the extraction area to a secure one. It was not without its problems.

A very close understanding and trust developed between the various SAS squadrons deployed and No 9 Squadron. Had this not occurred, then the SAS would not have been as effective in its role. Not all of these tasks went smoothly and it was not unusual for aircraft, and occasionally crews, to suffer damage. Crews wore personal body armour for SAS and some other high-risk tasks. At least one pilot will testify to its effectiveness.

In October 1967 the Prime Minister announced that the strength of No 9 Squadron would be increased from 8 to 16 aircraft. The decision was also taken to purchase the latest 'H' model aircraft. This version was fitted with an uprated engine that provided better performance at higher density altitudes and also provided a better load carrying capability in terms of both weight and volume. There was a centre of gravity problem apparent in the 'B' model whereby a lead weight had to be fixed on the tail of the aircraft to in part compensate for the guns and armour that had been fitted. This issue was largely alleviated in the 'H' model.

The squadron already had some 'D' models with the increased cargo area. These had been provided as replacements for aircraft which had been lost. With 16 aircraft, the on-line requirement was for 12. Increased personnel numbers were also needed, this putting a significant extra workload back on No 5 Squadron in Australia which also received new aircraft to help it meet its task. The RNZAF and the RAN provided some aircrew to assist the squadron.

Gunships

The squadron helicopters were equipped with two M60 machine guns, one fixed on a pivoting and swivelling mount on either side of the aircraft and manned by the crewman and his assistant. The purpose of these weapons was to provide suppressive fire for the protection of the aircraft itself. The guns could only be fired into the aircraft's two side hemispheres. There was no forward firing capability. This meant that realistically they could not provide fire support to troops on the ground. There was a need for armed helicopter or gunship support, not only to support the squadron during its operations with the SAS, but also on other occasions such as airborne assault, casualty evacuation, when troops were in contact or when there was need to provide suppressive fire in a particular area. The task force could request gunship

support from the US Army and this would be met in accordance with US Army priorities. However, there were occasions when gunships were not available at times when they were required and there were problems with ensuring that the Australian requirements were understood. There was no lack of will on the part of the US Army, it was just a question of priority.

Arriving at Vung Tau at about the same time as the squadron was a US Army unit equipped with Chinook helicopters armed with air-to-ground rockets, mini-guns or 20mm cannons, a flexible 40mm grenade launcher and a number of flexible .50 calibre flexible guns. This unit, called 'Guns-a-GoGo', was happy to support the squadron and the task force. Unfortunately just as a good understanding had been reached as to how each operated, the Chinooks were moved elsewhere. In the end the Chinook was not developed further as an armed helicopter. It provided very good support to those it was protecting but wreaked fiery retribution on those who challenged it.

The gunship used by the US Army was initially a modified 'B' model Iroquois. This was replaced starting in 1966 by the 'C' model, a version not operated by Australia. Also the US Army was developing the Huey Cobra as a specialist armed helicopter. In late 1967 the squadron sought approval to develop an armed helicopter capability and in advance of approval, obtained components from the US Army and started work. They could not adopt the flexible forward firing configuration fitted to the US's 'B' and 'C' models as the Australian aircraft did not have the required electrical and hydraulic connections. As the development progressed the squadron was in the process of re-equipping with the 'H' model Iroquois. The US Army did not have, nor was it developing an 'H' model gunship variant, so all the development work had to be undertaken by Australia, and in particular, by the squadron. The process took some time and it was not until April 1969 that the gunships became operational. They were fitted with two forward firing mini-guns, two rocket pods and two paired flexibly mounted machine guns (one each side). The aircraft that had been modified were then effectively dedicated to the gunship role, as it required some time to strip them for utility use and even more time to rebuild them as gunships.

Once operational the gunships provided invaluable support to the squadron and the task force, operating as a light fire team with two aircraft or as a heavy fire team with three and providing the squadron with new capability and confidence. Most of the crews were trained in-country and few had had any background experience in operating air-to-ground weapons.

Squadron Performance

Both air and maintenance crews were required to work long hours. Aircrews often departed for Nui Dat at first light, not knowing what tasks were ahead, returning after last light. Whilst individual hours flown were high and on occasions very high, the number of take-offs and landings, some in very difficult circumstances, was one of the aspects that consistently put a considerable strain on aircrews. Similarly, the workload on maintenance crews was high and it was not uncommon for them to work through the night to repair or service aircraft. They had to contend with very high rates of wear on some components, particularly during the dry season when sand and grit abrasion caused particular problems. By the standards of Vietnam the squadron's

serviceability rate was extraordinary high and the squadron was visited by US Army officers who were interested in determining why the squadron's aircraft availability rate was so high, its mission success rate so good, and its loss rate so low.¹¹

A number of No 9 Squadron personnel were killed or wounded as a result of enemy action. The squadron also lost a number of aircraft and had a significant number damaged. Damage was caused not only by small arms and other weapons fire but also by mines. On occasions aircraft were damaged during a landing to extract SAS patrols or other groups. It would have been reassuring to have been able to survey landing sites for obstructions in advance. There were a number of major accidents unrelated to enemy action, three occurring in the first year. Two resulted from engine failures, one while lifting out a SAS patrol and the other on take-off from Vung Tau. Overall the squadron's accident rate was much lower than that of other Iroquois units. This resulted from good maintenance, good training and self-discipline.

Summary

No 9 Squadron performed well in Vietnam notwithstanding very little advance notice of the deployment and a rather acrimonious start. The Army, despite gaining its own area of responsibility where it could use its own tactics and not be forced to use those of the US Army, was reluctant to accept that the squadron should use other than US Army helicopter tactics. Also any approaches to joint planning with the Task Force Headquarters were, at least initially, rebuffed. However, at the level where the squadron interfaced with Army combat units, a very productive relationship developed; this best exemplified by that with the SAS.

The perceived limitation of operating into relatively secure landing sites was not an issue in practice because the squadron ignored the requirement and simply got on with the job. Arguably there would have been some benefit if the operational element of the squadron had moved to Nui Dat but it would have been at some cost to manpower. However, if you benched marked No 9 Squadron to the US Army then it was substantially superior in terms of aircraft availability and loss rate.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Air Commodore Doug Chipman: Could I ask you to comment on the way the gunship capability was developed in Vietnam, on a shoe string budget, compared to the way we go about developing force capability today.

Group Captain Beatty: I guess from a gunship point of view, Squadron Leader Brian Dirou was mainly responsible for kitting out the gunship. We became operational in April 1969. I arrived the first week in May 1969 as a 20-year old pilot officer, and became a gunship co-pilot almost immediately and spent the rest of my 12 months tour flying gunships. I guess it's fair to say the way we developed the tactics; Bruce has already referred to the kit that we put on them. The only people who had experience with flying gun operations were the Flight Commanders and they were all ex-fighter

¹¹ Stephens, *Going Solo*, p. 294.

pilots. Brian Dirou and then John Hazelwood, Rex Budd and Frank Clough. There were some interesting things that we learnt and we had to learn very quickly. For instance, how to harmonise the guns. It wasn't for about 12 months that we realised you could harmonise guns and rockets better using a proper harmonisation board. The way we harmonised it was to load the rockets up on the pods, fly off to an area that was designated as a free-fire zone, find a tree and then start shooting at it with rockets. I think the record was about 63 rockets fired before we decided that the pods were harmonised. The mini-guns were somewhat different because you could go down the beach and you could pick a sampan or an old log or something like that on the beach. You could start firing the guns from about 500 feet of altitude and basically see where the guns were hitting the sand, and then you could walk them around and decide whether the guns were shooting accurately or not. This depended on where the skid ball was because you had to be in balanced flight.

So it was all fairly basic, fairly rudimentary. In terms of the rockets themselves, we always carried two to four 'Willy Pete' white phosphorus marker rockets for FAC work and the rest were either 12.5 pound or 15 pound high explosive warheads. The rounds for the mini-guns themselves are unlike those used today. I believe the Australian Army are now flying the same gunships with a total inboard capacity of 6,000 rounds, where we actually flew with 10,000 rounds and 1,500 rounds per M60 twin side guns. So when we were fully armed and fully fuelled we were well and truly over maximum all-up weight. Quite often when we backed out of the revetment to go flying, the two side-gunners would actually walk alongside us until we had sufficient power to get airborne.

I guess one other aspect in terms of operational flying was that we weren't geared for night flying. Towards the end of my tour we actually got involved in a night operation in the Long Hai Mountains. Nobody had actually thought of some of the ramifications of doing a night operation using gunships, but we got called in and we had to learn very quickly how to adapt daytime operations to night-time. We did have a flare ship, but when the mini-guns fired, there was obviously a three to five foot flame of light that would come out of the barrels. Night vision was lost very quickly. The answer for that was we simply put our sunglasses on, or put the visor down, to try and keep our night vision. But, as time went on, we certainly developed our tactics and we learnt to combine and adapt them very quickly particularly with the SAS operations.

Air Commodore Long: Could I say something on the development of the gunship. What Bruce said was that parts were really scrounged. Brian Dirou went around and scrounged pieces to build the prototype. Now that was how business was done. There was a raconteur equipment officer by the name of Bob Smythe who I can recall. He used to back up his truck regularly to the US hangar and they would load 'over-stocked' engines and whatever on board. The American system provided a resupply, based on historic useage, whether they needed it or not. If the auditors came around and found they had too many engines in the shed, then that supply rate would be reduced, and the US Army didn't want that. So we would back our truck up and take away what we needed. This worked very well because for a pair of GP boots or one of our flying suits you got quite a lot. In fact at the end of the day we crashed and lost one of our helicopters and ended up rebuilding it from parts, I think much to the embarrassment of the system because on the books we had 15, but we actually had 16. So that was the way of life.

Wing Commander Allan George: The American's 36 Backers were the squadron that flew the aeroplanes with the big cross and unarmed. We didn't. Any reasons why that may be the case and was there any evidence that the American dust-off helicopters were not attacked because they were so marked?

Air Commodore Long: There were a number of reasons, I understand, for us not wanting to display a red cross. Firstly, painting an aircraft with a red cross meant that it could not be used in the utility role; by the Geneva Convention it would have to be solely used for medical tasks. Instead, we did medevac as part of the job. If we had 16 or 12, or however many aircraft airborne on the day, we could do the dust-off with any one of those aircraft. At the end of the day, in fact on my second tour, I did mostly night dust-off.

There are a lot of stories about Army's poor view of our gumption, shall we say. I can recall one night we were sitting over a small village and there was a firefight on the ground and a dust-off had been called. We were sitting high overhead waiting for an opportunity to approach without taking fire. When you were out there by yourself and the next aircraft to be called forward if things went wrong was back at Vung Tau, it's rather lonely.¹² There was an injured person on the ground and there was an American helicopter also in the vicinity. In fact, he was low level, circling – probably unwittingly – in the middle of where ship-to-shore rounds were falling. He went in, took ground fire and came out again. Naval gunfire was being directed into the area as some sort of protective fire. And this US Army helicopter pilot was actually in the arc of the Naval gunfire. This apparent bravado was more times than not a result of ignorance. To me that epitomised the way that the US Army helicopter pilots tended to do things, because, as was mentioned earlier, I don't think they actually had much experience. Some of their pilots came into the area with only 50 hours, whereas we probably had something like 200 or 300 hours before we were let loose. So I believe it was probably 'ignorance is bliss' on many occasions, and that is why they (the Australian Army) perceived they got a better medevac service from the US Army.

Flight Lieutenant Tim Anderson: Gentlemen, I'd like to ask you a question. At the Recruit Training Unit, we have a responsibility to give our recruits an understanding, not only of the wars that they may fight themselves, but of the wars that have gone beforehand. One of the objects of this is to identify and promote to them airmen heroes and airmen role models. This is a little hard for us because in many ways there's a common perception, and in many ways a true perception, that in the Air Force it is our officers that we send into combat. As servicemen with 9 Squadron and as gentlemen that have served with the people we are looking for, I'd ask for your advice on where we go looking? What sort of airmen should we be identifying as these heroes and as these role models?

Air Commodore Long: I'll have a go again. There was a fellow who many in the room might know here, Frank Clough. Now in our day as pilot officers he was one of our role models. And I think he was the epitome of a happy-go-lucky older, but youthful in mind, ex-fighter pilot. He had lots of stories to tell and indeed was a legend in his own time. Now Frank, on the day, was a great role model for us. We looked to him for leadership and advice, but he was a man of his time and wouldn't fit the system at all

¹² Vung Tau was about 15 minutes flight time plus the preparation time for the crew.

today. So in my view, role models are very much a function of the time. How we get role models today, I'm not sure. These people were operational leaders but were not bureaucratic role models. But I don't think we'd have had those sort of role models had we not gone to Vietnam. It promoted that sort of close living and I guess, a promotion of mentors and role models, but heroes would be too strong a word. I suppose we had a set of values we shared and that same premise is probably how people choose role models today.

Group Captain Haxell: I agree with that Air Commodore Long. But I think the question might have been more along the line of non-commissioned aircrew. As you know, of course, the two guys in the front [of the helicopter] were officers, but the two fellows in the back who we seem to forget about were airmen. In those days there were a few senior non-commissioned officers, but very few. Most of them were Corporals and LACs and generally I think they were a fine bunch of guys. They certainly sat through some pretty wild rides with all of us, including a few with me. I have met up again with some of these fellows over the years, and they like to raise these incidents. There is no doubt they were full functioning members of the crew and we pilots relied upon them for the usual aircrew type things, and of course these were the days before things like CRM. I'd never heard of the word until more recent years, but those practices were very much in use in those days, albeit we didn't know the terminology of it. There are some of those guys in fact did some quite brave things.

Warrant Officer Ian Kuring: Back in the Vietnam era I was a soldier and a Corporal serving both in Australia and in Vietnam. I've flown in the back of your helicopters on a number of occasions in both places Australia and Vietnam. There are a number of things from a soldier's perspective. To start with, I guess we lacked the numbers of Iroquois helicopters that we would have liked both for training in Australia and for operations in Vietnam. I think that that hampered our activities a great deal. I think, as soldiers, we respected your abilities as professional aviators. One of the things that did disturb me, though, sometimes looking up front from the back of the aircraft you could see the shoulders of the two guys flying the thing, and instead of wearing Iroquois badges and 9 Squadron badges, you'd inevitably find someone wearing Mirage patches. I wondered about the motivation of such people. Did they really want to fly Iroquois or did they prefer to be punching holes in the sky in a Mirage? Perhaps some of the panel members might like to comment?

Group Captain Beatty: Well, I'll have the first crack at that. I can tell you that from the time I joined the Air Force all I wanted to do was fly helicopters. When I had the opportunity to fly fighters, as many of us did on completing our tour in Vietnam, I knocked it back.

Group Captain Haxell: Well, I was going to say that you should have been reassured that the guy had some previous experience.

Air Commodore Long: No matter what badge he's wearing I can assure you, I know where his thoughts would have been at the time.

Air Vice-Marshal Mac Weller: I need to speak on behalf of groundies, and it relates to the previous question about role models for recruits. One of the myths of combat is that

anything goes and free will can rein supreme. The issue is that, at least in engineering and maintenance, quite the opposite is the case.

What we are after are people who are dedicated and committed, who can spend 12 hours a day doing a job without variation of standard, and at the end of 12 hours, if you want them to put in another four or five hours, they will do that. I can remember working through the night with guys and putting an aeroplane on the line just half an hour before the time. The other point that needs to be remembered is that if ever a pilot wants a combat-ready, serviceable aircraft, it is in combat. There are times when you just don't take the risks, so I would say that the people that we want are very much the people we've had in the past. You look where our standards have been in the past in terms of maintenance and you'll find the people that we want in the future.

I'd like to ask a question of the panel in relation to operational tempo. It seems to me that if I look at the statistics for the last year of 9 Squadron in Vietnam in 1971, we lost, I think, all our fatalities in aircrew but one. I think our loss of aircraft was probably the highest at any period, and I'm interested to know were the people that went before just lucky? Did the operational tempo actually increase? Did our people in that era get in harms way more often, or was it simply that VC became more aggressive?

Air Commodore Lane: My understanding was that it was largely the last cause, that the VC became more aggressive against helicopters.

Air Commodore Long: I was there for that last period in 1971. I also think that was one of the reasons - I only stayed six months and not a year on my second tour. The Americans largely had their hands tied. They were compromised, because anything that was going to be undertaken then had to go through the Vietnamese command to be approved. Any action was therefore telegraphed around the indigenous military system, which lacked integrity at best. We started losing people, and the end of the Australian involvement looked, and was, in sight; there was talk about us coming home. We lost at least two pilots, one through direct hit with ground fire and the second following a crash under ground fire. I think we started to lose our enthusiasm and our commitment at that point.

Air Vice-Marshal Neil Smith: You talked about the development of the gunship and you've given us the impression it was all pretty much self-help in 9 Squadron. Perhaps the panel won't be able to answer this question and perhaps the answer can come from the floor. I was wondering about the amount of support that 9 Squadron felt they had from the system in that development, and in particular, I guess, from the support command of the day?

Air Vice-Marshal John Paule: I was there whilst the gunship was being developed. I arrived in Vietnam in May 1968 when we were moving from the old 'B' models into the upgraded 'H' models and doubling the size of the Squadron. Brian Dirou and Sergeant Hodge, he was the NCO in charge of our armament section, had started the development. I think Jim Cox might have had a bit of an early hand in it as well. When we started to get the 'H' models they stopped work on the 'B' model gunship and started to put the bits of equipment on the 'H' model. We got no help whatsoever from the RAAF as far as I know. Brian Dirou and Sergeant Hodge and a few other helpers used to jump on one of our aircraft when we had some spare capacity and disappear. They would come back hours later with scrounged US Army mini-guns, rocket pods, all sorts of bits of

equipment and within the squadron the aircraft gunship was developed. It was not until we could actually prove that we could fly these machines on a combat operation - and that was done in early 1969 - did the RAAF back in Australia even recognise that's what we were doing. Now you can go back into the history and all the monthly reports and what have you and you might find a few little holes in that, but that's basically how it was done. It was all done by scrounging.

Air Commodore Long: Could I just make one more comment before we close? It's interesting to look back on Vietnam now that I'm Commander of the Maritime Patrol Group and make some comparisons. It seems to me that people say, 'Gee, how were you affected by Vietnam? Has it had any psychological effect?' I have to admit that I don't know of anyone whose had any great psychological effect from their experiences. Now we didn't see too many of our mates get shot. A couple of them certainly we lost, but we were not there physically on the ground as the Army were.

About 18 months ago we did some rescues in the Maritime Patrol Group with the Orions and they were quite tough on crews. The people were working in very tough conditions; the crews were low level, all of the systems we had on board were not useful because of the conditions, and lives were at stake. Survivors were in the water and things didn't go off as planned. We actually had to fly away a couple of times, leaving people in the water that we knew were still likely to lose their lives. Now, according to anecdotes from the crew room, there were a couple of people off crews who were looking for psychological help. They needed some form of counselling.

My point is that this was just one exercise, or operation if you like, and I just wonder how well-equipped the young people are in today's Defence Force to cope with the emotional stress of combat, particularly with regard to flying, compared to the Vietnam era. I don't know what's changed, whether we've got soft, but I tend to see lots of things like that now. For example, we had a parade the other day: ten per cent of the people arrived and had reasons for not taking part. I'm not sure how well suited we are to fight the next war.

RELEVANCE, EXCELLENCE, TURBULENCE

DAVID GARDNER

A menu from an Australian Flying Corps function during World War I, a silk map used during World War II, a group of stories by members of the Royal Air Force's Escaping Society, photographs of No 77 Squadron activities in Korea, an F24 camera used by the RAAF for several decades and the remains of a mortar which dropped on the RAAF in Vietnam.

What do these objects have in common? They are objects I see coming across my desk at work. I am sure most of you can relate to similar objects. Nevertheless, the objects all come from the same culture and you have obtained them by souvenir, issue or gift during your service with the RAAF. Their only connection is that you can associate the objects with people, events and travel. They are part of the record of this Service. They can be seen as a collection, but only through your eyes and only when you tell the stories that go with them.

Inevitably, one day you will no longer be here and I would like to think that some items will start new lives with the Museum, as with that piece of aircraft from the desert, or that piece of china from the mess or perhaps another souvenir from that peace-keeping operation. Whilst the Museum does not condone this unique sport of souveniring, it applauds the ingenuity of the donor when one sees the array of items offered to the Museum. But if you have not informed anyone about the object's meaning, you will miss the opportunity to not only pass on the object but also part of its history.

This brings me to the role of the RAAF Museum. Since the RAAF Museum was formed as an official RAAF Unit in 1988, it has established a reputation for excellence and innovation in its mission 'to preserve and promote RAAF Heritage'. The Museum's collection now comprises 73 aircraft, 1.5 million photographs, 1,500 films, 18,000 reference books and an artefact collection of over 400,000 objects.

The International Council of Museums defines a museum as 'a permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment the material evidence of man and his environment'. By any measure of this definition the RAAF Museum has truly become a world-class facility. The Museum undertakes collection, research, restoration, conservation, exhibition, and education programs to tell the RAAF's story to the Service and public alike.

In October 1996, the RAAF Museum's new Heritage Gallery was opened to the public. In the first year of operation public attendance was 77,000 (compared to approximately 30,000 in previous years). This year attendance is predicted to exceed 80,000. Both of these figures are well in excess of predictions made in the 1996 Strategic Plan of 60,000 and 40,000, respectively. These figures alone prove that the RAAF Museum has captured the public's imagination. The challenge now is to capitalise on what has already been achieved.

Although the RAAF Museum has established quality programs in all areas of Museum operations, it has suffered from a lack of strategic direction over the past eight years, mainly due to the presence of the National Air and Space Museum Australia (NASMA) at Point Cook.

The genesis for NASMA dates back to the Piggott Enquiry of 1974 which identified a lack of activity in the preservation of Australia's aviation heritage. The idea for a National Aviation Museum grew throughout the 1980's, culminating in a proposal to build a facility at Laverton in 1988. Despite a number of false starts over the ensuing years, a project team was initially formed in 1994, with Point Cook chosen as the preferred site.

Throughout the inception of NASMA the RAAF has been greatly supportive of the NASMA concept. RAAF personnel have been represented at all levels of its development, with Museum staff being instrumental in the design and public program briefs for the new joint display facility. However, NASMA's presence has impeded the ability to have a meaningful strategic outlook at the RAAF Museum due to its constantly changing direction and developments within NASMA and its parent organisation, the Museum of Victoria.

Although NASMA still technically exists as a project supported by the Victorian Government, its likelihood of success, dependent as it is upon a Federal Government 'Federation Fund' allocation, is now very slim. The opportunity therefore exists for the RAAF Museum to enter into its own stage of development. Initially, planning for this began earlier this year with a view to establish the RAAF Museum as the country's pre-eminent aviation museum

There were three core challenges facing the RAAF Museum in developing a plan for its future. They are:

- **Museum Management.** The RAAF Museum has already addressed this challenge. The Board has formed and has already had its first meeting.
- **Display and Storage Facilities.** The current public facilities at the Museum are deficient in a number of areas, including toilets, disabled facilities and retail opportunities, which are required to provide a world-class facility capable of successfully attracting large numbers of fee paying visitors. Moreover, the Museum needs a large aircraft display and storage facility to house its growing collection of large aircraft.
- **Building Rationalisation.** With the impending closure of the Point Cook Base and the need for all RAAF Units to pay rental for facilities used, it is imperative that the RAAF Museum carefully examines its current building utilisation at Point Cook. This challenge will be addressed in concert with the Museum storage facilities.

The first area to be reviewed was upper level management. Unlike most other Units within the RAAF (with the exception of the RAAF Band) most of the expertise to run the RAAF Museum resides within the Unit and not in the parent Command. Therefore, it was important that any higher management organisation include this

professional knowledge and management stability as a cornerstone of its performance. At the same time such an organisation must allow the Museum to run under Program lines with the final decision on policy, staffing and resources to remain with Program managers.

In an environment of shrinking Defence outlays it is essential that the RAAF Museum puts itself on a secure financial footing, whilst trying to minimise Program outlays. Moreover, the Museum would benefit enormously from a management body which is able to provide the specific policy guidance and planning assistance which is peculiar to museums.

To provide this management, most large, well run museums have external Trusts or Boards of Management that take carriage of the strategic management of those museums. After considering a number of overseas and local models, it appeared that the best solution for the RAAF Museum was to establish a structure similar to that of the RNZAF. This solution would give the RAAF an appropriate and visible means of providing strategic guidance to the Museum and policy direction to the RAAF. By learning from other major institutions, the RAAF is able to put in place a management structure which will provide a team of museum and business professionals whose focus will be totally on Museum operations. Therefore, the RAAF will have access to a management board to provide long term vision and stability for the Museum, whilst still being linked to the parent Program to ensure the Museum remains relevant and focused on the current Program values.

The RAAF has established a Museum Advisory Board (MAB) for the RAAF Museum to assist Commander Training – Air Force (COMTRG-AF) with the long-term management of the RAAF Museum. This Board has just had its inaugural meeting at Point Cook on 27 October. The Board is responsible to COMTRG-AF for advice on matters such as:

- Museum Policy, including collection, conservation and restoration;
- Public Programs;
- Staffing Levels;
- Resource requirements and allocations; and
- Major Capital Works Proposals.

Any successful museum needs a critical mass of objects and display space to be successful. A hangar with only one aircraft or a room with 5,000 objects is not likely to succeed. Moreover, a museum must take measures to preserve its collection or suffer from a dwindling reserve of display items and the loss of priceless and irreplaceable assets.

In June 1996, CASAC endorsed, in principle, a plan to construct a Large Aircraft Storage Facility (LASF) at Point Cook. The facility was designed to house the Museum's growing collection of large aircraft that do not fit into the present Bellman

hangars. The cost of this construction was estimated at \$1.8 million, with funding being devised from a business plan drawing revenues from the RAAF's participation in NASMA.

As well as providing a revenue stream, NASMA was also to provide a display facility large enough to display selected items from the Museum's aircraft collection. However, with NASMA's demise the RAAF Museum is left with no facility to store or display its large aircraft.

On current trends 85,000 people will pass through the Museum this year. At present the Museum does not charge entrance fees, relying totally upon Program funds, supplemented by a small amount of donations. However, in order to remain a strong and viable presence at Point Cook, in light of the RAAF's withdrawal of other Units, the Museum must find a way to grow and become more efficient without an increasing demand on Program funds. One of the obvious ways to do this is to charge admission fees.

Whilst it is tempting to multiply the current attendance by \$3-4 per head to come up with a revenue base, the truth is that the Museum is doing so well because it has free admission. If people are to part with an admission fee they have a certain expectation level of entertainment and display presentations that will be provided. To charge admission fees, with the present Museum facilities (poor toilets, no canteen, limited disabled facilities) would see attendance drop to approximately 30-40,000 people (based on similar venues around Melbourne). Therefore, to maintain growth in attendance and visitor interest levels, in a fee-paying environment, the Museum needs new display facilities. Indeed the Commonwealth's Duty of Care dictates it.

The public need for new facilities, coupled with the Museum's need to store and display its large aircraft, means that in a post-NASMA environment the Museum needs a Large Aircraft Display Facility (LADF).

The RAAF Museum has undertaken a detailed study into such a facility. The project is known as Pegasus. The new facility will cost an estimated \$3.7 million. A further \$500,000 will be required to fit it out with displays, giving a total project cost of \$4.2 million in today's dollar terms. It is clearly unrealistic to expect that this level of funding would come from Program sources.

A preliminary study undertaken on behalf of the Museum has identified positive feelings within the business community for support through sponsorship of the RAAF Museum. The study has revealed that a sponsorship target of \$2 million over two years would not be unrealistic for a development of Pegasus' nature.

It has also been determined that the Victorian State Government still harbours an interest to develop an Aviation Museum presence at Point Cook. The B-24 Liberator Memorial Foundation has recently received in-principle agreement for a grant of \$750,000 to construct a hangar for displaying their Liberator on its completion in two years. Rather than plan to use Air Force or Defence Estate Organisation funds to make up the \$1.7 million required to construct the Large Aircraft Display Facility, the Museum proposes to make representation to the State Government to provide a \$1.7 million State grant for the construction of the new display facility. The new facility

will be marketed as a boost to the local and state tourism market, with the Museum attracting over 24,000 interstate and overseas visitors per annum. Furthermore, at the predicted visitation levels, the RAAF Museum would be amongst the State's top 15 tourist attractions.

Successes are often an excuse for celebration. But by romanticising these successes can often obscure current realities. The current reality is the critical storage problem that faces the Museum.

There has been a perception in recent times that the RAAF Museum has simply squatted in buildings at Point Cook as they have become vacant. However, most of this expansion has been due to the closure and reorganisation of RAAF Units as part of various Defence Reviews. Over the past five years the RAAF Museum's storage requirements have grown due to the closure of many RAAF Units and functions. These closures have meant that various heritage objects and aircraft have been given to the Museum to 'sort out'.

Against the backdrop of Unit closures and functions, the Museum has had to endure the turbulence of various moves within and external to Point Cook in addition to accommodating a local movie company. All this compounded by DEO's point of view on not providing the Museum with a clear direction. Consequently, the Museum has not been able to correctly store or rationalise its Collection, nor implement recommendations of a local report commissioned into storage problems and facilities at Point Cook.

Indeed, the Museum has recently been unceremoniously dumped from its main storage area at Point Cook to make way for a film company. This has led to priceless artefacts being scattered at several warehouses throughout Melbourne. The Museum was told that the film company is supposed to build a replacement hangar for the Museum. But that was supposed to be complete in August this year. Don't hold your breath.

Mind you, not all is doom and gloom. The high cost of ex-military aircraft on the open market generally prohibits any attempt at cash purchase and the RAAF Museum has no feasible means of acquiring significant exhibits other than through the exchange process. This is particularly true, given the present situation with respect to Defence spending. The Museum is forced to trade in this way, and doesn't mind doing it. I might add the Museum is getting pretty good at it. Therefore, the legacy of the rationalisation of the collection has provided the Museum with a number of surplus objects. There have been a number of acquisition successes during the past year and several of these surplus objects have been used for exchange to obtain significant aircraft such as Beaufighter and Kittyhawk projects, an Avro504K and an SE5a, in addition to other aircraft parts for current and planned projects.

In summary I feel the future is bright as the RAAF Museum approaches 2000. It enters a challenging period in its continuing development. Faced with the dwindling Defence dollar and uncertainty of tenure, the Museum must plan to provide the required level of preservation and promotion for its growing collection. The Museum strives to remind and educate the public and the Service of the RAAF's illustrious history.

2 SQUADRON IN VIETNAM

WING COMMANDER J.W. BENNETT

This paper was researched and written by Wing Commander John Bennett who served with No 2 Squadron in Vietnam. Unfortunately, Wing Commander Bennett was unable to deliver the paper at the conference due to Service reasons. In his place, Wing Commander Al Curr, also a Vietnam veteran with 2 Squadron service, kindly agreed to deliver the paper and take questions and comments on its completion.

As part of Australia's growing commitment to the Republic of South Vietnam, in late 1966 the Government announced a squadron of Canberra bombers would be deployed to support ground combat forces. No 2 Squadron, based at Butterworth in Malaysia, was the unit selected, but before entering the war zone, its Canberras had to be modified and facilities for the squadron needed to be prepared.

To be compatible with US tactical aircraft, Canberras were fitted with better TACAN navigation displays, UHF radios, and armour plating, to afford the crew some measure of protection from groundfire.¹ In addition, the make-up of the squadron itself would change: even though aircrew strength would remain around 11 crews, the ground support had to be dramatically increased. At Butterworth, the squadron strength had typically numbered 140 personnel, but in Vietnam (without the normal RAAF support of a Base Squadron to provide all domestic facilities) the number of personnel was to double. 2 Squadron would become part of the USAF's 35th Tactical Fighter Wing (35th TFW), which operated F-100 fighters and B-57 dive-bombers (the US variant of the Canberra), from Phan Rang Air Base.

Phan Rang was on the eastern coastal plain, nearly 300 kilometres north-east of South Vietnam's capital, Saigon. The Australian facilities at Phan Rang were hurriedly constructed by 5 Airfield Construction Squadron - without the efforts of 5ACS there would have been no living quarters, messing facilities, technical or administrative areas ready for 2 Squadron's arrival. Construction also involved construction of a maintenance hangar and annexes, communications and operations sections, recreation areas and a sewerage system.

Control of 2 Squadron was handed over to the US 7th Air Force when Wing Commander Rolf Aronsen led his Canberras from Butterworth on 19 April 1967. After two days of training flights to familiarise crews with USAF air traffic procedures, the first missions were flown on 23 April. These were Combat Skyspot missions - radar-directed, high level bombing missions, controlled to the extent where the ground controller called bomb release.

¹ Nitrogen purging fuel systems were also later added, to prevent tank fires if hit by groundfire.

After flying a week of daytime missions, ranging over the whole of South Vietnam, the Squadron was then programmed for eight sorties each night. Of the eight aircraft 'fragged'² that first night, two aircraft were forced to return to base with their bombs. For the ground radar station to accurately track a Canberra, the aircraft had to be fitted with a radar transponder, known as a 'music box', as accurate controlling was not always possible on the reflected radar 'skin paint'. On this first night, one aircraft was not fitted with a transponder, the other's had gone unserviceable. These teething problems were soon overcome as the crews settled into the routine of the first nightly take-off at about 8 pm, with the others following at about hourly intervals. The last aircraft would not arrive back until about 6.30 am.

To meet the daily tasking commitment of eight sorties, 2 Squadron kept eight Canberras on-line at Phan Rang, which were maintained at exceedingly high serviceability levels. The Squadron maintenance personnel carried out the normal daily flight servicing and rectification, in addition to weekly 'A' and monthly 'C' servicings, and over the time at Phan Rang a serviceability rate of 96 per cent was maintained. Deeper maintenance was conducted at Butterworth and Amberley.

Initially, the standard bomb load for the Canberras had been six 500-pounders, but soon six 1,000-pounders or nine 500-pound bombs became the norm.³ However, following a series of negative releases, or 'hang-ups', problems were identified with the Avro Triple Carrier.⁴ Furthermore, in mid-June, after some bombs had fallen onto the bomb doors - and in one case a bomb was inadvertently released as the doors were opened - the use of these carriers was discontinued. There can be no doubt that the squadron was extremely lucky that these bombing problems did not have tragic consequences. Fortunately, alternate carriers had been held in reserve, but these only allowed for the reduced load of eight 500-pound bombs,⁵ or four 1,000-pounders, in the bay. Soon wing-tip bomb carriers were adopted, with each carrier cleared for a 500-pounder on each wingtip. These carriers would remain standard for the rest of the Canberra's bombing life.

The tasking of 2 Squadron by Headquarters 7th Air Force, in Saigon, had been stipulated by the Australian Government to be wholly within South Vietnam - not over the North or into Laos, nor within 20 kilometres of Cambodia. Not that these restrictions hampered the Canberras' operations; crews found ways of working within these constraints. The US had begun bombing North Vietnam in March 1965 with the USAF 'Rolling Thunder' campaign, which was maintained until November 1968. Targets in the South included Viet Cong concentrations, food storage dumps, infiltration routes, gun positions, river crossings, bridges, base camps and military buildings. The military buildings in the South amounted to little more than huts which housed the VC and their caches, and were identified by reports received by the USAF from Army reconnaissance patrols, airborne FACs, photographic reconnaissance, and intelligence reports.

² The fragment of the 24-hourly tasking schedule, issued nightly by Headquarters 7th Air Force.

³ These were the old World War II stocks of a variety of single lug 500-lb bombs, or Mk 1 1000-lb bombs, all carried in the bomb bay. The bomb bay load was two Avro Triple Carriers, each capable of carrying three 1000-lb bombs, or three Triple Carriers, each capable of carrying three 500-pounders.

⁴ No 2 Squadron A51, of 1 June 1967.

⁵ These were two Avro 100/1000 Standard Carriers on Multi Adaptors in the bomb bay, with four bombs on each carrier.

On 25 June 1967, the first FAC-directed close air support missions were flown as a 7th Air Force trial to assess the suitability of the Canberra for low-level visual bombing. From September, this resulted in the daily tasking of a pair of Canberras on visual bombing missions. At dawn each morning, two crews departed on close air support sorties, with some supporting the Australian Army Task Force in Phuoc Tuy Province. Such raids were directed by a FAC in a Cessna O-1 'Bird-Dog' observation aircraft, marking the target with smoke rockets. Visual bombing proved to be more rewarding to the crews: radar Skyspot missions were normally mundane as it was not normally possible to obtain accurate battle damage assessment (BDA).

Headquarters 7th Air Force had, by November, been suitably impressed by the high degree of accuracy that 2 Squadron, now under the command of Wing Commander David Evans, could deliver in close air support, and four visual strikes became the pattern each day, with four Skyspot sorties each night. Quite often, however, weather conditions precluded visual bombing, so the Canberras would be retasked airborne to a radar mission - probably to another target, and sometimes to another Corps. What had been intended as visual bombing in the country's south along the canals of IV Corps, could become a route interdiction task in the mountains of northerly I Corps under Skyspot control. If the urgency of the ground war required immediate air support, the Canberras enroute towards a pre-planned target could be diverted to a hot troops-in-contact 'fire fight'. Such was the flexibility of the Canberra. Its crews made it an accurate delivery system with a substantial load, and it could remain airborne for four hours - twice that of other tactical aircraft involved in the fighting.

By late 1967, the North Vietnamese leadership had proposed a major shift in tactics from the guerilla style of conflict to massed assault on prime locations. From the beginning of 1968 intense pressure was placed on the US fire support bases in northern I Corps, immediately south of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), the border with North Vietnam. These assaults were planned to begin on the Vietnamese Buddhist lunar new year, or Tet. Even if the attacks would not be successful militarily, the North Vietnamese were confident that they would undermine American resolve in the war. On the night of 31 January 1968, more than 100 cities, military installations and transport lines were attacked. The Australian Task Force in Phuoc Tuy successfully defeated the enemy's D445 battalion in an attack on the provincial capital of Baria, but perhaps the best known of the Tet offensive attacks was against the US outpost at Khe Sanh. As the North Vietnamese divisions pressed south to capture the base, the defence of Khe Sanh was placed above all other operations. During the following weeks of the siege, Canberras participated in the enormous air campaign which ultimately saved the base.

The standard bomb loads for the Canberras over this stage had been eight 500-pound or six 1,000-pound bombs. As the RAAF's stocks of the old Australian bombs were becoming rapidly depleted by the high squadron usage, alternative weapons were considered. A trial in early April 1968 saw one aircraft daily dropping six of the American 750-pound M117 general purpose bombs, and by August, the 750-pounder became the squadron's standard weapon.⁶

⁶ No 2 Squadron A50, of 11 August 1968: 'Today saw the start of the change over to American M117 750-lb bombs'. In late 1969 some stocks of 1000-lb bombs were again dropped. These were post-WWII Mk 10 HAHS (high altitude-high speed) bombs, that had specifically been designed for the Canberra and RAF V-bombers.

The Canberras were the only visual level-bombers in the country, and in addition to delivering great accuracy,⁷ the Canberras could be called in to bomb under low cloud ceilings. This occurred especially during the monsoon season when much of the country was under cloud, and other aircraft were prevented from striking targets, needing higher cloud bases for their dive attacks. Furthermore, the Canberras could deliver 'sticks' of bombs, ideal for targets along the straight canals in the Mekong Delta region in IV Corps, or could loiter to make individual attacks with single bombs against pinpoint targets. This mode of attack was often used in close air support situations, where friendly forces were in close proximity to the enemy, and a 'short round' would have had tragic results. The Squadron's accepted minimum height for bombing had been 3,000 feet, which enabled adequate target acquisition and generally kept the aircraft out of small arms fire. It was also above the height of aircraft running the risk of self-damage from their bombs. However, if the cloud base did not permit bombing at this height, they were to refuse this and request another target. It was felt by the crews this reflected poorly on their ability, so the CO cleared all crews to bomb at the minimum level which the bombsight would function, with a pull to safety height after bomb release - typically between 800 and 1,000 feet. These lower heights minimised left and right line errors, and became the accepted technique for bombing targets requiring particular accuracy in line, such as beside the long straight canals. This was part of the CO's aim to achieve an accuracy that would enable the squadron to operate effectively in tactical operations.

By the beginning of 1969, 2 Squadron, now with Wing Commander John Whitehead as CO, was flying seven visual missions and one Skyspot mission daily. This resulted in a high amount of BDA, but sometimes the results suggested the futility in attacking apparently uninhabited jungle, with crews querying the employment of tactical air power against insignificant targets. However, later feedback during August 1969 of the results on an attack of one of these 'pointless' targets bore fruit. On 31 July, 2 Squadron had bombed a VC base camp in the Mekong Delta. Local Viet Cong had been attending a cadre meeting at the time, and ten of them, including one of the VIPs in the VC infrastructure, were killed as a result of the Canberra strike.⁸

One of the more unusual missions carried out by aircrews in Vietnam was visual night bombing, known as 'Night Owls'. Normally, of course, visual bombing was done by day, but at night it was possible for the target area to be illuminated by parachute flares, fired by an aircraft 'flare ship' or by artillery. The FAC would mark the target, as usual, by a smoke rocket.

By November 1969, the squadron was led by the popular CO Wing Commander Jack Boast and was being tasked primarily with visual missions, and only a very occasional Skyspot.⁹ The Squadron's 50,000th bomb was dropped on 28 November.¹⁰ Soon 2 Squadron moved into a new field of operations in its air campaign, when in April 1970 it began interdicting roads in I Corps, immediately south of the DMZ. The main area of

⁷ In the 12 months from November 1968 to November 1969, No 2 Squadron's weapon delivery accuracy, assessed by photography, was 50 per cent of bombs within 40 metres, 90 per cent within 100 metres.

⁸ Agent report, No 2 Squadron A50, of 22 August 1969.

⁹ From 4 October 1969 only VBMs were fraged. The author's flying logbook shows that over the period November 1969 to November 1970, of 260 missions flown, only six were CSS.

¹⁰ The 50,000th bomb was dropped by Kennedy/Curr (A84-240). Most of the bombs dropped during 1969 had been the US 750lb M117 (15,900 dropped), with the Australian Mk10 1000-lb bombs introduced at the end of the year (1,150 dropped).

operation during this phase was bombing the road through the A Shau Valley, the principal supply route from the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos to VC base camps in northern I Corps, now called 1MR. This corridor to the south provided a conduit of supplies, which was to prove the key to the failure of military strategy in the war.¹¹ The interdiction of this route proved highly successful while it lasted, and the speed with which the VC tried to repair road damage showed that the Canberra strikes were seriously denying the enemy his supplies.

On one of the first sorties near Tiger Mountain, along the A Shau route, the squadron achieved a successful 15-metre cut on the road, and enemy trucks that evening found the road impassable, with 17 being destroyed by USAF AC-119 gunships. The success of cutting these routes by the Canberras saw three missions a day being flown to the A Shau Valley, and soon 7th Air Force requested an increased rate of flying from the Canberras. From the middle of June 1970, 2 Squadron was tasked with nine sorties a day, and on the 29th, the Squadron dropped its 60,000th bomb.¹²

This was also at the stage of the 'Vietnamisation' of the war, whereby US policy now concentrated on training the Vietnamese to take over the running of operations at all levels. The greatest impact that Vietnamisation had on 2 Squadron was operating with Vietnamese FACs. Training had begun earlier in the year in the Mekong Delta, with USAF FACs instructing the locals on directing air strikes. The Vietnamese naturally had a limited vocabulary, so the Australian crews attempted using understandable pidgin-type language. Unfortunately, as soon as the FAC heard the word 'smoke', he would fire one of his few rockets at the target, irrespective of the position of the attacking Canberra. However, the Vietnamese took only a short time to adapt to the Canberras' unique level run-ins, which not only required the timely laying of the smoke on the target, but also a time-consuming target brief. Because of the Canberras' large fuel reserves, the Australian crews were able to persist with the initial language problems, and ensure the target brief was thoroughly understood. The shorter-range USAF fighters were unable to hold for these lengthy periods, and made their integration with VNAF FACs more difficult.

A rapport began between the Vietnamese FACs and the Australian crews by a system of 'exchanges', which was implemented from June. This enabled Australian crews to visit the bases of the FACs for several days, and for the Vietnamese to reciprocate by visiting Phan Rang. Not only were RAAF crew members able to fly FAC sorties, and occasionally attack missions in Vietnamese A-37 Dragonfly aircraft, the VNAF FACs were able to fly in the Canberras.

Just as Wing Commander John Downing took command, on the night of 3 November a Canberra flown by Flying Officer Mike Herbert and Pilot Officer Bob Carver (A84-231) was lost on a Skyspot mission in 1MR in the Da Nang area. Over three days, 2 Squadron flew 38 search sorties, amounting to 113 hours, but these failed to reveal any trace of the missing A84-231. Mike Herbert and Bob Carver are remembered by plaques for those Missing in Action at the Vietnam Memorial, on Anzac Parade, in Canberra.

¹¹ Peter Edwards with Gregory Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1992, p. 226.

¹² Magpie 21, Herbert/Aitken A84-241.

Despite the inexplicable loss of Herbert and Carver, tasking continued at nine or ten sorties per day. This remained the level of activity for the remainder of 2 Squadron's operations in Vietnam, with a heavy involvement in operations in the northern part of 1MR. On the afternoon of Sunday 14 March 1971, the CO Wing Commander John Downing and Flight Lieutenant Al Pinches were shot down by a surface-to-air missile at 14,000 feet near the DMZ. Fortunately the crew survived by ejecting. The starboard wing of their Canberra, A84-228, had virtually been blown off by an SA-2.

Both ejected safely and parachuted through cloud, and in rain and near-zero visibility were floating down into the mountainous jungle. John Downing crashed through trees on the side of a steep ridge, 3,000 feet high, and landed on his knees, fracturing a kneecap. Al Pinches fortunately had his fall broken by the thick jungle canopy, which snagged his 'chute, leaving him dangling a metre above the boulder-strewn ground. He had received back injuries on ejection, but falling on the boulders would most probably have killed him. After a sleepless night in a noisy jungle, at midday the next day, they established contact with each other and then alternated their distress calls to conserve battery power. Three hours later, the downed crew were picked up by helicopter crew and flown to hospital.

On 7 April, Flight Lieutenant Stan Fenton and Flying Officer Pete Murphy conducted one of the most successful strikes flown by the Squadron for the entire war when they rendezvoused with their FAC in the mountains near the Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam border. American ground troops on Fire Base 6 were under heavy pressure from the enemy from a distance of only 200 metres. The friendly force commander, despite the potential danger, cleared the Canberra to bomb. Herb 52 dived in and marked the target - with adversaries fighting it out in close contact, friendly lives could be lost by a misdirected bomb. The strike completely disrupted the enemy attack and relieved the heavy pressure on the friendlies on Fire Base 6. The ground forces later confirmed 80 enemy troops had been killed as a result of the strike.¹³

To replace Downing, Wing Commander Tom Thorpe had hurriedly completed his training in Australia and rushed to Vietnam, but his tour of operations was to be short-lived - it had already been announced that 2 Squadron was to be withdrawn. The last missions were tasked for 31 May 1971. On the last bomb to fall from Magpie 61 was the message: '76,389 and last bomb Compliments to "Charlie" from No 2 Squadron RAAF Uc Dai Loi'.¹⁴

The aircraft were then prepared with their wingtip fuel tanks for the ferry back to Australia, and crews flew their Canberras from Phan Rang on 4 June, arriving at Amberley the following day. The Squadron had been absent from Australia since 29 June 1958. In recognition for its service during its four years in Vietnam, 2 Squadron was again awarded the Duke of Gloucester's Cup, this time for 1970-71.¹⁵ This was not the final award for 2 Squadron's service in Vietnam. The Republic of Vietnam Unit Citation, the Gallantry Cross with Palm, was awarded to the 35th TFW, which included 2 Squadron members who had served from 1 September 1968 to 9 October 1970.¹⁶ In

¹³ No 2 Squadron A51, of 7 April 1971.

¹⁴ *Uc Dai Loi* is Vietnamese for Australia.

¹⁵ The presentation was made at Amberley on 6 July 1972.

¹⁶ RAAF PR S4550/72 Ministerial Press Release, of 1 March 1972. The award had been approved in Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. 87, of Thursday 9 September 1971.

addition, the USAF awarded its Outstanding Unit Award to 2 Squadron for 'exceptionally meritorious service in support of military operations against opposing armed forces in Southeast Asia from 19 April 1967 to 31 May 1971'.¹⁷

Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War has always been controversial, and as the war continued, and our commitment had grown, the tide of public opinion had turned towards the *withdrawal of Australia from the war*. The returning veterans were not feted, as their predecessors of previous conflicts had been.

It was only after 1973, by which time all USAF tactical squadrons had also left South Vietnam, that the North was finally able to mount a decisive campaign.¹⁸ Without that Allied air campaign, albeit mounted with the incredible political constraints from Washington, the fall of the South may well have happened a decade earlier. And then, as the domino fell in the 1960s, the advances made by South-East Asia over the last three decades would have been greatly different. The question would have been asked: 'Why did Australia not help an Ally?'. We would have had no right to expect any assistance in the future.

DISCUSSION

Air Commodore Alex Alexander: Thank you very much, Al, for including the bad parts as well as the good parts. If you don't mind and bear with me for two minutes, I might just give you the history of the problem. When the Canberra was built, despite the fact it was designed during the latter part of the war, it was built as a bomber with what was known as an Avro Triple Carrier and a very up-market HAHS bomb of 1,000 pounds. It fitted perfectly and worked perfectly. The trouble is we had 25,000 bombs left over from World War II, mainly made in South Africa and UK in 1942 and 1943. And most of them had been stored in the north and the Islands. However, when we went across to Vietnam with this configuration, it should have been using the 1,000-pound bomb of that design. However, we tried to fit it with a 500-pound bomb and as such we had a considerable number of irregular releases and bombs falling on the bomb bay doors and things of that nature. It took ARDU¹⁹ a long, long time to sort the problem out. At Kingswood we had to pack and send these 25,000 bombs to Vietnam and we had to chisel and file the bomb lugs on the bombs so that they would reduce this problem on the aircraft. We also had to make locking bands so that the tails wouldn't fall off. We also had to put fin extenders on the bombs so they would be spin stabilised so that it might actually fall, unlike the World War II bombs that you saw in the television clip. Also we still had to use a pistol detonator combination, unlike the Americans who had a fuse. So quite often the bombs that fell off the Canberra as we dropped them tended to float in the bomb bay and then fall away. The trouble was by the time they inched open the bomb bay doors the bombs were armed. Luckily the aircrew didn't fully realise this. But we laugh and I laugh today because we're still here. But what I'm really trying to say is, we must practise in peacetime what we do in war. And if you use configurations

¹⁷ G. Odgers, *Mission Vietnam*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 1974, p. 122.

¹⁸ Alan Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1992, p. 125.

¹⁹ ARDU – Aircraft Research and Development Unit.

that are not the configurations you are going to use, then you've got serious problems. I could go on all day because it's my pet subject, but I won't. Thanks, Al.

Air Vice-Marshal Bill Collins: I might build on what Alexander had to say. In the 1966-67 time period I was a middle ranking Flight Lieutenant in the Department of Air in the Directorate of Aircraft Engineering. Virtually all the types of aircraft that went to Vietnam fell into my policy bailiwick. When it was decided to send the Canberras to Vietnam, suddenly a list of modifications that were essential before the aircraft could be used in operations were generated. Some of them have been touched on and related to the Skyspot, for example. Others were quite frankly things we had chosen not ever to do because we didn't think we'd ever be using the aircraft operationally. And one of them in fact was the revised venting system for the fuel tanks on the aircraft. The lesson I drew out of all of that - and it's a bit similar to what Alex has just said - we should be preparing in peacetime as if things might happen and we might have to go and use aircraft in operations at very short notice. It seemed to me that we were just playing and waiting for the new one, the F-111 to come along - a personal view generated by a 25 year old Flight Lieutenant.

FORWARD AIR CONTROL OPERATIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

AIR VICE-MARSHAL G. W. NEIL

It is my privilege this afternoon to briefly cover the role of the forward air controller (FAC) in Vietnam, outlining FAC procedures and touching on some of the experiences of the RAAF FAC's who served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1971.

The FAC's role was to control the close air support (CAS) of friendly ground forces and integrate that air support with other fire support, such as artillery, or helicopter gunships to ensure the safety of friendlies and optimise safety for supporting aircraft. The FAC was always the 'on scene' air commander.

The FAC's modus operandi was to be airborne over the area of operations (AO) during daylight hours to conduct visual reconnaissance and be immediately available to provide CAS should a troops-in-contact (TIC) situation arise. He advised army commanders on the use of air support, adjusted artillery and assisted wherever possible in areas such as navigation assistance or radio relay.

The RAAF had 36 FAC's perform tours of six, eight or twelve months attached to the 7th Air Force USAF. They were all experienced fighter pilots ranging from the rank of flying officer to wing commander. They were experienced in operating under FAC control in the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency or in peacetime training in Malaya, Thailand or Australia. They quickly adapted to being the FAC through a combination of osmosis and participation in a joint warfare course as well as a FAC course in Australia or participation at the USAF FAC University (FACU) in South Vietnam.

Before dealing with the FAC role itself, I believe it is necessary to briefly mention the tactical air control system in operation. The air force's tactical air control centre was based at Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon, and this agency issued the 'frag' orders each evening for the following day's operations. Details of these planned missions were passed on to the wings and squadrons as well as to the Direct Air Support Centres (DASCs) in each of the four corps in South Vietnam and to the tactical air control parties positioned by the USAF at each army division or brigade headquarters.

Each day some 750-800 CAS sorties were flown either as pre-planned missions or from alert status. The rationale behind the pre-planned tasking was to provide an even spread of airborne aircraft during the day (and to a lesser extent at night) so that they could be diverted at very short notice to more immediate targets that arose, such as TICs. It also enabled the squadrons to remain proficient at CAS and conduct their own individual categorisation training despite the requirement to keep aircraft and crews on ground alert. Each DASC had operational control over the missions with the authority to divert pre-planned missions or to scramble alert missions onto immediate air strikes.

The TACPs at division and/or brigade level were commanded by a USAF lieutenant colonel or major who in turn commanded the detachment of FACs and airmen there. To give you some idea of the number of air strikes allotted to each TACP, it was in 1970 usual to have three to five pre-plans allotted to each US army brigade each day. This, of course, would vary depending on operational priorities. For instance, in May 1970 when two brigades of 25th Division moved into Cambodia, their FACs controlled some 54 air strikes on the first day, and most of those air strikes were flown in flights of four!

The USAF had five Tactical Air Support Squadrons (TASS) to conduct their FAC operations, four of them in South Vietnam. The squadrons, in turn, deployed their aircraft, FACs and groundcrews to forward operating locations where the TACPs were based. In 19th TASS based at Bien Hoa they had 26 forward operating locations, about 120 aircraft of three types and about 230 FACs deployed. The unit was commanded by one lieutenant colonel - some responsibility - and a minefield to promotion prospects!

The USAF had FACs in South Vietnam from October 1961, but as the war effort increased and experienced aircrew often had to undertake second, third and more subsequent tours in Vietnam, the FAC role recently re-jigged to suit the environment in South-East Asia soon started taking the 'hind-tit'! Manning difficulties dictated that 'low-time' pilots with less than 750 hours were given brief ground attack training and assigned to the FAC role. By 1970 two-thirds of the FACs were low-time pilots. Those who were ground attack qualified were designated 'A' FACs who could provide support to the US Army and allied armies while the non-ground attack qualified FACs were designated 'B' FACs and ironically were assigned to the riskier strike control and reconnaissance (SCAR) role out-country.

The Australian and New Zealand FACs were usually flying in support of the US Army. Their levels of experience provided an advantage to them, especially early in their tours, whereas low-time FACs had to be supervised as closely as possible. But I have to say that given the appropriate practice it would have been impossible to differentiate the relative performance standards between the low-time FACs and their more experienced fighter pilot peers after, say, three months.

The Australian, and Kiwi, FACs did not have it all their way. It took a lot of adjustment to work in the USAF/Army environment where everything was done on a massive scale compared with our own forces. It was done via very broad operational directives but pity any commander whose unit was found lacking! There were plenty of staff officers at the various headquarters and agencies who fancied doing some of their Vietnam tour in a command position. This often stifled initiative.

The conversions onto each aircraft type were carried out in-country. The OV-10 conversion, for instance, took about 20 hours; this included basic training for the FAC role. More dedicated training was carried out on-the-job once we were assigned to a TACP. The TASS standardisation and evaluation checks were carried out once all aspects of training had been covered, usually after controlling about ten air strikes under supervision.

Aircraft flown were the Cessna 0-1, the Cessna 0-2 (an interim aircraft) until the North American-Rockwell OV-10 Bronco came into service in 1968. I am somewhat biased toward the OV-10 which was designed for the job with two engines, ejection seats, better communications, four 7.62 mm machine guns, and more rockets. Early in the piece the Bronco was allowed to carry 14 HE rockets as well as the 14 White Phosphorous rockets in an armed FAC program called 'misty bronco'. This capability was to save many lives in that awkward interim period awaiting fighters or gunships to arrive on target.

The rules of engagement were relatively clear and simple. Buildings and monuments of religious significance were protected, as were villages. However, should ground fire be encountered from any such protected site it could be struck.

In conducting visual reconnaissance, it was usual to be initially sceptical about what could be discerned from around 1,500 feet. But as experience was gained and as the AO flown over every day became more and more familiar it was indeed possible to detect movement or recent movement on the ground. Some indicators were smoke from cooking fires, traffic marks in long grass, mud in rice paddies or along river banks and canals, movement patterns to and from villages and nearby fields and vegetable gardens hidden under trees.

Targets were identified with a four or six figure grid reference but were often inaccurate, often because the troops' initial reference for their position was incorrect because they were not dropped off at the correct grid reference. If, say, a six figure grid reference was provided for a bunker complex and a trail junction was nearby, it would pay to put the first bomb or two at the trail junction to see what they opened up. Unfortunately, it was my experience during 1970 that many pre-planned air strikes were squandered because the army came up with targets which, although existent, were dated or not relevant to the current or future tactical plot.

One of the most important roles of the FAC, and the air liaison officer (ALO) in particular, was to provide advice to the ground commander on the use of tactical air support. The ALO attended morning and/or evening briefings at the division or brigade headquarters tactical operations centre (TOC) and accompanied the brigade commander in his command and control helicopter whenever possible. The opportunity was there to 'sell' air power and to advise for or against proposals being put forward by subordinate commanders and staff. In a similar fashion duty FACs were placed forward with brigade TOCs, when the AO was well away from the division headquarters to act as advisers and provide the necessary liaison.

The high rate of staff turnover generated by one-year tours and the US Army's policy to post people rather than units meant that commanders often had little knowledge about the ever-widening range of air-to-ground weaponry available. Often their understanding was based on myths or past problems. As an example, one afternoon I found myself above a hectic troops-in-combat situation requiring blocking artillery fire and air strikes. The terrain and vegetation and the linear target dictated that cluster bomb units (CBUs) would be the best weapon for the job. However, the army was very wary about using CBUs because their earlier models called 'butterfly bombs' had small fins out the back of the bomblets which caught up in the trees and scrub. When dislodged later by troops moving through the scrub or by the pressure

waves from explosions nearby the bomblets could cause many casualties amongst the friendlies. I knew I could request an immediate air strike with CBU and napalm loaded and have them out from Bien Hoa within 15 minutes. I knew there was no danger from hang-ups in the trees because the new CBU-25 bomblets had a spin decay fusing. I felt somewhat deceitful as I explained over the radio to the ground commander that I could order 'jungle bombs' (the official USAF description) for an immediate air strike. Not once did I use the term 'CBU'. The USAF had foreseen the problem of nomenclature and had been confident enough to 'sell' its new product and it worked.

Weapons delivery parameters were laid down in the table of minimum safe distances. There were sound reasons to treat them as mandatory, especially since the FAC, not the fighters, was responsible for troop safety but there were occasions where the FAC and ground commander could agree on ordnance being placed more closely, usually at the ground commander's request.

I would now like to run through a typical day in the life of a FAC in 1970. I mention the year because there was quite some disparity between the hours flown by FACs early in the conflict; they often flew up to 125 hours per month whereas we were restricted to 84 hours per month. The earlier FACs also put in many more air strikes and encountered more incoming rocket and mortar fire in their domestic areas.

I found my first day quite intimidating, Pete Larard had one week to introduce me to senior staff at 7th AF, III DASC, III FV, 504th TASG and 19th TASS. We left Saigon early one morning to drive to Bien Hoa. On the way near Long Binh, we came across a traffic snarl and confrontation between a US Army truck driver and a crowd of locals understandably upset about one of their number being squashed quite flat by the truck. The Vietnamese police and the military police were doing their best to control the situation; there were pistols and rifles being waved everywhere, but I was glad when we got through.

Then at Bien Hoa our car was broken into outside the base PX and my camera and clothes were stolen. Fortunately, for Pete, his F-1 machine gun stowed under the seat was not stolen.

Then on the way back to 7th AF TACC Pete pointed out the iniquitous VNAF¹ officers' club to me. On cue, only about ten metres away, an American in civvies ran out of the club with blood streaming from his head - followed by a bar girl armed with a high heeled shoe. She was followed a few seconds later by a VNAF MP, armed with an M-16, who proceeded to fire about three shots after the American down a relatively busy street.

Only 364 days to go.

It was far more peaceful out in the country. I was based at Bear Cat and Cu Chi, both very large bases each with a population of around 15,000 men. Our domestic accommodation varied depending on the itinerancy of the brigade and the USAF TACP. For most of my time we members of the TACP were on our own and left to

¹ VNAF – Vietnamese Air Force (Republic of Vietnam – South Vietnam).

our devices to find suitable messing. At Cu Chi, we chose to be self-catered. The benefits of our messing allowance of about \$3 per day were dwarfed by the benefits of trading Australian beer for steaks and air conditioners and we had the additional benefit of Ken Semmler being one of our FACs. His father ensured that we had a wide selection of Kaiser Stuhl wines flown up to Vung Tau each month with the cooperation of the CO of 36 Squadron, John Radford. I should also mention the exceptional support provided by No 1 Operational Support Unit, Vung Tau. Its staff was always willing to provide all facilities for us at all hours.

We generally flew one mission of 2.5 to 3 hours each day, seven days a week. If we had more FACs than needed, we doubled up by flying them in the back seat, another pair of eyes was always useful and we had gyro-stabilised binoculars which could be fitted in the rear cockpit.

Preparation for each mission was extensive with briefings at division or brigade level, on troop positions, call signs, frequencies, codes and tactical plans. Our first take-off was at dawn, then we flew a total of five or six missions per day with standby rosters usually each night.

The OV-10 communication fit was well ahead of its time. We had:

- UHF with guard and a homing facility
- Two VHF-FM with a homing facility
- One VHF-AM
- HF for more remote operations (and Radio Australia)
- KY-28 secure voice on UHF and VHF-FM

We listened out on at least four radios at once and it took a while to become adept at managing that, especially when operations were hectic. It was a matter of adjusting each radio's volume so that the more important nets were set at higher volumes than others.

Before take-off, advice was obtained from the artillery advisory net on artillery firing and a course was planned to avoid it. Throughout the flight it was necessary to check each artillery advisory station for each area to keep up to date on friendly fire. This procedure also provided some degree of flight following.

Primary flight following was done by the TACP control who also acted a conduit for the messages from the TOC, DASC or fighters on their way to an air strike.

On entering the AO contact was made with the friendlies on VHF-FM. If conducting VR we remained in contact with respective units and artillery batteries in the area. We also worked with army aviation often providing top cover when they were down in the weeds.

If preparing for a pre-planned air strike, it was important to fly in random patterns which did not telegraph where the target area was. It was necessary to locate the friendly units with panels or coloured smoke and to locate the target. It was the

ground commander's prerogative as to whether or not he wished to mark his position for the FAC and, later, for the fighters. If he chose not to mark them that was his own responsibility.

For pre-planned air strikes the TACP would already have coordinated clearances from the US Army and ARVN² but, for immediate air strikes, clearances from other units could take time; anyone would understand the FAC's frustration at not being able to obtain the province chief's clearance on a lazy Sunday morning while his FM radios were awash with urgent action and casualties on the ground. Not that clearances were fool-proof; on one occasion I spotted eight men swimming in a stream and sought clearance to engage them. The ARVN were about ten kilometres away and the US Army were four kilometres away. I obtained a quick clearance but on my first pass I noticed that one of the swimmers was black. That section had much to thank for having an African American amongst them!

Prior to the air strike a fire coordination line was negotiated with the artillery to ensure the safety of the fighters. Sometimes it was necessary to shut-off the artillery during the air strike but wherever possible some artillery was kept on the target to keep the enemy's head down. That of itself made it safer for the fighters and the FAC.

A rendezvous point would have been already passed on to the fighters, either a TACAN point or a well-known geographic feature. On checking in to the FAC's UHF frequency the fighter would advise their weapons and the amount of playtime available. The FAC, in turn, would provide a general target briefing, pick up the fighters and lead them into the target area keeping them away from or above the artillery. During this run-in friendlies closer than two kilometres to the target would mark their positions for the fighters and a final more particular target briefing would be completed by the FAC. The target would be marked as quickly as possible with a white phosphorous rocket and the fighters would go to work. Each pass had to be individually cleared by the FAC once he was assured that the fighter was on target. During the air strike, the FAC would fly a racetrack pattern to one side of the target, or a figure eight pattern or a circular pattern. The aim was to keep the target and friendlies in sight, keep the fighters in sight (especially on final run-in) and be able to roll in at any time to put in a new mark. The fall of each bomb or napalm was used also as a reference point for the next piece of ordnance.

Once ordnance was expended the fighters would hold high and dry while the FAC carried out a bomb damage assessment (BDA). 20 mm cannon or mini-guns were kept in reserve by the fighters should the FAC be seen to be taking ground fire.

During the air strike the FAC had to remain in direct contact with the friendlies being supported. There was always a chance that they would call for a stop-firing or suggest further adjustment of the ordnance impact area.

At the end of the BDA the results would be passed to the fighters and the TACP control, the FCL would be cancelled and the artillery advisory agency would be advised that the air strike was complete.

² ARVN – Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

Despite the artillery advisory agency hot broadcasts about other aircraft negotiating air strikes and artillery fire in their area, there were often aircraft straying through the air strike pattern or command and control helicopters with army commanders on board who could not resist trying for a closer look. It was also not uncommon to have a flight of three VNAF fighters arrive on station unannounced and offer their services. If they saw or heard of a decent air strike nearby they would ignore their own tasking and do some freelance work.

Perhaps the most rewarding, and at times scary, BDA results were relayed by the grunts when they came back to base. Some would call by to pass on their thanks and show us photographs and pieces of souvenir shrapnel. It was much safer and cleaner in our aluminium cockpits.

In summary, the RAAF's FACs were fighter pilots with at least two tours worth of experience. They were sent to war, well trained but with a different air force which operated on a much larger scale. They were subjected to minimal supervision but had to be highly self-disciplined. Their high levels of responsibility resulted in very rewarding tours of duty but, at the time, most would have preferred to carry out their tour on fast jets. Only in hindsight does this privileged position stand out. A lot was expected of them and those expectations were more than met.

DISCUSSION

Warrant Officer Ian Kuring: Sir, my reading of Australian military history suggests that the RAAF is probably one of the pioneers of forward air control with the work that was done in World War II, particularly in New Guinea with the Wirraways and Boomerangs. We were associated with it in Korea and again in Vietnam, but we don't appear to really follow it up by buying a specialist forward air controller aircraft to really maintain the state of the art. Perhaps you'd like to comment and take in your experiences and perhaps also point out why we appear to develop the skill, maintain it in a number of wars, but never buy the right kit to be able to perpetuate the skill?

Air Vice-Marshal Neil: Thanks, Warrant Officer Kuring. Your comments are absolutely correct. The Australian experience, if you read the official history of the RAAF in New Guinea, would have people like Ross Glassop control sometimes flights of 76 attacking aircraft. The forward air control or army cooperation techniques that they used were exceptional. It was developed in North Africa, it was pursued further in Italy and then, immediately after the war, it was forgotten until it had to be reinvented by a Colonel Crawford of the United States Air Force with his Mosquito FAC program. Immediately after Korea, it was again largely dropped except that within the British Commonwealth countries, in particular, we did proceed with FAC work. Most of it was dealing with a ground FAC which was clearly not very suitable for jungle operations. I think Australia is fortunate in that we had experience with the British Army with Auster marks, or with RAF helicopters in Malaya.

So, many of us who later went to Vietnam had experienced airborne FAC operations, hence my reference to osmosis in our training. But I think it largely comes down to money, as to whether or not you have enough money to buy a fleet of aircraft and then

pursue a role. In the United States Air Force they went through a phase of going nuclear. And even within the tactical fighter squadrons you would find pilots didn't have a clue about air combat manoeuvring (ACM). Really they were just conducting low-level raids and they were pre-programmed to go into China or wherever. When it came to ACMs our Sabres use to wax them every time. So the USAF fell into the problem of going nuclear, forgetting a lot of the basics of tactics, and forgetting a lot of the basics of army cooperation or close air support, and again it had to be reinvented. After Vietnam the USAF developed it a bit further by using A37 fighters called OA37s and they became an airborne FAC. But everyone became aware of the risks and the chances of being able to operate in such a friendly air environment were going to be reduced in the future with the development of Strella and Grail missiles and so forth. So I think in fairness to various Air Forces, they've all sat on the fence a bit to have a look at what weaponry is developed and what they can do within the air environment. Unfortunately for our next conflict, that's going to mean delays of one kind or another. I firmly believe in the use of an aerial platform, but there are times when you just can't use it. And I think with modern weaponry these days there are other alternatives to just close air support.

Group Captain Arthur Skimin: Graham, a quick question. Was there any interplay between the RAAF component in Vietnam and the Army Aviation element that was supporting the Task Force Headquarters?

Air Vice-Marshal Neil: I really don't have any experience of supporting the Australian Army, but I can answer from the point of view when I worked with US 1st Division, the 'big red one'. We used to sit down every night with the Army aviation operators who flew Huey Cobras and OH6A scout helicopters. And we used to arrange our schedules to ensure that we had a FAC over the AO at all times during daylight hours. But obviously if you came across a troops in contact situation near the end of your flight and you had to accelerate the takeover of the next guy, you could almost get a gap. If there was a risk of such a gap, it was essential that at least the light Army Aviation aircraft there could help fill in that gap if need be. So we arranged our schedules so that none of our sorties would start or expire around about the same time. We had a good overlap, and we had a very classical operation.

When I went to the 25th Division, it was a bigger base, and domestically we weren't as close to each other. Our Brigade was called the 'fire brigade'. It went everywhere from Cambodia down to Phuoc Tuy Province and we never really talked to the Army aviators, except perhaps over a beer occasionally at night, or perhaps when we were airborne. But there was no cooperation or no integration planned or even sought by the Army or ourselves. I'm not saying that was right, but it was just the sheer logistics problems of getting to see people.

RTFV-35 SQUADRON VIETNAM 8 AUGUST 1964 - 19 FEBRUARY 1972

GROUP CAPTAIN R.J. CONNOR

Today I would like to walk you through the period that RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and 35 Squadron spent in Vietnam. In preparing this talk I have taken information from anecdotal sources, added some personal experience, some historical data, and some information from two excellent sources that I would commend to you if you wish to get more information. These publications are *Going Solo* by Dr Alan Stephens and *Target Charlie* by Steve Eather.

Following requests from the South Vietnamese and the American governments, Cabinet resolved, on 29 May 1964, to send a flight of six Caribou aircraft to South Vietnam in support of South Vietnamese and American forces in the fight against the Viet Cong.

At this time the RAAF was accepting delivery of the de Havilland (Canada) DCH4 Caribou aircraft, and only three had arrived in Australia from Canada. The subsequent ferry flight was to be terminated in Butterworth, Malaysia, and the newly formed RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam, would deploy directly to Vung Tau, south of Saigon.

The unit was formed on 21 July 1964, and after a couple of weeks of crew familiarisation in tactical operations on the new aircraft in Malaysia, the second ferry flight deployed with three aircraft to Vietnam on 8 August under the command of Squadron Leader Sugden. A second batch of three aircraft arrived direct from Canada on 29 August, and the seventh aircraft arrived in May 1965. This made up the full unit complement of seven aircraft, which was maintained throughout the operations in Vietnam.

After a brief settling in period and country familiarisation, the first operational missions were flown on 14 August 1964. Two aircraft, one flown by the CO, Squadron Leader Sugden, and one flown by Flight Lieutenant Lancaster, flew from Vung Tau to Tan Son Nhut (Saigon) then on to Pleiku in the north and return. These missions were flown without incident.

The unit was initially billeted on the airfield at Vung Tau, but the conditions were considered so poor, with noisy equipment operating 24 hours a day and an open sewerage drain running adjacent to the quarters, that the entire unit moved into town and hired a villa at their own expense. It is reported that this did not particularly please the US Army Base Commander, but the unit remained in villa style accommodation for a couple of years until more suitable, on-base accommodation was provided. One of the villas, Villa Anna, became rather well known.

The unit was placed under the Command of the senior US officer in Vietnam, General Westmoreland, who delegated this authority to the 315th Air Commando Wing of the USAF. Command later changed to the 834th Air Division of the USAF 7th Air Force

where it remained for the duration of the unit's stay in Vietnam. Operational control is probably a better term to use in this instance as we were administered under the Australian Forces Vietnam organisation once it was formed.

Wallaby Airlines, adopted from the unit callsign of Wallaby followed by the mission number, quickly established an excellent reputation and developed tactics to minimise the danger from small arms ground fire, which was mainly up to .50 cal. The tactics involved transiting above 3,500 feet where possible, and remaining at height until close to the destination airfield where a steep, spiral descent as close as possible to the airfield perimeter, and a short, steep final would be flown. As a result, damage from ground fire was minimal compared to that suffered by the US and Vietnamese aircraft which flew typical circuits and long straight finals offering a simple, no deflection shot to any enemy in a position to shoot at them. These tactics were excellent for the environment encountered in Vietnam, but I would not like to use them today with the easy availability of shoulder-launched infra-red missiles. Despite this technique, several aircrew members received minor wounds and several passengers were wounded or killed by ground fire either on approach or departure from airfields, or when forced to fly at low level due to bad, monsoonal, weather.

Operations settled into a pattern of four aircraft tasked daily. Two aircraft operated from Vung Tau flying into the delta and Saigon area; one aircraft was deployed to Nha Trang feeding the central highlands area; and one aircraft was deployed to Da Nang flying into regions such as the A Shau Valley, Pleiku, Khe San and the Hue Citadel; names which later became common knowledge due to the televised coverage of the war. Many of the smaller airfields in the region were also visited on a regular basis. The detachments at Nha Trang and Da Nang operated on a weekly changeover basis from Monday to Saturday. Later in the unit's operations these northern detachments stopped and by 1969 all aircraft operated out of Vung Tau. Four aircraft were tasked Monday to Saturday inclusive and one aircraft was tasked on Sundays, although more often than not special tasks arose on Sundays which were accepted.

By 1969 the longest missions were those tasked into the delta region. These would begin with a 0630 hours take-off from Vung Tau, a short hop to Saigon, and then the rest of the day carrying freight and passengers around the delta arriving back to Vung Tau about 1800 hours, or later, that evening.

One particular mission was always most enjoyable, although weather was a problem in the central highlands in the monsoonal wet season, a bit like Papua New Guinea but without the very high mountains. The 005 mission would depart Vung Tau for Saigon, then travel via Ham Tan and Tsong Mao to Phan Rang taking mail to 2 Squadron, then on to Nha Trang, Dalat, Gia Nua, Bao Loc and back to Saigon. Landing at Saigon was always an experience as it was the busiest airfield in the world at this stage, and it was normal to join down wind and find that you had everything from 707s to bird dogs (Cessna bug smashers) and TAC jets for company. Of all the airfields on this mission, Ham Tan was most enjoyable. Ham Tan was an American army fire support base and the Wallabies were their main contact with the outside world. We operated through there twice a week carrying supplies and mail and occasionally personnel. The major commanding the camp always met the aircraft with fresh brewed coffee and fresh donuts at about 1030 hours. So it would have been impolite not to stop for a quick morning tea

break and pass a short time of day with him before continuing. The mission would finish with a fresh ration or passenger run to the Task Force at Nui Dat on the way home to Vung Tau.

The Wallabies rarely supported the 1st Australian Task Force operationally, as the helicopters were more suitable for such work within Phuoc Tuy Province. Two operations where the squadron directly supported the Australian force at Nui Dat were Operation *Kingston* involving 5th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and shortly after on Operation *Kings Cross*. However, the unit provided daily support to the task force at Nui Dat with deliveries of mail and fresh rations from Saigon, and the carriage of Australian Army personnel between Nui Dat and Saigon, and Nui Dat and Vung Tau when they were going for a well deserved leave break or arriving in, or departing from, Vietnam on their tour of duty. These missions were added to the normal USAF tasking on a daily basis.

The missions were of a typical tactical transport style including air drop and air land missions carrying mail, food, fuel, ammunition, troops and civilian passengers; and in the earlier days, livestock. The carriage of livestock and supply dropping operations had ceased by about early 1969. The carriage of livestock stopped mainly because of the problem of removing the very corrosive secretions of these non-paying passengers from the honeycomb floor of the aircraft, and the problems posed by corrosion in a major structural part of the aircraft. Supply dropping stopped when helicopters arrived; they were a simpler alternative demanding less resources.

There are a number of interesting anecdotes about carrying live animals. Apparently, to alleviate the smell when carrying pigs, the crews would fly with the rear door open and the pilot's windows on the latch. This caused a vacuum affect through the aircraft and kept the air smelling almost normal. On occasions, a pig would break out of its wicker basket used to confine it and make a dash for the open space and perceived freedom, only to find that they were solo skydiving a short time later. On another occasion, a crew were dropping a live bullock to a field camp. After the bullock was released from the aircraft and the parachute duly deployed, the crew realised that the chute had been attached to the top of the crate and not secured under the pallet on which the animal was standing. The crate disintegrated with the obvious result. This was one occasion that *on time – on target* was definitely not appreciated when the free-falling large animal crashed through the unoccupied mess building.

Some of the earlier sorties also involved night flare dropping in the delta area, and on one occasion the Caribou became a Caribomber when fuel drums were dropped and ignited by tracer to help clear some jungle.

In June 1966 the name of the unit was changed, and 35 Squadron, a World War II C47 transport squadron, was reformed. Nothing else changed; it was still Wallaby Airlines (the Vietnamese had no knowledge of our marsupial emblem and called us the flying red rat); the unit role and tasking remained unchanged.

The reputation of the Wallabies for getting the job done continued to grow, and on at least one occasion the squadron was visited by US efficiency experts to observe the maintenance and operating procedures. This was brought about because, while flying

only 1.4 per cent of the total tactical transport missions, the Wallabies were carrying 7 per cent of the total freight. (General Westmoreland, in fact, requested another squadron of 12 Caribou from Australia, but of course these were not available.)

To us, the answers sought by the US efficiency experts were fairly fundamental:

- The squadron ground crew did a magnificent job usually providing five aircraft per day (four needed for tasking plus one spare out of six available - one being in major servicing at a time). They would start work in the evening when we landed and, if necessary, work all night to provide a maximum effort for operations the next day.
- The aircrew looked for work and would always try to arrange backloads where possible. Also, when the tasked missions were completed for the day the crews would call up the movement tasking authority in Saigon, callsign Hilda, and request extra missions (which were always available) on the way home.
- The crews would refuel only to the minimum required and thus maximise the freight availability on all the sorties.
- Teamwork within the squadron was excellent - from the CO down - both in a general sense and within and among the crews. The crew teamwork ensured that field refuelling, loading and unloading times were kept to a minimum. Everyone chipped in to get as much flying in a day as possible.
- The crews were more experienced and therefore more proficient than our USAF counterparts as we were all 'C' category captains with flying experience in PNG and on Army exercises when we arrived in country. This allowed us to accept missions into the tighter strips and use the full operational configuration of the aircraft.
- Everyone in the squadron was focussed on simply getting the job done the best way that we could.

One of the smaller strips was Hai Tien South, at the bottom of the delta. It was less than 1,000 feet long with only about 50 feet clearance on one side to the jungle, and less to a fence on the other side, and there was a 50-foot hill just short of the threshold. The strip was one way operation and so narrow at the end that you had to execute a three point turn to reposition for take-off. We used to support an American Special Forces Camp there with everything from mail to ammunition and ice cream.

Most of the small strips did not have unloading facilities, and to man-handle palletised loads and fuel drums off the aircraft took too much time, and in fact damaged the load. There was also the risk of the pallets falling the wrong way when pushed over the ramp and damaging the aircraft. The early crews quickly devised speed off-loading techniques, which were followed by subsequent crews. This involved opening the rear door, unlashng the pallets and securing the tie-down straps, running up to power on the brakes and simply driving the aircraft out from under the load. This was more efficient and also caused less damage to the freight being off loaded as the pallets invariably fell flat and could be easily be broken down on the ground and carried away.

A modified technique was used for offloading fuel drums, and with a bit of practice the drums could be stacked in neat rows in the fuel farm, which was usually adjacent to the runway or strip. As well as being more efficient this off-loading technique minimised ground time where the aircraft was most vulnerable to ground fire.

When carrying Vietnamese troops tactical loading would also frequently be used. Because of the size of these people, weight was not a problem. So instead of using the seats, which limited the aircraft to 30 passengers, we would floor load them using tie down straps as restraints that they could hang on to, and this permitted 50 or 60 to be carried on one sortie.

Vietnamese civilian passengers were also carried provided they had an authority. But, as the authority could be issued by a local, we always suspected that some of the passengers could have in fact been Viet Cong. Unfortunately, there was no way of knowing for sure and there was nothing that the crew could do about it, except not carry any civilian passengers, and this was considered unacceptable. Luckily none of the suspected Charlie passengers had suicidal tendencies.

In the period that the Wallabies spent in Vietnam, three aircraft were lost and several were badly damaged but repaired. Of the aircraft lost, only one was due to enemy action when, on 29 March 1970, A4-193 landed at That Son near the Cambodian border south-west of Saigon, and took a mortar round through the left wing when offloading fuel drums near the end of the runway. The crew quickly abandoned the aircraft with only the co-pilot receiving a minor shrapnel wound to his left cheek. Subsequent mortar fire destroyed the aircraft and the surrounding fuel farm.

One aircraft was lost when it hit the water off An Thoi in appalling weather conditions. Only the loadmaster received minor injuries. The third was lost when it struck a ditch someone had dug across the strip at A Ro, but in this accident ground crew were dispatched and, working in miserable conditions, were able to recover the engines and mainplane.

In other incidents, an engine was shot out by a sniper when the aircraft was on the take-off roll at a field in the A Chau Valley. The engine was secured, the prop feathered and the aircraft continued to take-off on one engine and recover to Da Nang where repairs were made. Another aircraft ran off the runway at Hai Tien and was badly damaged, but a group of our ground crew managed to replace a wing, engine and prop and the aircraft was recovered to Vung Tau for further repairs.

Also on 19 January 1969, A4-208 came under mortar fire while on the ground at Katum, a US Special Forces camp near the Cambodian border. One round landed about 25 feet in front of the aircraft taking out the main tyres, hydraulics, peppering the aircraft in over 100 places, damaging the flaps and wounding both pilots. The 'loadies' very quickly unloaded the aircraft and the pilots managed to get airborne and limp back to Bien Hoa where it was repaired. There are many other stories of a similar vein, which could be told, but unfortunately time does not permit.

The tour of duty at 35 Squadron was 12 months and very few personnel did not complete the full tour. During this time the aircrew would typically fly 1,200 hours and about 2,000 operational sorties; 1,400 hours and 2,300 operational sorties was about the maximum recorded.

1971 saw the progressive scale-down of operations with the staged withdrawal of American and Australian forces. In June 1971, 44 personnel and three Caribou of 35 Squadron left Vung Tau for Australia. The remaining four aircraft continued to support the Vietnamese, American and Australian forces remaining. By Christmas 1971, 35 Squadron was the last remaining RAAF squadron operating in Vietnam.

Flying ceased on 13 February 1972, and on 19 February 1972, under the command of Squadron Leader Smithies, the last Wallabies left Vung Tau for Australia after seven and a half years of active service in the Vietnam War.

They were the first in and the last out. And during that seven and one half years the Squadron achieved an excellent operational record and reputation, and an outstanding efficiency record as a tactical transport squadron. Unfortunately, like all other Australian personnel who served in Vietnam, and other units, this recognition was not forthcoming within Australia on their return because of public feeling about the war, and the political climate of the time. During their time in Vietnam the Wallabies flew 81,500 operational sorties, and carried 42,000 tons of freight and 679,984 passengers. Not a bad achievement.

DISCUSSION

Air Vice-Marshal Bill Collins: There's a point I'd like to make regarding both 9 Squadron and 35 Squadron and that is that the supply support for both those squadrons came from the US Services. It did not come from Australia. Therefore, Australia's logistic support to our forces in Vietnam was not thoroughly exercised. Mac Weller has spoken eloquently about the need for the engineers to be as sure as they can that the aircraft that is in harm's way is not going to get more in harm's way through a technical malfunction. The engineers that were members of those two squadrons put a lot of time into that and you've heard about the long hours. The supply support was paid for under some financial arrangement with the United States and I've no idea what we paid. But in my view we didn't get value for money because the spares that came out of the US Services, particularly the US Army, were in most cases junk. Extraordinarily poor standards, ones that in many cases were rejected by the senior engineering officers at the time. It caused major consternation in Department of Air when this reality became apparent and yet there was no way in which the RAAF was in a position to back out of that situation. We could not have sustained those two squadrons from the Australian support base. So when we're contemplating what has been done in operations in Vietnam - and I applaud enormously the efforts of the operators and the maintainers there - bear in mind that we got it to a certain extent, cheaply. And when you're buying something cheaply, you don't often get something that's very good.

Squadron Leader Rowley Tompsett: I recall earlier this morning that Flight Lieutenant Anderson from 1RTU asked the question about the heroes for today's up and coming airmen. I would suggest from at least three presentations we've heard today concerning the ground crew in support of 35 Squadron, in support of 9 Squadron and in support of 2 Squadron, along with the airfield defence guards who saw service in South Vietnam, that indeed you need to look no further than the Vietnam War and the ground crew who supported the aircrew for the heroes for today's airmen. You may want to comment on that, sir.

Group Captain Connor: Yes, Rowley. I'd just like to endorse that. It was a fantastic team effort from the CO down, and in the operations in Vietnam that did not apply to 35 Squadron alone. It was 9 Squadron, 2 Squadron and everyone up there and I dare say it would have applied to the Army units that were there at the same time. It's amazing how necessity can focus one on the job that's got to be done, and I think that's something that we perhaps forget about in our training roles and what we do back in Australia as opposed to when we deploy to operations or exercises. But I agree, as far as we're concerned the heroes of Vietnam were the blokes that provided those aeroplanes for us every morning plus a spare, working all damn night, trying to sleep all day under noisy and abysmal conditions and getting the job done. And you're right, they are the role models that are applicable and could be used by 1RTU at any time they like.

Group Captain Ian Scott: Chuck, it's been really outstanding to hear all the stories and the history. I wonder if you and perhaps some of the presenters from other squadrons would like to talk about the opprobrium of the returning warriors that the Army felt in spades. Were you also under pressure to keep quiet about what you'd done over there? I know of one 2 Squadron pilot who took some certain pages out of his log book. Did you all feel under pressure? Did you feel like you came back as heroes, or did you come back as people who had been doing something a bit dirty?

Group Captain Connor: I don't think the aspect of coming home as a hero or something ever entered the equation. What annoyed us more was the treatment that the Army kids got when they got back with red paint being thrown on them and everything else. We didn't feel that to the same extent, nor do I believe that we went through the same trauma, although we did have one member of 35 Squadron who did have some problems with anxiety - I guess that's the best way to put it - when he got back. I think the worst part from our perspective was going to a party, as singles you were still out raging in town, and someone would drop the hint and say, 'Oh, he's been to Vietnam'. The worst part about that was being berated continually by bloody university students who wanted to label you as a war monger. All you could do then was just pack up and quietly go and hop in the car and go and find another party - and there were always plenty of them to find. There was no real worry with it, but I know that later there were State government-sponsored moratoriums and kids given days off school to protest against the Vietnam War and to carry on. I think it affected us more then. But I'm not aware of any highly traumatic episodes that happened after we got back.

Group Captain Vic Guthrie: I was the third commander of the transport flight in Vietnam. And I want to point out the hardships that the first two commanders and myself went through. We arrived there before the task force arrived. We had to feed ourselves, cater for ourselves. We'd be on duty at 0700 hours in the morning so we'd have to get up and cook our own breakfast. We'd fly all day and come back at night.

We'd have to cook our own meals and then clean up and then go to bed. Every week, I'd send an aircraft to Saigon to pick up supplies for the airmen, because they had to do the same thing. And once a month I would send an aeroplane to Butterworth to pick up fresh milk and any other things we required. And the hardships that these first three lots of people went and endured must be admired by everybody.

Group Captain Connor: I think that point can be further emphasised by the fact that the first crew when they got there decided to disappear into town at their own expense. And in several of the references that I've checked, there's quite a lot of evidence that the first two or three commanding officers of RTFV actually met a lot of expenses out of their own pockets, hoping to be later reimbursed. And that's the way it happened.

PHANTOMS

GROUP CAPTAIN L.A. NAYLOR

Introduction

In the late 1960s, offensive air operations in Indochina were at their height, and many USAF and USN air crews were returning for their second and third operational tours in South-East Asia. RAAF operations were also being maintained at a high level, but at that stage, involvement by RAAF fighter pilots was as forward air controllers (FACs) and some who had transferred to the tactical transport role. In 1968, the RAAF offered a small number of experienced Mirage pilots to the USAF, primarily to gain operational air experience in tactical fighter operation for the RAAF, and as a fringe benefit, to ease in a small way the load on American air crews. Accordingly, the program commenced with two RAAF pilots training on F4C aircraft in the USA, and then proceeding to Vietnam for a 12 months operational tour of duty with a USAF tactical fighter squadron, flying F4D aircraft.

The first two pilots, Squadron Leader Hans Roser and Flight Lieutenant John Ellis finished their tours in 1970, operating from Da Nang and Phu Cat Air Bases. They were replaced by Squadron Leader Ian Whisker and Flight Lieutenant Lindsay Naylor, who flew F4D aircraft from Phu Cat during 1970 and 1971. They were not replaced, as by then, Australia's effort in Vietnam was winding down. Although two other RAAF pilots, Squadron Leaders Klaffer and Reid flew RF4C aircraft on operations in Vietnam, this paper focuses on F4C and D tactical fighter operations flown by RAAF pilots.

Training

Before heading to Vietnam, Australian pilots underwent a rigorous USAF training program. The non-flying activities started with Sea Survival Training at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida and covered all facets of the rescue sequence from the moment of ejection, to recovery by helicopter. The other ground-based training which gave all participants a great confidence boost was Jungle Survival Training at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. This was a pre-requisite for all crews before they commenced operations in South-East Asia. The USAF indeed ensured that all its personnel were as well equipped as possible to survive if they had the misfortune to be shot down.

F4 training was at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base at Tucson in Arizona, and for Whisker and Naylor, it was for a period of six months, through the heat of the summer. They learned quickly that operations in a USAF combat crew training squadron were considerably different to those in Australia. Being programmed on the first wave of the day required crews to be at the squadron for an 0400 hours briefing. Night flying could progress past midnight; and even weeks of temperatures above 110 degrees Fahrenheit did not stop flying - touching the aircraft's skin in these conditions was a real health hazard.

F4 Operations

Phu Cat Air Base was a USAF base inland from Qui Nhon on the central coast of South Vietnam. USAF units on the base included a tactical fighter wing, a FAC squadron, and an EC-47 squadron. The base boasted probably the best runway in Vietnam, over 10,000 feet of an excellent concrete surface.

The 12th Tactical Fighter Wing comprised two tactical fighter squadrons. The two Australian pilots were assigned to different squadrons and flew the complete range of missions undertaken by the wing, utilising all available ordnance. Whisker and Naylor, former 20CU instructors, were both used by their respective squadrons as instructors, and flew operationally in that capacity in both front and rear cockpits.

The weapon which was regarded as the mainstay of tactical fighter operations in South-East Asia was the Mk 82 500 lb GP bomb, in both high drag and low drag versions. However, an array of other ordnance was used, including the 20mm cannon underslung in a pod, Mark 84 2,000 lb bombs, napalm, CBU's, and CS gas.

Missions were flown by day and night (flares and blacked out), in all sorts of weather. In poor weather when visual operations were not possible, aircraft flew at medium level under radar control to release loads of low drag Mk 82s. Accuracy of this form of weapon delivery could be best described as doubtful and such missions were limited to area type targets and suspected troop locations. Although the F4D was equipped with a rudimentary radar assisted bombing system, only 'manual' deliveries were permitted in-country, ie. without utilising any 'automatics'.

Many interdiction missions were flown against small jungle bridges, river crossings, roads and road maintenance machinery. Targets were rarely sighted, the pilots needing to rely on the target being marked with white phosphorous smoke by a FAC.

Close air support missions presented the greatest challenges and proved the most rewarding. Always under the overall control of a FAC who was in radio communication with ground forces, missions of this nature confirmed the value of tactical air support to troops in contact. There were occasions when ground commanders later made contact with the base to pass on their thanks for a well-executed mission.

Most close air support was carried out using napalm, Mk 82 high drags and 20mm cannon. At night, these operations were always under flares, normally dropped by the lead F4, which was also equipped with napalm. Inclement weather in the target area would add to the challenge. In these conditions, ensuring that ordnance was delivered on target presented a potentially serious safety hazard, but to the credit of all crews, these missions were always carried out professionally and safely. Tree strikes were a rarity and never resulted in the loss of an aircraft.

The level of enemy action varied considerably, with the most determined opposition usually coming during close air support missions. Ground fire in these target areas ranged from small arms fire to 37mm AAA, and ensured that navigators' vocal chords

remained active to ensure that aircraft were kept jinking. On most missions of this nature, particularly in bright sunlight, enemy fire was not seen by the fighter crews - it was brought to their attention by the FAC.

At night, all calibres of AAA could be seen, and even aircraft en route to a target area were sometimes engaged, requiring evasive action. SAMs were occasionally fired at aircraft operating near the DMZ, and their trails could be seen for many miles. Although further north they were fired in salvos, around the DMZ they were usually only launched singly, and did not present major problems, although they always represented a serious 'attention-getter'.

To the credit of the F4 crews, damage from ground fire was rare, and during the year-long tour by Whisker and Naylor, only one aircraft from each squadron was brought down. Those incidents resulted in three successful ejections and safe recoveries, all over land. (The fourth crew member was lost when his ejection seat failed to fire.) The value of a dedicated combat recovery capability was brought home to wing aircrews on these occasions.

Notwithstanding their acceptance as 'squadron pilots' and their willingness to fly any tasked mission, Australian pilots were still treated as 'foreigners' by USAF Intelligence personnel. On many occasions they were required to leave squadron briefings while sensitive information of an operational nature was passed to their American colleagues. Since this material invariably had an impact on squadron operations and both occupants of an aircraft, impromptu briefings were sometimes given from 'backseater to frontseater' on the way to a target.

Australian Government Policy

For reasons which were never explained to the pilots concerned, Australian Government policy was for RAAF pilots flying with USAF tactical fighter squadrons to be restricted to in-country operations. To the pilots, the policy was puzzling, as Australians flying RF4C aircraft were permitted to operate over North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In practice, the policy was at best, inhibiting, and at worst unworkable.

Squadron programmers needed to be constantly mindful of the restriction on the Australian pilots, and while pre-planned missions generally did not present a problem, there were some periods when operations were concentrated in Laos that the Australians could not fly. However, there were occasions when an in-country mission had been briefed, but a last-minute target change across the border necessitated the aircraft being shut down at the end of the runway for an American pilot to fly the mission. This led to occasional comments about Australia not really being serious about its commitment.

The squadrons' alert commitment was more of a problem for observation of the Australian Government policy. Two pairs of aircraft were maintained on a 15-minute alert status, 24 hours a day. Crews were 'scrambled' from an alert facility, and on many occasions, out-country targets were involved. In such instances, a pilot change would be necessary, delaying the scramble time and frustrating Americans and Australians.

Throughout all of this, there were many occasions when the Australians struck targets close to the border, and only after plotting the positions in mission debriefs did they realise they had been on the 'wrong side' of the border. As time progressed, all concerned became more flexible in their approach to the policy.

Conclusion

The four RAAF pilots who flew F4s in Vietnam gained valuable operational experience in the tactical fighter forces' offensive air support role. Thankfully, the RAAF has not been required to fly operations of this nature for many years, and the relatively short exchange program provided the means for some RAAF pilots to benefit accordingly. The program was not without its operational limitations though.

The major inhibition was the Australian Government's policy of restricting RAAF pilots to in-country operations only. In practice, it proved a source of frequent irritation to all concerned. Being denied operational information on the grounds of it being for USAF personnel only was an added concern, and had the potential to disrupt what is now known as 'crew resource management' both within individual aircraft, and within formations.

Nevertheless, all RAAF pilots involved in the exchange would readily acknowledge that the experience was worthwhile and that if the opportunity again presents itself, the RAAF should grasp the opportunity to again seek a similar arrangement.

DISCUSSION

Air Marshal Ray Funnell: Lindsay, in your time at Da Nang and Phu Cat, were the American authorities there, the local Wing Commanders and Squadron Commanders well aware of what you were doing and why and the effect of this within their system?

Group Captain Naylor: Yes, sir, they certainly were. I'm aware that, during our tour there, our Wing Commander made representations to Saigon to try and get the policies changed but met with a brick-wall response. And I think they tacitly endorsed the way we viewed the problem.

Air Vice-Marshal Dave Rogers: Lindsay, you made a point about the weapons system in the F4 in that you were only allowed to use the manual system. Knowing that the F4 had a very accurate auto-toss capability, is there a good reason why you were limited to the use of manual?

Group Captain Naylor: The dive-toss system was used out-country, but on a number of occasions it malfunctioned. And the philosophy was that if it malfunctioned out-country then it could have malfunctioned in-country and bombs could have fallen on friendly positions. So we did not use it.

C130 OPERATIONS, NO 5 AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION SQUADRON, AIRFIELD DEFENCE, LOGISTICS, PHOTOGRAPHIC INTERPRETERS

DAVID WILSON

Previous presentations have focussed on the operation side of the Air Force's function in South Vietnam. I have been charged with giving an outline of supporting operations 'in-country' and the airborne lifeline to and from Australia.

The Vietnam War affected all who served in the Air Force during the period of Australia's involvement. I recall an associate of mine, Bob Rowe, who was posted from Williamtown to 9 Squadron. He claimed that we would not see him 'swinging on the end of an M-60 in a Huey'. As may be seen from the cover page of the September 1966 issue of *RAAF News*, personal assertions and the needs of the Service are not necessarily compatible. Another example is Exercise *Pacific Concord* which was mounted in November 1965. During this exercise a New Zealand Canberra landed at Williamtown. Trials were undertaken to check the compatibility of American ordnance with the aircraft. Little did we know that just over 12 months later Australian Canberras would be operating out of Phan Rang.

We have already seen the more dramatic involvement of Australians flying USAF Phantoms and Forward Air Control Tasks. The expertise of RAAF members was also sought by the United States Air Force as photographic interpreters and as radar controllers. The precedent had been established during the Korean War when four officers were detailed to undertake photographic interpretation duties with the Far East Air Force. Another officer was employed on fighter control duties in mid-1952.

Beginning in April 1967, six officers served with the USAF 6470th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron and 460th Reconnaissance Wing as photographic interpreters. For the first two officers, Squadron Leader Bob Lamont and his replacement, Squadron Leader Bill Riggs, the original tour of duty was for three months. However, so impressed were the American authorities that approval was sought to extend their tour to a full six months. In September 1968, two senior non-commissioned officers joined the two officer replacements and all four were employed with the 12th Reconnaissance Technical Intelligence Squadron at Tan Son Nhut. This unit provided rapid interpretation of photographs for post-strike evaluation and target identification and selection. In total about 40 Australians, after 14 weeks of extensive training at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado, served with the Americans.

The Australians role as radar controllers was not so well defined. Flight Lieutenants Frank Russell and Lance Edwards served from May 1967 on fighter control duties at Tan Son Nhut and, in the former case, Da Nang. Although Russell was recommended for an American award, and four more RAAF officers were employed in the role, the USAF was reluctant to expand the scheme.¹

¹ C.D. Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen and Unwin in Association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1995, p. 297.

As an aside, an explanation for the difference in attitude may be placed at a higher plane. The commencement of the activity coincides with the period in which Secretary for Defence McNamara greatly influenced US Vietnam policy. The centralised target selection being made at the White House at the time probably explains the priority given to photographic interpretation.

The nature of the activities of photographic interpreters tended to segregate them from direct conflict. This cannot be said of the chaplains, who were subjected to the inhumanity of a horrifying war. Chaplain Norman Lawless recalls handling the body bag of a young New Zealand officer whose legs had been blown off by an anti-personnel mine. Around his neck were his 'dog-tags and his wedding ring. In a few hours his widow would have the sad news of her soldier husband's death'. Lawless recalls that he 'prayed over him, and for her. I was filled with thoughts of the sadness and the terrible waste which is war'.²

In addition to their personal counselling and spiritual leadership duties, chaplains were intimately involved with one of the most public of the Vietnam programs - the 'winning of hearts and minds'.

This is not the venue to debate the politics of the civic action program. Vietnam had been racked by war for two decades. The people were poor and orphans were a social problem. To the Australians in general there was genuine motivation to assist those in need. In their role as civic action officers the chaplains were the conduit for coordinating assistance. Orphanages were sponsored and communal projects developed in consultation with local province officials. To be successful, chaplains became expert scroungers of tools and expertise. In these cases a source of both would have been the members of the airfield construction squadrons.

Two detachments of 5 Airfield Construction Squadron were deployed to Vietnam to construct the infrastructure for the expanding RAAF presence. Detachment 'A' assembled at Vung Tau in May 1966 where it was administered by the newly formed Base Support Flight. By the end of September the detachment had erected a Bellman hangar (which had been salvaged from the wartime airfield at Parkes, New South Wales), four Kingstrand huts and three tropical huts. The latter housed the equipment, technical and administrative facilities of the Caribou squadron and the Base Support Flight. In addition landing pads and a tarmac area were constructed for 9 Squadron's helicopters.

By the end of June, the detachment, under the supervision of Warrant Officer Peter Davern, had grown to a strength of 15. Davern had wide experience in the civil engineering area, having being appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for his efforts during the expansion of the Darwin airfield in 1959. With such a small Australian work force, the major problem was the provision of labour. Vietnamese women were employed to supplement the meagre labour force. Although the women's customary two-hour midday siesta caused Davern some consternation, he was favourably impressed by their work ethic.

² P. Davidson, *Sky Pilot: A History of Chaplaincy in the RAAF 1926-90*, Principal Chaplains Committee-Air Force, Canberra, p. 13.6

The second 5 Airfield Construction Squadron body deployed to South Vietnam during January 1967. Detachment 'B' arrived at Phan Rang to prepare for the deployment of 2 Squadron. Little could be attempted until the detachments heavy equipment arrived from Cam Ranh Bay after the Navy supply ship *Jeparit* berthed on 6 February. The task was typical of that undertaken by 5 Airfield Construction Squadron during this period - the construction of domestic and technical facilities, hangars, revetments and hard standings. Innovations at Phan Rang attracted American attention. The aluminium kitchen had been constructed in Adelaide. It comprised three 40-foot trailers which were joined side-by-side to form a single unit. But this was nothing compared to a real novelty at Phan Rang - the flushing toilets fitted to the prefabricated living quarters.

The unit worked 60-70 hours a week to ensure that the facilities were available to enable the Canberras to deploy from Butterworth during April 1967. The overall task was completed by the end of May. It had been a team effort. In true ACS tradition the detachment worked hard. Building airfield facilities in the heat of a Vietnamese dry season was a filthy job. At the end of their shift the men were covered with a grey mantle of powdered dust.

The success of the detachment is attributable to the cooperation of the US 554th Civil Engineering Squadron and the liaison with 2 Squadron on planning matters. Squadron Leader Richard Gurevitch had travelled to Phan Rang before the detachment deployed to establish the excellent relations between the units concerned. Squadron Leader Graham Anderson and his men built on Gurevitch's groundwork. During the construction phase, the men enjoyed American recreational facilities and were dependent upon the 554th Civil Engineering Squadron for administrative support.

However professional they may have been as engineers, the men did not master softball skills. Even though coached by an American 'expert' the unit team never won a game. Anderson at one stage reported that the team was improving and that a win was a distinct possibility. Three months later he still waited on an elusive victory.

With the completion of the task at Phan Rang, the strength of detachment 'B' decreased as time-expired members were posted back to Australia. Simultaneously consideration was being given to transfer the detachment to Vung Tau to undertake work which could not be completed by American works units within an acceptable time frame. The detachment flew by Caribou to Vung Tau on 21 June 1967. They were responsible for the construction of an extension to the Bellman hangar which had been erected by the original detachment 'A' in 1966. The detachment laid an aircraft nose dock and erected office and maintenance sections for the personnel of 35 Squadron and their Caribous. Despite a constant erosion of numbers the work was completed on 20 January 1968. The detachment, the last Airfield Construction Unit to operate overseas, was disbanded on 17 February.

Between July 1966 and May 1971, there were at least 50 incidents involving rocket, mortar and physical incursions at Vung Tau and Phan Rang. The Air Board was aware of the requirement to maintain the defence of Air Force bases. During 1965 the Air Defence Guard mustering was reintroduced for service in Malaya, Thailand and Vietnam. The first air defence guards arrived at Vung Tau on 7 September 1966.

Air defence officers at both Vung Tau and Phan Rang were involved with the development of the defence plans for both bases. In the former case the defence of the base was the responsibility of the various Allied units based there. The security of the surrounding area was the responsibility of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, with which there was little cooperation. At Phan Rang, the exterior security was the responsibility of the 9th Division of the South Korean Army and, initially, a Brigade of the US Army 101st Airborne Division. Internal security was the primary responsibility of the USAF 35th Security Police Squadron. The Australian air defence guards joined this unit in ensuring the security of the 21 kilometre perimeter.

Bob Hepe, an ex-air defence guard has written an account of an incident at Phan Rang. The probable date is 26 October 1968. The ten-man patrol cleared the concertina wire perimeter, passed the lights of 'the strip' (a roughly fabricated facility established by the Vietnamese to cater for the recreational needs of servicemen) into flat open country with little cover. Hepe continues:

We are all switched on now: well into patrol routine ... my senses working overtime tell me something is not quite right ... something is definitely not right. I prop for seconds listening and hear nothing but the night sounds around us. Moving off again I am uneasy ... my senses are screaming at me now. Ben turns and we both listen and hear definite noises behind us. The message goes forward and we quickly form an ambush.

The noises come closer and Merv sends up a 'pop' flare. Night turns into day ... after the blackness I am having trouble seeing in this light ... someone screams 'contact' ... an explosion in the vicinity of my left ear: Ben has let loose with the M79. I still can't see a damn thing. The flare dies and Pop yells that there were three of them, armed. We have taken no answering fire.

Merv and Graham go scouting around ... They have found blood trails ... away from the scene of the contact. We are extremely alert ... The hours pass slowly, watching and listening with just the night sounds around us, nothing else ...

Early morning arrives and we quietly break ambush. Moving off we have to fight the strong urge to hurry back to the relative safety of our own base. We know the enemy likes to hit patrols after they have been out all night when everyone is tired and less alert.

Still switched on we take a different route back to a point some five hundred metres from the perimeter. Here we make our radio calls ... no one wants to be shot at by a trigger happy American ...

Walking towards the truck pick up point we discuss the night's events. A little further on someone hands out the cigarettes ... the first is 'heaven'. We reach the truck. The driver comments that we 'stink'. Someone threatens to punch him out and he quickly shuts up.

Everyone looks so tired. Once clean we breakfast at the mess. The tension slowly disappears.

On this patrol we have found the enemy. Mostly we do not and the stress and tension increases.³

The Australians had made contact with an enemy mortar team, but this action was the exception not the rule.

The urban geography of Vung Tau was a challenge for the defenders. It was 'a congested nest of structures and allied units ... off base major roads and/or civilian structures were built right up to the perimeter fence ... field patrol work was inappropriate ... Static tower work [was] broken only by limited mobile patrols and other sedentary duties'.⁴ Successive commanders at Vung Tau recognised this problem and measures were taken to alleviate the tedium of the guards. In March 1968, nine air defence guards were attached to 'A' company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (1 RAR), at fire support base 'Horseshoe'. Four members a week were also sent to Nui Dat, where they participated in army patrols and the manning of the 161 Reconnaissance Flight perimeter. By 1970 men from Phan Rang and Vung Tau were attending indoctrination courses at the army 1st Australian Reinforcement Unit at Nui Dat. The 15 Men from Vung Tau were replaced by an Army section for the duration of the two-week course.

The status of men such as Flight Lieutenant George Foskett and Corporal Noel Power at Phan Rang and Flight Lieutenant Jim Brown and Flying Officer Barry Ellison at Vung Tau is indisputable. But there is the obverse to this coin. In the period between August 1968 and January 1971, 66 per cent of the disciplinary charges heard by the commander of IOSU involved air defence guards. This is a symptom of the problem that successive RAAF commanders recognised and to which I have referred. It is also a reaction to the air defence guard role. With 20/20 hindsight it is easy to claim that the enemy threat to both bases was relatively small. However, early in 1968 the perception was that the bases would be subject to enemy infiltration and mortar attacks. The threat was intangible and interminable. Due to circumstances beyond their control air defence guards were employed on static duties or constrained defensive patrols. They were operationally restricted, tied to a defensive posture and unable to undertake aggressive patrolling.

I would like to mention other factors to explain the guard's behaviour, and put them forward as a basis for future discussion or study. In general terms they were posted to Vietnam as individuals. Before embarking for Vietnam air defence guards undertook a 21-day battle efficiency training course at Canungra. The course highlighted a basic weakness of the organisation. An air defence flight was organised as an Army platoon. However, the staff of the Jungle Training Centre assessed them as lacking sub-unit tactical training.

Air defence guards were employed as individuals. They were not commanded by defence officers. Manning towers and egress points in the perimeter on a round-the-clock basis on shifts made it difficult for a unit identity to be maintained or even developed. In this regard I compare the air defence guards and the Airfield Construction Squadron. Members of the airfield construction squadrons are not

³ Hepe, R., *A Day in the Life of an Airfield Defence Guard: 2 Squadron, Phan Rang, South Vietnam 1968*. [RAAF Historical Records]

⁴ Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam*, p 219.

renown for their demeanour. Both musterings have a history which dates back to 1942. The airfield construction squadron members in Vietnam were detached from a parent unit, had a proud corporate identity and given a tangible task - even 25 years after the demise of 5 Airfield Construction Squadron there is a distinct unit pride among the veterans. It was not until 1983 that the Air Defence Squadrons were reformed. It may appear trite in this day and age to talk of unit pride and the 'honour of the regiment'. However, I believe that it is one element which may help to explain the Air Defence Guard Vietnam enigma.

I now turn to the activities of units which have no identity crisis and were not based on Vietnamese soil. HMAS *Sydney* was tasked with the transportation of the advance party and heavy equipment of 1 RAR to Vietnam in May 1965. Between 28 May and 10 June, Neptunes of 10 and 11 Squadron participated in Operation *Trimdon*. This was mounted to protect the ship from possible enemy intervention - a contingency that the official historian has described as 'somewhat incredible'.⁵ *Trimdon* was a major effort. Eight aircraft, half of the Air Force's maritime patrol asset were deployed to Lae, where the tented accommodation and the poor flying conditions added a World War II feel to the deployment, and Agana on Guam. Seven aircraft then concentrated at Sangley Point in the Philippines. Due to possible confusion between United States Navy and Australian aircraft operating in the same area, the Australian Neptunes were unable to escort the *Sydney* and its consorts into Vietnamese waters. Despite this frustration, Wing Commander Geoff Michael reported that 10 Squadron gained 'valuable experience of operating in what could be considered to be a wartime situation'.⁶ The 11 Squadron commander, Wing Commander Jim Smith, also saw a positive benefit from the operation.

RAAF transport aircraft were not an unknown sight in the skies above Vietnam before the national commitment increased in 1965. During March 1961, after participating in SEATO Exercise *Air Bull*, two 36 Squadron Hercules aircraft featured in a Vietnamese Air Force display at Tan Son Nhut airport, Saigon. Dakotas from the Transport Support Flight at Butterworth had operated over Indochina since February 1960 when Flying Officer Walker flew blankets for emergency relief to Laos. Regular ambassadorial tours were made from March 1965. The Transport Support Flight supported the deployment of 2 Squadron to Phan Rang. The honour of flying the final sortie related to the withdrawal of the Australian forces in Vietnam belongs to Flying Officer Peter Hays and crew who flew from Saigon on 21 December 1972. However, the withdrawal of Australian forces from Vietnam did not preclude the Dakotas from flying into Vietnam. During January, February and June 1973 the aircraft flew in support of the Embassy Guard Platoon at the Australian Embassy in Saigon. Indeed, the Flight was still operating over Laos between 2-8 March 1975. A Dakota flew four sorties a day to and from Vientiane and the Plain of Jars on behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees.

Naturally tasking of the Hercules force to South Vietnam reflected the increased national commitment. On 4 January 1965 Wing Commander Dave Hitchins flew from Butterworth to deliver spares to the Caribou flight at Vung Tau. Six months later Flight Lieutenant Don Jones flew the first 'freight special' to support the Army

⁵ *Ibid*, p 63

⁶ 10 Squadron Commanding Officer's Report June 1965.

at Bien Hoa. This was in response to an Army request for a regular courier service from Australia to South Vietnam; a service which remained in force until the last Hercules departed from South Vietnam on 20 December 1972 with the final members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

It is important to place these operations in the context of the period. The transport force exhibited great flexibility. Never wholly committed to the support of the Vietnam Task Force, it was not unusual to have Hercules aircraft flying additional operational sorties in support of a maritime exercise in Hawaii or the Philippines, a major exercise in the north of Australia or supporting Australian activity in New Guinea. Even in South East Asia Hercules aircraft supported the Air Force deployment to Ubon and anti-Confrontation force in North Borneo. To this list, one must add various ad hoc tasks of no less importance; the testing of Lindholme rescue equipment, search and rescue missions, civilian medical evacuation tasks and Army parachute training exercises to name but a few.

But I digress. The original sorties into Vietnam were extensions on the normal Butterworth courier service. Operations to South-East Asia were complicated by President Soekarno's policy of confrontation toward the newly formed Malaysian state. To prevent the violation of Indonesian air space a circuitous route (Richmond-Pearce-Cocos Island-Butterworth [or Singapore]-Vietnam) had to be followed. It was a long and arduous flight. The prevailing strong westerly headwinds on the Pearce-Cocos leg could entail a diversion of the aircraft to the secluded base at Learmonth on Exmouth Gulf for fuel. Headwinds on the last leg often culminated in a late night short-of-fuel approach for landing at Butterworth. To overcome aircrew fatigue, the then commander of 36 Squadron, Wing Commander Dave Hitchins, used the unofficial expedient of stationing spare crew at Butterworth to give crews a two to three day rest between flights.

The first military aircraft to overfly Indonesia after the end of confrontation was a new C130-E from 37 Squadron. Wing Commander Ron McKimm flew to Butterworth on 14 November 1966. The introduction of this model with its longer range and increased lifting capacity enhanced the potential of the Hercules fleet. Approval to overfly Indonesia eased the operational problems and enabled 36 Squadron to inaugurate a direct Darwin-Vung Tau-Butterworth-Darwin service in September 1967. During May-June 1967, this squadron deployed three aircraft to Darwin to fly 2,400 troops direct to Vung Tau. The troops were to replace 5 RAR and 6 RAR and 37 sorties (a total of 400 hours) were flown to complete the task. Sixty-five passengers were carried on each eleven-hour sortie.

Passengers (replacement operational crews and Army troops) were usually carried on a 'space available' basis. In general terms, the system was designed to deliver urgently required freight. In its heyday, Richmond was the focal point for Australia's largest freight operation. During 1970-71, 2.7 million kilograms of freight was moved to and from Vietnam. The emphasis was placed on priority cargo, such as essential aircraft spares, motor transport vehicles, ammunition, medical supplies and mail. Although bulky and low priority items were transported to Vietnam by sea, the loads which were delivered by air were still substantial. The list includes Sioux and Iroquois helicopters, Cessna light aircraft, howitzers and tractors.

Although 700 personnel travelled to Vietnam by Hercules in 1970-71, Qantas charter aircraft carried the majority of the replacements to and from the theatre. The service commenced in June 1965 when the airline flew 1 RAR to Saigon and remained in place until the end of the Australian commitment. The initial reaction of Qantas management was not positive. They felt that the charter flights would disrupt normal commercial operations; a concern warranted in given circumstances. The replacement of 1 RAR with 5 RAR and 6 RAR was a major undertaking. Thirty-four charter flights were made over a ten week period ending on 21 June 1966, and, to meet the requirement, some commercial flights had to be cancelled.

Due to Indonesian intransigence at the time, the initial flights were made via Townsville, Manila in the Philippines and then Saigon. Once diplomatic relations enabled Australian aircraft to overfly Indonesia, Singapore was substituted for Manila. In the face of political sensitivities servicemen were required to wear civilian clothing during the overnight stopover at Singapore. Qantas' last weekly service to Saigon was flown on 1 February 1972. At least 203 charter flights were made and it is estimated that half of the servicemen who served in-country travelled to and from in our national carrier. For our transport and movement personnel handling civilian aircraft resulted in some unique experiences - one officer recalls being attacked by an umbrella wielding little old lady from a 'save our sons association'.

It was the lot of the Hercules fleet to carry the most precious cargo of all - battle casualties. The first casualties were evacuated from Tan Son Nhut aboard the normal courier flight in mid-July 1965. To facilitate this action, Warrant Officer A. Pellizzer, a senior Air Force medical orderly, was stationed with the US Army 3rd Field Hospital Aeromedical Evacuation Unit at Tan Son Nhut in September. He organised the evacuation of over 1,600 patients. It was not an ideal arrangement. When casualties were to be evacuated medical staff from 4 RAAF Hospital would embark at Butterworth before loading casualties at Tan Son Nhut. The aircraft would stage through Bien Hoa and Vung Tau. The schedule made for a long and exhausting day for the medical personnel and being forced to clamber over cargo made patient care difficult.

The noisy 'A' model Hercules was not an ideal aircraft for the medical evacuation role. Interior temperatures were difficult to control. During May 1966, consideration was given to using chartered Boeing 707 in the role. Problems related to the fitting of litter racks and loading patients negated this course. The airfield at Vung Tau was too small to permit operations by the jets. One option was to operate the Boeing 707 through Tan Son Nhut. However, as patients were stabilised at the United States Army 36th Evacuation Hospital or the Australian 2nd Field Ambulance at Vung Tau, the moving of seriously ill patients to that airfield was not medically justifiable.⁷

So the medical evacuation task remained with the 'A' model Hercules. The first dedicated flight was made on 1 July 1966. Thereafter aircraft departed from Vung Tau on every second Monday. Patients were transported by a specially constructed air conditioned bus to the flight line. After flying the 2 and 1/4 hour leg to Butterworth, the casualties were taken to 4 RAAF Hospital. On the Tuesday, red

⁷ Odgers, G., *Mission Vietnam: Royal Australian Air Force Operations 1964-1972*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974, pp. 148-150.

cross representatives took those patients fit enough to do so shopping at Penang. At 4 pm a hot meal was served and the aircraft departed at 5 pm for Richmond, where it landed some 13-14 hours later.

Even though the patients were expected to sleep for nine or ten hours during the flight the medical staff of two nursing sisters and a medical orderly could not relax. Palliative care had to be given as required and the patients tended. In-flight rations comprising meat and salad sandwiches, fresh juice and preserved fruit were distributed. When the aircraft was fitted with a galley unit, hot meals could be served. There was also personal discomfort and embarrassment. Gaynor Tilley was an experienced medevac nurse. She recalls that the sisters restricted their fluid intake when flying in the Hercules. They 'were reluctant to use the portable loo, mainly because it caused such a side-show for all the men aboard'. Of course there were occasions where there was no option. Even though the apparatus was curtained off, it was always wise to ask the men to keep their eyes firmly to the front. Sometimes even this precaution did not stave off embarrassing situations. One nurse found herself yelling for help as she found herself 'slowly rising up to the ceiling or the ramp section with her slacks dangling around her ankles. The loadmaster had not secured the loo down firmly enough.'⁸

The average number of patients per flight was about 20. However, this was dependent on the scope of the fighting in the Australian area of operations. On 27 February 1967 a total of 51 casualties were evacuated from Vung Tau direct to Richmond. The crew of the aircraft had been increased to nine, and during the 14-hour direct flight four medical officers, five nursing sisters and four medical orderlies were employed.

According to George Odgers, 3,164 patients were evacuated to Australia.⁹ Over 90 nurses and 29 medical orderlies participated in medevac flights. These figures do not include those Australian nursing sisters who served with the US Air Force 902nd Aero Medical Evacuation Squadron which was based at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. After discussions between Major D. Zablocki, the chief nurse of the 902nd, and the RAAF Nursing Service Matron-in-Chief, Charlotte McRae, in mid-1969 arrangements were made for Australian nurses from 4 RAAF Hospital to be detached to the American Unit. At least 25 nurses were so employed with the 902nd for 60 day periods between 1966 and 1969. It was a unique experience. The nurses were required to undergo small arms training in the use of the M16 rifle and .38 calibre revolver. In fact they were required to wear side arms when flights took them to unsecured airfields where sniper fire could be expected. They also had to cope with the embarrassing attention of American servicemen who were attracted by the novelty of the Australian uniform. The girls were soon absorbed in the American system and shocked at the injuries to which they administered. Gaynor Tilley will never forget one young boy - 'a charred remnant of a human being with [his] face burnt off'.¹⁰ American nurses were specialists in various aspects of medical treatment and were amazed at the overall professional skills of the 25 Australian girls who served by their side.

⁸ Gaynor Tilley, *Personal Stories of Section Officer Gaynor Tilley on Assignment with the 902nd AMES, August, September October 1967*. [RAAF Historical Records]

⁹ Odgers, *Mission Vietnam*, p 152.

¹⁰ Tilley, *Personal Stories of Section Officer Gaynor Tilley on Assignment with the 902nd AMES*.

Australian nurses returned to Vietnam on 4 April 1975, when four aeromedical teams from 4 RAAF Hospital were involved with Operation *Babylift* - the evacuation of Vietnamese orphans who had been adopted by Australian citizens. These children were flown from Saigon to Bangkok by Hercules aircraft of 86 Wing Detachment 'S', which had been formed under the command of Wing Commander Jack Mitchell, the commander of 36 Squadron. The Hercules crews commenced operations from Tan Son Nhut on 30 March and continued operations over South Vietnam until Anzac Day. The strength of the detachment grew to eight aircraft which were involved in flying humanitarian and relief missions. Two flights a day were made to An Thoi on the island of Phu Quoc where some 40,000 refugees from Da Nang and Hue had sought refuge from the advancing North Vietnamese forces. Conditions were chaotic. The South Vietnamese Government and its forces lost cohesion and discipline. At Phan Rang, South Vietnamese Army personnel and refugees panicked when four rockets landed near an Australian Hercules. Refugees and soldiers jostled and barged their way onto the aircraft. At An Thoi the Hercules crews witnessed the summary execution of Vietnamese marines who had forced their way on to an American freighter at Da Nang and terrorised the refugees aboard during the two-day voyage south.

Personnel from the detachment were billeted in the Embassy Hotel in Saigon. However, due to the deterioration of the situation and subsequent threat of damage to the Hercules aircraft due to sabotage, it was considered prudent to shift the base of operations of the detachment from Saigon to Bangkok. Technicians were flown from 486 Maintenance Squadron at Richmond to augment the servicing crews. Heat exhaustion was a factor faced by the aircraft crews, technicians and air defence guards as they toiled in the sweltering heat to load relief supplies for flights back to Saigon.

The final flights on 25 April were to evacuate Vietnamese officials, orphans and a party of Vietnamese nuns. The second embarked the Australian ambassador, but there was not enough room for the four air defence guards who had been engaged in cleaning out the abandoned embassy. Fortunately, another Hercules had been kept circling off the coast in case of an emergency. This aircraft was called to uplift the luggage and airmen. The four men vied to be the last Australian to leave Vietnamese soil - but we have no record of to whom this honour should be bestowed.

It is fitting that the Hercules crews closed the circle that they had opened a decade previously. Without them the Australian commitment would have been very different in nature. They supplied a vital logistic and personal link with the home country. The crew's operations were, in the main, unsung. If there is a criticism to be made of the force it is that it was not large enough.

There is no doubt as to the professionalism of the individual members who supported the combat units in Vietnam. However, the employment of small groups such as the air defence guards is an area of concern. In the time available it has not been possible to canvas all these issues and I trust that the role and importance of those who served in supporting roles during the Vietnam War may be the subject of further study.

DISCUSSION

Air Commodore Tom Trinder: I've one comment and one observation. In 1966 I was the senior air planning officer in the Maritime Headquarters for Operation *Trimdon*. I think the reason that Neptunes escorted *Sydney* was never properly understood by the Air Force. I don't think what they were doing was ever properly understood by anyone including the squadron itself. They carried Mark 34 homing torpedoes, two in the bomb bay. The crews were briefed that under no circumstances were they to drop them because they were too expensive, and, in fact, the bungs and everything else weren't removed. So carrying a hell of a lot of freight and limiting their time on tasks supporting *Sydney* against what, no one actually knew. That's that observation. Later the next year I was on the headquarters staff at Richmond when the Hercules had to be based in Vietnam and in Darwin to withdraw the regiment. It shouldn't be forgotten that the reason that the Hercules had to do that was because the Qantas crew refused to fly the charters, because they didn't reckon they were being paid enough danger money.

Air Vice-Marshal Mac Weller: The question that comes out is whether the current infrastructure that Air Force has would be able to mount and sustain something that we saw in Vietnam. No airfield construction squadron, no aircraft depots that bred the technical workforce that was so essential in supporting operations, no *Sydney*. But then I'd guess in contemporary management we'd let a contract, get a service-level agreement sorted out. Then I think how successful industry was in support of Australian endeavours in Vietnam. We couldn't move anything there by ship until Navy commandeered a Jeparit. We couldn't move bombs to 2 Squadron because the union wouldn't build the pallets. We had to build wooden pallets in 2 Aircraft Depot.

Flight Lieutenant Tim Anderson: Sir, I'll seek another opportunity to talk to you about airmen issues, as far as role models and heroes go. I just want to catch on the last thing you said and that was that you hope that the support roles in the Vietnam War will be investigated further. Who's responsibility is it to be doing that investigation, to be collecting those stories and those facts and be compiling it? Is it the responsibility of history or is it the responsibility of people within the Air Force?

Mr Wilson: It's mostly people within the Air Force. As the Air Force Assistant Historian, my job is maintaining the Air Force's records. We have a very good record of producing very high quality history books. We have a lousy record in maintaining our actual documents. I think the Air Force has got to put more an emphasis on this side of things. We tend to look at what we're doing now as being terribly mundane and dull and uninteresting, but it is these records that we'll be looking at in 25 years or even ten years or even five years. We've got to look at what records we're keeping and ensure that those records are available to people like myself in the future. *History is like this*. We look at the RAAF in Vietnam now, trying to learn the lessons, but the records of Vietnam are not all that well kept. I noticed Chris Coulthard-Clark, when he did a little bit on air defence guards in the official history, had to go to American sources. When I went through this, I had to go through lots of unit history records. ADG history is hidden in them and that is not good enough.

THE HOMEFRONT AND THE HOMECOMING

JOHN MORDIKE

Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Gordon Menzies announced his Government's decision to deploy an infantry battalion to Vietnam at 8 pm on the evening of 29 April 1965. Speaking in the House of Representatives, he explained that: 'There can be no doubt about the gravity of the situation in South Vietnam.' And, in a reference to ANZUS and SEATO, he observed that Australia 'must not overlook the point that our alliances, as well as providing guarantees and assurances for our security, make demands upon us'. Taking time to inform the Australian people of the dimensions of the problem, as he saw it, Menzies then went on to say that the 'takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia' and 'must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans'. In this way the Australian Prime Minister announced and justified the commitment of Australian combat troops to South Vietnam.¹

In the official history of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, Peter Edwards was critical of Menzies's reference to Communist China posing a direct threat to Australian security through the war in Vietnam. The Prime Minister had given 'the impression that Australia was intervening in Vietnam in order to meet a direct military threat from China', Edwards commented, but '[t]his was an inaccurate and unfortunate distortion'.² Historian Russell Ward was a little more severe when he referred to Menzies's comment as 'palpable nonsense'.³

So why would Menzies make such a comment?

Elected governments do not like dissent, especially when they are preparing to undertake risky ventures, such as the commitment of troops to an overseas theatre of operations. This helps explain why Prime Minister Menzies announced the Vietnam commitment as a move designed to head-off a 'direct military threat' to Australian security. Members of a nation tend to accept military action more readily if they perceive it to be related to their immediate security. Furthermore, the notion that action was being taken to confront the twin issues of the advance of communism and a military threat emanating from Asia was bound to be viewed sympathetically by many Australians.

Menzies also indicated in his statement that the Government's decision to commit an infantry battalion to Vietnam was taken 'in close consultation' with the United States. This was the vital issue. Edwards referred to 'the pressure which [American

¹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 45, House of Representatives, 29 April 1965, pp. 1060-2.

² P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian politics, society and diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965 - 1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, St Leonards, 1997, pp. 372-4.

³ R. Ward, *A Nation for a Continent: the history of Australia 1901 - 1975*, Heinemann Educational Australia, Richmond, 1977, p. 358.

President] Johnson personally ... placed on American allies to have some form of visible military commitment in Vietnam'. To resist any form of military involvement would have been 'gravely damaging' to Australian-American relations and would have undermined 'the direction of Australian policy over the previous fifteen years'. And Edwards claimed that such policies 'could properly be described as national policies' because they were 'consistently supported in general terms by the electorate and, in most of their specific applications, by opinion polls'.⁴

There is no dispute that the Australian Government's decision to deploy combat troops to Vietnam was accepted by most Australians at the time. A Morgan Gallup Poll in May 1965 indicated that the Government had 52 per cent support for its decision to commit troops. And to bring Menzies's reference to China together with the American connection, the same poll indicated that 72 per cent of Australians believed that Australian security would eventually be threatened by China if the United States pulled out of Asia.⁵

But before the decade was out, Australia's involvement in the war was to become one of the most divisive issues in Australian history with the majority of Australians being trenchantly opposed to further involvement.

From the 1940s, Australia had sought the concrete involvement of the United States in Pacific security arrangements. The ANZUS pact was the result of these designs in 1951. It was seen as a positive step forward in the search for security in the South-West Pacific. But there were also cultural and material dimensions to Australia's engagement with the United States. As Bill Hudson has observed: 'As Australia grew into a suburbanised industrial society in the 1950s, Australian entrepreneurs and the mass media turned increasingly to the United States for models, materials and ideas.'

Increasingly, Australians were exposed to American news and American media practices. The introduction of television in 1956 and the broadcasting of American programs added to this development. By the 1960s Australian popular culture reflected a distinct American influence. The rituals of youth were set to the music of rock and roll. Business also turned to America to provide the model for best practice. Supermarkets and regional shopping complexes became commonplace. Three-quarters of Australia's motor industry was owned by General Motors, Chrysler and Ford and Americans invested in petroleum and chemicals, agricultural equipment and food processing. American interests wholly owned more than 70 of Australia's top 300 manufacturing companies by the mid-1960s.⁶

⁴ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, p. 384.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49; & Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent: The Genesis of Anti-War Protest', in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, Lansdowne, Sydney, 1990, p. 72.

⁶ W.J. Hudson, '1951 - 1972', in F. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, pp. 524-6.

This was a distinct break from the past for Australia. During the 1960s, Australian exports to, and imports from, the United States increased to the extent that both exceeded trade with Britain for the first time.⁷ In short, the United States was assuming the position in the Australian national psyche once occupied by Britain.

The national reaction to the announcement that the Government was committing a battalion to Vietnam is probably best described as one of general acceptance.

The newspapers were generally supportive, but they noted the gravity of the decision. Only the *Australian* expressed unequivocal criticism, commenting that it was 'reckless' and 'wrong' to commit Australian forces to a situation where the nation had no responsibility.⁸

Strong support came from the Roman Catholic Church, but there was a degree of ambivalence in senior ranks of the Anglican Church. The most senior Anglican archbishops supported Australian involvement but certain bishops expressed their reservations.

Despite the expressions of support from newspapers and members of the church community, the Federal Opposition, under the leadership of Arthur Calwell, was formally united in its opposition to the war. Yet within its ranks there was a range of views and some degree of acceptance. Dr Jim Cairns from Labor's left wing rejected the basis of America's involvement on the grounds that he considered North and South Vietnam to be one in the same country. Gough Whitlam from the right wing was a strong supporter of the American alliance and thought that America's motives in Vietnam were 'above dispute'. Despite its overall opposition to the war, Calwell promised that the Labor Party would never deny Australian troops the support and aid that they required.⁹ This promise was to have an important influence on the action of the trade union movement as the war developed.

From the outset, left wing unions were opposed to Australia's involvement in the war, notably the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Seamen's Union, but right wing unions, such as the Federated Iron-workers Association, expressed strong support. The executive of the trade union movement's national body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, expressed its opposition to Australia's involvement in the war but, echoing Calwell's commitment, it also promised to support Australian troops. ACTU President, Albert Monk, issued a presidential ruling that the ACTU would not support union work stoppages imposed as protests to the war or any additional industrial action which would 'prevent the passage of troops or conveyance of materials for use by Australian troops in South Vietnam'.¹⁰

So what was the nature of opposition to the war and why did it grow over the ensuing years?

⁷ R. Ward, *A Nation for a Continent*, Appendix VIII & Appendix IX, pp. 448-9.

⁸ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, pp. 36-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-43.

In writing about the origins of public opposition to the Vietnam war, Ann Mari Jordens observed that Australia had 'a long tradition of anti-war dissent'. People who joined organisations which expressed opposition to war were generally influenced by three overlapping ideological traditions - religious, socialist and liberal internationalist.¹¹ But such groups were comprised largely of idealists and were relatively few in number.

What strengthened the voice of dissent in Australia was the Government's decision to employ conscripts in the war. This decision overturned a longstanding principle. The Australian *Defence Act* of 1903 had included a provision which denied Australian governments the power to send soldiers outside Australian territory. The provision had been included so that young Australians could not be compelled to serve in Britain's imperial operations.¹² Overseas service was for volunteers only. This is the reason why Australia raised special volunteer forces for overseas service in the two world wars. The provision was also intact during the Korean War. But the decision to send conscripts to Vietnam overturned this principle, providing another front to which opposition would rally.

Menzies had already announced the introduction of conscription, which only involved service in the Army, on 10 November 1964,¹³ about six months before he announced the deployment of the infantry battalion to the war in Vietnam. At the time, the Prime Minister's conscription announcement was greeted with overwhelming public support - some 71 per cent of Australians agreed with the move.¹⁴ Jordens claimed that '[p]ublic acceptance of the introduction of conscription for overseas service was aided by the widespread assumption, evident in newspapers and journals at the time, that it had been introduced for deployment in a wider conflict against Indonesia, and was thus relevant to the immediate defence of Australia'.¹⁵ This was undoubtedly the major consideration.

But Australia in the 1960s was also a very conservative society where authority was generally not questioned and military service was considered an excellent vehicle for introducing adolescent males to discipline and manly values. In short, the popular view was that military service would make men of Australian youth. When, in 1968, the national secretary of the RSL expressed the view that there was nothing wrong with students that could not be corrected by a 'wash, a haircut and two years in the Army',¹⁶ he was assured of substantial support. And, remarkably, it was not only from older Australians. Many young Australians not only supported Australia's involvement in the war but also conscription. Indeed, conscription enjoyed more support from the young than the old, as did the deployment of conscripts to Vietnam.¹⁷ The protest movement 'at least in its early stages, was overwhelmingly

¹¹ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', p. 60.

¹² John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A history of Australian Military Developments 1880 - 1914*, Allen & Unwin in association with The Directorate of Army Studies, Department of Defence, North Sydney, 1992, pp. 125-27.

¹³ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁶ P. Cochrane, 'At War At Home: Australian Attitudes during the Vietnam Years', in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, p. 172.

¹⁷ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', p. 75-6.

dominated by the middle-aged'.¹⁸ Yet, while students and other young Australians, remained quiescent at the outset, conscription for the Vietnam War was to become a major influence in radicalising many young Australians.

Prime Minister Harold Holt, who had assumed office with the retirement of Menzies, announced in March 1966 that the Government was increasing its commitment by deploying a two-battalion task force to Vietnam, along with a flight of eight RAAF Iroquois helicopters. This would bring Australia's strength in the theatre to some 4,500 men and, for the first time, conscripted national servicemen would be included.¹⁹ Holt's announcement was met with an outburst of protest that displayed a degree of resolve and strength that astounded the Government and many Australians.

Yet, while the resolve of opponents to the war might have been increasing, support for the Government was still strong. A poll taken in May 1966, indicated that 61 per cent of Australians believed that the nation should continue to fight in Vietnam and only 27 per cent believed that the troops should be brought home.²⁰ This level of support was higher than it had been when Menzies had announced the deployment twelve months earlier. It undoubtedly buoyed Holt. One month later in a visit to the White House in Washington Holt reaffirmed Australia's support for the United States' intervention in Vietnam, proclaiming that Australia would go 'all the way with LBJ',²¹ a reference to the leadership of President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Some thought it a provocative statement, but at the time it appealed to many Australians. In October 1966, Johnson became the first American President to visit Australia and, in scenes reminiscent of the visit of the young Queen Elizabeth 12 years earlier, a large number of Australians took to the streets to welcome him. It was estimated that half a million or more people turned out in Melbourne on Friday 21 October. Johnson's visit to Sydney on the following day saw one million people in the streets in what could only be described as a demonstration of enthusiasm for the American alliance. There were only a few dissident voices.

The Government's judgment in bringing President Johnson to Australia as a tangible display of support for the United States was vindicated in the federal elections which were held four weeks after the President's visit. The result was interpreted as a statement of support for the involvement in Vietnam.²² The Government - a Liberal-Country Party coalition - increased its majority over its Labor Party opposition from 22 seats to 41 seats. The Government's majority was now the largest in Australian history.²³ It was a resounding victory.

This was the high-water mark in support for the Government, but it was a level that was maintained only for a few months. Before 1967 came to an end, the tide began to turn. A poll taken in May indicated 62 per cent support for Australian forces

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁹ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, pp. 93-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²² Curthoys, 'Mobilising Dissent: The Later Stages of Protest', in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, pp. 144-6.

²³ Ward, *A Nation for a Continent*, Appendix IV, pp. 442-3.

continuing to fight in Vietnam, but in November 1967, after Holt had announced a further increase in the strength of the task force to a three-battalion level, there was a significant decline in support to 46 per cent. There could be no mistaking the signs.

What was the constituency of the growing voice of dissent?

Some were drawn into the early protest movement because of their connection with organisations based on a left-wing political ethos. But by the beginning of 1966, the peace movement was comprised largely of middle-class members of society who had no radical political associations. Perhaps the best illustration of this development was the advent of Save Our Sons, an organisation which was comprised largely of middle-aged women. SOS opposed the war on humanitarian, religious or pacifist grounds and objected to the conscription of Australian youth for active service in an overseas theatre. The Reverend Alan Walker of the Sydney Central Methodist Mission was another prominent activist against the war. And, although the RSL was an influential voice raised in support of the war, a breakaway group from the RSL calling itself the Ex-Services Human Rights Association took an opposing view.²⁴

There were pro-war activists. The RSL was one important advocate for the Government's policies. A pro-war organisation calling itself the Australian Action Co-ordination Centre was established in Sydney in April 1966. At the same time, another pro-war group was established in Melbourne from an unlikely alliance of young Australians with an interest in politics. The Melbourne University Australian Labor Party Club joined forces with the Young Country Party, the Young Democratic Labor Association and the Young Liberals to form the Vietnam Rally Committee. In 1968, academics from Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne established the Friends of Vietnam. The secretary of the Friends of Vietnam was Melbourne lawyer Kenneth Gee, who had been a former member of the Communist Party.²⁵

The important understanding to be drawn from the alliances and organisations that began to form either in opposition to, or support of, the war was that positions were being adopted with a degree of commitment which transcended former allegiances and political outlooks. Stereotypes were crumbling. The war was polarising Australian society and it was the ranks of opponents to the war which were growing. Middle-aged women and men took to the streets with young Australians to express their trenchant opposition to the policies of an elected government. For many this was a bold step. There can be little doubt that some of these people had never taken such action before in their lives, and never would again.

The communist forces' Tet offensive in February 1968 marked a turning point in the character of the anti-war movement in Australia, as it did in the United States. Increasingly, questions were now asked about whether the war could be won. Perhaps for the first time, there were doubts about the invincibility of American military might. Was this not a futile effort? In March, the new Prime Minister of Australia, John Gorton, placed a ceiling of 8,000 personnel on the strength of combat forces in Vietnam.

²⁴ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', pp. 74-6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Adding to the doubts about the war, on 31 March 1968 President Johnson announced his intention not to run again for the presidency. It had been less than 18 months since millions of Australians had demonstrated their enthusiasm for going 'All the way with LBJ' and now LBJ had dropped out of the race. His withdrawal was interpreted widely as an indication of his own lack of conviction that the war could be won. By December 1968, 49 per cent of adult Australians still believed that Australians should continue to fight in Vietnam; 37 per cent expressed the view that Australian servicemen should be withdrawn from the war.²⁶

In 1969, the Government began to lose the moral and political authority it had enjoyed since beginning its commitment to the war. In June of that year, Richard Nixon, who had become President of the United States six months earlier with a commitment to seek 'peace with honour', announced the first American withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.²⁷ Next month Nixon spoke to reporters in Guam and let it be known that he thought that America's allies should do more to enhance their own defence if they were to expect support from the United States.²⁸ Taking notice of these developments, Australians were beginning to have serious doubts about the involvement in Vietnam. The first Gallup Poll to show a majority of Australians - 55 per cent - in favour of bringing the forces home was taken in August. Support for continuing the war had collapsed to 40 per cent. From this point on all polls were to show majority support for abandoning the war. The Federal Opposition under the leadership of Gough Whitlam had taken a soft line on the war after the resounding Government victory in the elections of November 1966, but in his policy speech for the elections of October 1969, Whitlam declared that a Labor government would withdraw Australians from Vietnam by June 1970. The elections resulted in the Government losing 17 seats to the Opposition, reducing its majority from 41 to 13.²⁹ In November the world received news of the horror at My Lai, strengthening the resolve of those who were concerned about the morality of the war.³⁰

In October 1969, a Moratorium on the war attracted 250,000 participants in New York and 100,000 in Washington. It was a stark reminder to political leaders that the tide was now running against them. The Australian anti-war movement decided to follow the American example. Demonstrations were held on 15 December. Prime Minister Gorton then announced that Australia's combat force in Vietnam would be reduced by one infantry battalion by April 1970, a decision taken amid confusion and uncertainty about American intentions.³¹ But, as well as seeking to extricate itself from the Vietnam commitment while maintaining good relations with the United States, the Government had its own domestic constituency to consider.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁷ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, p. 188.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁹ Ward, *A Nation for a Continent*, Appendix IV, p. 442-3.

³⁰ Curthoys, 'Mobilising Dissent', p. 153.

³¹ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, pp. 241-5.

The first Australian Moratorium which was held on 8 May 1970 drew 200,000 people into the streets. It was considered by the organisers to be highly successful. Further Moratoriums were held in September 1970 and June 1971. On 18 August 1971, the Government announced that Australian forces would be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of that year.³²

The anti-war movement in Australia was not a monolithic movement. It was comprised of a multitude of groups, factions and individuals who viewed the war and conscription from a number of perspectives. With such a broadly constituted movement the forms of protest took many forms. Save Our Sons, for example, protested typically in silent vigils, always being peaceful and orderly while making their stand known to the public.³³ But other groups and individuals protested in far more radical ways, and, while drawing attention to their cause, also alienated many Australians.

On 6 June 1966, Nadine Jenson poured red paint over herself at Sydney's welcome home parade for the 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, and then threw her arms around Lieutenant Colonel Preece, who was leading his unit in the march.³⁴ On 30 March 1967, the Monash Labor Club announced its support for the National Liberation Front in Vietnam. Then, in a highly provocative step, the club established a fund to provide aid for the National Liberation Front.³⁵ In the following month, protesters painted the word 'Peace!' and anti-war symbols on Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.³⁶

Acts like these were deeply offensive to the vast majority of Australians. They were interpreted widely as being deeply disrespectful to those men and women who had fallen in earlier wars, as treachery against Australian men and women serving overseas in a difficult war and as an offence to members of the Services who had placed their own lives at risk while fulfilling the role given to them by the Government.

Did radical elements in Australian society threaten support for Australian forces?

During the war, a potential problem arose over support for the Australian forces. Two civilian cargo vessels, the *Boonaroo* and the *Jeparit*, were chartered in mid-1966 to transport the increased logistic requirements of the expanding Australian forces in Vietnam. At the time the Seamen's Union of Australia opposed this development and resolved not to supply a crew for the *Boonaroo*. Subsequently, a compulsory hearing of the Arbitration Commission ruled that ACTU President Albert Monk's earlier pronouncement that unions would always provide support for the Australian forces constituted a directive that bound the SUA to comply.

³² Curthoys, 'Mobilising Dissent', pp. 157-160.

³³ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', p. 79.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78; & J. Ross, 'Australia's Legacy: The Vietnam Veterans', in G. Pemberton, *Vietnam Remembered*, p. 191.

³⁵ Curthoys, 'Mobilising Dissent', p. 148.

³⁶ Ann Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', p. 61.

Six months later in December 1966, the potential for a more serious dispute arose over the carriage of bombs for the RAAF's No 2 Squadron. To defuse any such dispute, in February Cabinet decided that if the maritime unions objected to the carriage of bombs then it would commission the vessels with naval crews. At the same time, the ACTU executive reaffirmed that its policy of providing support for the Australian forces included the carriage of bombs, and the SUA retreated. On 1 March the *Boonaroo* was commissioned as a vessel of the RAN and subsequently sailed to Vietnam with a naval crew. A slightly different approach was taken in the case of the *Jeparit* where a mixed crew of merchant seamen who were not SUA members and members of the Navy continued to sail the vessel for several years.³⁷

Did members of the Services returning from service in Vietnam receive a hostile reception?

In writing about the war, Jane Ross observed:

The Australian population at large was not opposed to the Vietnam war for most of the years of Australia's involvement; even less was it hostile to the soldiers who fought there. Returned servicemen in Australia have shared in the honour given to the original Anzacs; those returning from Vietnam were no exception.

The Army's major combat units each enjoyed a welcome home parade at the end of their tour. This certainly applied to infantry battalions and artillery regiments. Ross points out that there were 16 marches for the battalions and other units and troops, mainly in Brisbane and Sydney but also in Townsville and Adelaide. 'The reception given to those troops who did march on their return home,' Ross wrote, 'shows that there was abundant warmth and welcome in the community towards the soldiers.'³⁸

But the parade and the warm welcome were not shared by all participants in the war. While the Army's major combat units experienced welcome home marches through some capital cities, many smaller Army units and individuals missed out. The primary reason for this was that these smaller units were not replaced in Vietnam as units. Instead, individuals were posted in for tours of duty, normally 12 months, and returned home as individuals on completion of their service. Many National Servicemen had the same experience, even when they were part of a major fighting unit, because in a number of cases their two-year period of service expired before their units had completed their full tour. For these people the homecoming could itself become a traumatic experience. On their return to Australia, they were discharged from the Army and went back into the civil community to be met with disinterest or at times hostility. Many veterans harboured the belief that they had been blamed for the war, rather than the politicians who had sent them.³⁹

³⁷ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, pp. 163-4.

³⁸ Ross, 'Australia's Legacy', p. 190.

³⁹ Edwards, *A Nation at War*, pp. 341-2.

But Air Force units also missed out on the welcome home marches because the staffing of these units was done on an individual basis. I know only of one instance when Air Force personnel marched on their return home. This was when '50 men from the RAAF' - they could only have been former members of the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam - marched with 1 RAR on its return on 8 June 1966.⁴⁰

In the first instance, this lack of visibility has contributed to a lack of public awareness about the Air Force's contribution to the war. In the concluding pages of the official history of the RAAF in the Vietnam War, Chris Coulthard-Clark referred to 'a remarkable lack of knowledge regarding the nature and extent of our national involvement'. Explaining this, he continued:

The popular image of the Australian presence in Vietnam was, and still is, dominated by the role of the Army because it was the largest numerical component of the forces engaged. This emphasis has produced a mistaken and unjust perception that Australia's contribution in the air was at best incidental, at worst irrelevant.⁴¹

One need look no further than the many accounts of the war which describe the Australian participants as 'troops' or 'soldiers' - never airmen and seamen - to see one result of this unintentional bias.

Most are guilty of this oversight - so it is unfair to single out Jane Ross - but in the extracts from her work on welcome home marches that I have just read, we find reference only to 'soldiers' and 'troops'. One would not want to see recognition of Army's contribution diminished in any way, but Air Force needs to think carefully about how it should present itself to the public.

This brings me to my second, and final, point. When 9 Squadron returned to Australia in December 1971 as Australia's involvement in Vietnam was being brought to an end, the helicopters flew in mass formation from Maroochydore to the home base of Amberley. Similarly, in the following February the last four Caribous of 35 Squadron marked their return with a fly-past over Sydney's central city area before landing at Richmond.⁴²

Does a fly-past make a clear statement to the people who witness it?

Does a fly-past recognise the contribution of all those who contribute to the delivery of air power?

As we have heard today it is people functioning in a many diverse ways who conducted, and contributed to, operations in Vietnam. It is people who achieved a sense of fulfilment. It is people who were scared, or brave, or indifferent. It is people who harboured the grievances and disillusionments. It is people who were - and, in some cases, still are - the casualties of the Vietnam War.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴¹ C. Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962 - 1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, St Leonards, 1995, p. 333.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 319-20.

DISCUSSION

Air Vice-Marshal Bob Richardson: John, thank you for a very interesting presentation and I'd like to just pick up that final point you made, because I think there's still a very important message for us right now. I went as Chief of Air Force's representative to welcome home a major UN peacekeeping contingent coming back from Africa a few years ago. I was ordered to report by the Commander of that operation in disruptive pattern combat uniform. I refused and copped some opprobrium from the Army for doing that. I sat with the Mayor of Townsville when the Boeing landed and I said to him quietly as the welcoming procedures were going on and all the people were on parade, 'Can you see any Air Force people there?' There were quite a significant number, in the minority of course, but still a significant number of Air Force people. He said, 'No, I can only see Army people'. My concern is that the policy as I understand it at the moment is that the disruptive pattern combat uniform is worn on all operations, and in a lot of training as well, by all three services. This of course means that to anyone except the highly educated observer, because of the camouflage, there's no recognition whatsoever of the RAAF. The point that I am trying to pick up is that the public has no perception at all of involvement by Air Force or Navy people unless it's the pictures that come from the operation. In the case of Air Force, if aircraft are not involved, which they often are not in peacekeeping operations, then there is no recognition at all.

Dr Mordike: Clearly, it's a difficult issue. I became aware of this by talking to young Air Force officers at Basic Staff Course, which I do about every fifth or sixth week, and I have found over the last couple of years a fair degree of resentment. Some of them have been on these deployments and they feel that their Air Force contribution isn't recognised. Now, I don't quite know what the Air Force would do about that, but I think for the development of esprit de corps, for the development of cohesion in a force, it is vital for people to feel that their contributions have been recognised. I think it's important, but I cannot give you any particular clue on how to go about it.

Air Marshal Ray Funnell: John, thanks very much for your presentation. You mentioned that in the early history of our involvement, some of the social influences that were being felt in Australia were most particularly from the US. It's always seemed to me, too, that there was a lot of that copycat syndrome at work in the whole of the protest movement. It always seemed to be that if something occurred in the US, it would be copied and to some extent aped by our own protest movement here in Australia. In your researches did any of that come out?

Dr Mordike: Absolutely, it's well documented. Just the use of the word veteran comes from America, for a start. The teach-ins in the universities, I didn't mention them, but they came from America. One form of protest against conscription became known as burning the draft card. But we didn't have draft cards. They were American and some American protesters burnt their draft cards. We had the national service registration card but the same form of protest which was copied from American protesters was called burning the draft card in this country. In a similar vein, moratoriums were a direct copy of the American experience. Yes, absolutely, there's no doubt at all that we did follow the American model of protest.

Mr Kerry Boss: I don't know what recognition the sailors off the war ships off the coast got, but a friend of mine served on HMAS *Sydney* on regular runs and it was only a few years ago in fact, after a long series of disputes, that they got recognition for the fact that they had run into Vietnam on a regular basis in HMAS *Sydney*.

Dr Mordike: Yes, that is correct. I think there was an issue of a special medal. I might stand corrected on that, but I think there was.

CLOSING ADDRESS

AIR MARSHAL E.J. MCCORMACK

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. First of all let me apologise for not being here for most of the conference. I was actually participating in a little piece of RAAF history with the laying-up of the Governor General's Banner for 486 Squadron after 52 years of dedicated service. From tonight on, maintenance that was conducted by 486 Squadron has now been split finally between 33, 36 and 37 Squadrons. While it was a sad occasion, for many of the old and bold who were there last night, it has been embraced by a majority of members as the way ahead.

Second, because of the massive shake-up of the RAAF, we are presently questioning the culture and ethos of the RAAF. What we are? What we stand for? I must thank Air Marshal Funnell for his vision in starting this series of conferences as well as the Heritage Awards and the Air Power Studies Centre. Those elements contribute greatly towards our history, culture and ethos. Part of that ethos must be the focus on operations. I understand that General Hartley gave an excellent expose of the difficulties faced by 9 Squadron in their transition to operations, and Air Commodore Lane explained very well the difficulties faced in that transition. That is why we must now focus on our primary role, operations, so that the transition to war is much less traumatic.

Not long ago, after a visit to Australia, the then Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the United States, Admiral Owen, commented that it takes a long time to transition to war, because our attitudes emphasise peacetime training. It appears that we have again forgotten the lessons of war and particularly the lessons of Vietnam. While I was not able to be here for most of the day I look forward to reading the papers and proceedings with great interest. I'm sure that they will be an important contribution to the RAAF's history of its involvement in the Vietnam War.

We have been privileged today to have had presentations from some distinguished people with an association with the war in Vietnam. I refer especially to Dr Peter Edwards, the official historian for Australia's involvement in South-East Asian conflicts from 1948 to 1975. And especially to Major General John Hartley, Land Commander, who I've mentioned previously. John, it's good to see you back in Canberra. I guess you're not going to stay long. Please accept my special thanks for making time, not only to prepare the papers, but to come along today and address the conference. I'm also pleased that a number of RAAF veterans of the war could tell us about their experiences today. I know the ones I listened to were very interesting. Some of these veterans are now retired from the Air Force and I appreciate their efforts to be present.

Now a conference like this takes a lot of planning and preparation. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Director of the Air Power Studies Centre, Group Captain Garry Dunbar, who unfortunately cannot be here today because of a recent accident and to his staff for organising this conference. The Air Power Studies Centre staff will also be editing and publishing the papers and the proceedings and posting out copies to all participants. I'm advised that you can expect this to happen early in the new year.

Air Commodore Doug Chipman deserves a special thanks for the work he has done today in chairing this conference. It has all run smoothly, I believe, and this is in no small part due to Doug's care and attention. Finally, I'd like to thank all of you as participants in this conference. It's one thing to arrange speakers for a conference, but ultimately the success of the conference depends upon an interested audience, one which is prepared to take part in the proceedings. I trust that you have found that the day has fulfilled your expectations and that you find yourselves more knowledgeable about the war in Vietnam. I know that the recording of the history is very important for us.

Since I took over as Chief I've been concentrating on people, since I believe that well trained people are the key to our success. One element of the people equation that I believe is lacking at present, especially in the middle ranking officers and non-commissioned officers, is command and leadership. I therefore nominate Command and Leadership as the topic for our next history conference and I hope I'll see you all here again next year.

