

The RAAF EXPERIENCE IN VIETNAM

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you coming along today.

As most of you will be aware, last month marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, one of the more well-known engagements fought during the Vietnam War.

More broadly, this year also marks fiftieth anniversary of the Vietnam deployment of the Australian Task Force to Nui Dat and the RAAF's No 9 Squadron to Vung Tau.

Over the last few years there have been a number of other Vietnam milestones marking half century anniversaries.

In July 1964, the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam was formed and in June 1966 it became No 35 SQN. While in April next year it will be fifty years since No 2 Squadron operating Canberra bombers arrived at Phan Rang Air Base and began their four year tour of duty.

It seems timely then that in the midst of these milestones that the commitment of the RAAF to operations in Vietnam be recounted in an Air Power seminar.

References

References

When I began to prepare for this seminar I realised just how much research and published work has already been completed on the RAAF involvement in the Vietnam War. It would certainly be remiss of me not to mention some of the excellent work that I was able to reference in preparing for today.

The Official History – *The RAAF Involvement in Vietnam, Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-75* by Chris Coulthard, is the definitive work on the subject and was extremely valuable in preparing for today.

Going Solo, the Royal Australian Air Force 1946-71, by Alan Stevens again an extremely useful source.

The Highest Traditions – The History of No 2 SQN by John Bennett

Mission Vietnam by George Odgers

And

The RAAF in Vietnam – The proceedings of the 1998 RAAF History Conference.

I must also acknowledge the nameless Foreign Affairs officials, Defence Committee secretariats, staff officers, registry clerks and Commanding Officers who during the Vietnam War ensured that reports drafted, meetings attended, decisions made and the deployments conducted were duly documented and retained for future research. The primary source information I have been able to readily access has been very good. Without such commitment to good record keeping today's presentation would not have been possible.

Geneva Conference

Political Background.

Before discussing the RAAF experience in Vietnam, it is perhaps useful to first discuss why it was necessary for the Air Force to be the first place.

The Australian involvement in the Vietnam conflict was generated by a number of strategic interests. In the post-war years the region to Australia's north became increasingly identified as an area of importance as the influence of European domination receded and the spread of communism increased almost in lock step with increasing nationalist identity of the previously colonised states.

More specifically, the origins of the RAAF's involvement in Vietnam can be traced to the 1954 Geneva Conference called to finalise the armistice agreement which ended the fighting in the Korean War. Also on the

conference agenda were discussions around the emerging independent states of Indochina (Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam).

While the Geneva Conference failed to reach a meaningful agreement on the situation in Korea, it did result in a decision on the withdrawal of French forces from Indochina and the partition of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel, separated into a communist North and a republican South.

Elections were to be held no later than July 1956 to enable the Vietnamese to decide on the nature of their government on reunification. Known as the Geneva Accords, the decision concerning Vietnam did not rest easily with at least two of the key actors.

Ngô Đình Diệm

Ngô Đình Diệm Prime Minister and later President of South Vietnam, did not favour an election on reunification due to what he considered an oppressive political environment in North Vietnam that would not result in a free and free ballot in that the north.

In the North, Ho Che Mhin, the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam while outwardly supportive of the elections, maintained support to the Viet Minh movement in the South, primarily to maintain a political presence in the largely rural areas.

When the Diem Government formally declared that the promised elections would not go ahead, there began a progressive slide into what was to become an increasingly violent and wide spread Communist led insurgency in the South.

SEATO

In a move intended to curb the very communist influence developing in South Vietnam and encourage stability across the Indochina region, Australia joined with several other powers, most notably Britain, France and the US, to form the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1955. The aim of SEATO was to underwrite the sovereign independence of South-East Asian states. More specifically, the US increasingly directed SEATO initiatives towards curbing the spread of communism in the region¹. As the security and political situation in South Vietnam deteriorated, Australia and the US became increasingly drawn into a war aimed at resisting further North Vietnamese incursions into the South.

This was no surprise and had been a policy foreshadowed in Australia for some years. In the 1956 *Strategic Basis for Australian Defence Policy* document, the language and intent was specific. Stating in relation to the arch of states to Australia's north, that 'collective defence is the most effective and economic method for ensuring Australia's security'².

Indochina Map

This policy focus was evident in expanded diplomatic engagement through the region, with Australia increasing its diplomatic representation in South East Asia from zero prior to World War II to 13 missions by 1960³ and further committing to military relationships such as the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve and South East Treaty Organisation.

¹ Briefing notes to A/Minister External Affairs : SEATO Treaty Negotiations September 1954

² Strategic Basis for Australian Defence Policy: Report by Defence Committee, October 1956, p3, accessed NAA 10 Sep 16.

³ Office of the Prime Minister file 57/2106, Australian Foreign Policy-General, (4) p23, accessed NAA 10 Sep 16.

In partnership with other South East Treaty Organisations, but principally with the USA – Australia began to express concerns regarding the threat posed to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam by what was referred to as ‘other power groups’. Further defining a specific threat to Vietnam in a 1955 SEATO report as ‘Communist violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords’⁴.

Australian Army Training Team Vietnam

The US and later the Australian response to the escalation in Viet Cong operations, which had developed into almost regular attacks across South Vietnam, was to increase direct military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam Army. In its first major commitment to the now openly referred to war, Australia despatched 30 Australian Army advisors to South Vietnam as the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in August 1962.

Flying Officer David Cooper

While the RAAF School of Languages established Vietnam Language training to their curriculum in 1960 and the Air Board approached the USAF regarding the possibility of positioning a RAAF WGCDR within the Air Staff of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). The first meaningful RAAF commitment in South Vietnam came when in May 1963 an Air Attaché, Group Captain Brinsley was appointed to the Australian Embassy in Saigon. This was followed within days by the first operational missions in South Vietnam by a RAAF aircraft. Over the period 9-21 May 1963, Dakota A65-119 from No 2 Squadron’s transport

⁴ Department of Defence file 11/301/990, SEATO - an evaluation of the work of, 1955 (1), accessed NAA 10 Sep 16.

flight based at RAAF Base Butterworth and captained by Flying Officer David Cooper, conducted 28 sorties in South Vietnam.

The missions were predominantly humanitarian aid flights, delivering some 25 000 kg of food and medical supplies to Montagnard refugees displaced by the Viet Cong insurgency. This short deployment marked the beginning of the RAAF presence in Vietnam, which was to continue in varying forms and with only minor breaks until 1975.

Prior to the relief flights of May 1963, Australia had been under increasing pressure from the South Vietnamese and US governments to commit transport aircraft to provide supply and administrative support to the counterinsurgency effort. These requests grew to include aircrew to provide additional airlift capacity to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF).

Until 1963, these calls had been resisted for three interrelated reasons. First, the RAAF was undergoing a major re-equipment program which required the transition of a majority of its aircrew and technical personnel to new aircraft types. Furthermore, the management of the induction of the new platforms had to be balanced against the retirement of the outgoing aircraft.

Dassault Mirage

With the Dassault Mirage replacing the CAC Sabre, the de Havilland Caribou replacing the C-47 Dakota, along with the introduction to service of the Bloodhound surface to air missile system, the UH-1 Iroquois helicopters and new Lockheed Neptunes and Orions, the resources of the RAAF was becoming stretched.

Ubon

The second reason for resisting a commitment to Vietnam was the RAAF's existing counterinsurgency and Far East Strategic Reserve commitments in Butterworth, Malaysia and a SEATO commitment in Ubon, Thailand. With base support units, control and reporting units, a maintenance SQN and three fighter, one bomber and a helicopter squadron operating in the region, the limited resources of the RAAF were stretched even further.

F-111

The cost of both the equipment replacement program and the operational tempo of the early 1960s combined to generate the third challenge the RAAF faced in supporting additional commitments. In 1962, the RAAF was on the cusp of deciding on its next generation of strike aircraft, and although the preferred platform had yet to be identified, the cost of the possible options was going to make it one of the most expensive acquisitions in RAAF history.

The Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) at the time, Air Marshal Valston Hancock, was understandably concerned that the RAAF budget was already fully committed and any additional costs incurred due to further operational deployments would potentially curtail the Air Force's development plans.

Caribou – 38 SQN

The turning point in the RAAF's ability to support a deployment to Vietnam came in 1964 as No 38 Squadron began its transition to the de Havilland Caribou aircraft. With potential to deploy six Caribous on the horizon, the capacity of the RAAF to supply meaningful tactical transport

capability in Vietnam was being realised. The timing of these developments proved critical.

Viet Cong

During 1964, the Government of South Vietnam was destabilised by two military coups. These events led to a surge in the Viet Cong insurgency seeking to take advantage of the now dysfunctional leadership in South Vietnam. In response to requests for increased military aid to the war from both South Vietnam and the US, the Australian Government decided it was in the best interests of the nation and those of its allies to agree to an increase in the Australian commitment. As part of this increase, the commitment of a RAAF Caribou deployment was announced on 8 June 1964.

While the decision to deploy the Caribous was established on paper, there was a significant amount of work required before the aircraft were available for deployment. So new was the Caribou in RAAF service that there were only sufficient aircraft in Australia to sustain a training capability, necessitating the formation of the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) at RAAF Base Butterworth, from aircraft delivered directly from the de Havilland factory in Canada.

Caribou – in flight

The formation of the RTFV and its arrival in Vietnam in August 1964 marked the beginning of a significant RAAF presence in Vietnam. The RAAF commitment to the war resulted in the appointment of a one-star Commander RAAF Forces Vietnam in June 1966 and the expansion of the RTFV into No 35 Squadron.

C² Chart

It would be joined in theatre by Nos 2 and 9 Squadrons, flying Canberra bombers and Iroquois helicopters, respectively, No 1 Operational Support Unit and No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron DET B. Reflecting the fact that the Australian forces in Vietnam were there as contributions to a coalition, not all of the RAAF units served together under common operational lines of command and all were responsible for unique roles. While Nos 2 and 35 Squadron were allocated for duty with the USAF Seventh Air Force, No 9 Squadron was under the direct control of No 1 Australian Task Force.

As a consequence each element of the RAAF forces in Vietnam each had their own unique experience.

Tactical Transport Operations

RTFV ARRIVAL

The arrival of the RTFV in Vietnam occurred at a significant period of the war. The Viet Cong were becoming more active and the US in response to the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, which had occurred just days before the main arrival of the RTFV at their base at Vung Tau, was to result in a far more aggressive operational approach by the US forces.

The arrival of the versatile tactical airlift Caribous into theatre was to prove highly providential. The aircraft's robust construction and exceptional Short Take Off and Landing (STOL) capability enabled it to operate from the most rudimentary of airstrips. The aircraft gave the RAAF considerable flexibility in the conduct of air mobility operations, enabling the tactical airlift of personnel and cargo across a wide variety of environments and conditions found in Vietnam.

CARIBOU FLTLN

As has been experienced in more recent counterinsurgency operations, the ability to transport personnel and logistic support by air provides the means to avoid the insurgents preferred engagement space and in the case of Vietnam avoid the frequently flooded road networks.

With complete control of the air the Caribou was able to exploit the freedom of manoeuvre afforded by the lack of air threats and its short field performance.

The RTFV under the command of SQNLDR Chris Sugden, had an initial strength of six aircraft and some 70 personnel. It began the first of its 80 000 sorties in theatre on 14 August after having a brief period of orientation flights with the USAF units they were to be operating with.

The RTFV was not to be an isolated unit, but was integrated into the USAF's 2nd Air Division's 315th Air Commando Wing, later renamed the 315th Tactical Airlift Wing. As part of this formation, they were essentially part of the USAF air lift system and received its tasking through that body.

VUNG TAU

In 1966 with the arrival of additional aircraft and personnel the RTFV was reformed as No 35 SQN, although the nature of the tasks performed by the Caribous remained reasonably consistent.

This included routine scheduled logistics runs, short notice supply missions to remote Special Forces camps as well as inserting Special Forces troops by parachute and night illumination missions. The tempo was high, three aircraft would be committed per day for the scheduled

services leaving only three aircraft available for short notice mission providing none of them required maintenance or servicing.

CARIBOU FIELD OPS

Later when the RTFV was raised to a full squadron, the tempo of operations did not diminish with the unit's statistics indicating a proportional rise in flying hours and as well as in passengers and freight carried.

The operations were not always carried without cost. No area of Vietnam was ever considered truly safe. On 15 November 1964, while operating out of Da Nang, Caribou A4-185 was struck by at least 5 hits from ground fire, fortunately without serious consequences. However just three days later the aircraft was written off in a landing accident when the pilot attempted to fly badly needed supplies into the isolated Special Forces Camp at A Ro while the airstrip was heavily water logged.

A4-193

Damage from ground fire and landing/takeoff accidents remained a feature throughout the Caribou's service in Vietnam. While a number of aircrew were injured there were no fatalities. Three aircraft were however written off, the worst incident was when A04-193 was completely destroyed by mortar fire on 29 March 1970 at That Son. Struck squarely by a mortar round the aircraft was first damaged by the blast and shrapnel and then completely gutted by the resulting fire.

However the risks were unavoidable. The Caribou's ability to utilise rudimentary airstrips meant the aircraft and crews were often operating at the forward edge of the battlespace and had to utilise airstrips which were under constant enemy observation. The risk was not limited to

aircrew, repairing aircraft on remote airstrips was extremely hazardous due to the risk of ground fire. Three ground crew were Mention In Despatches for their work in these conditions.

No 35 Squadron's time on Vietnam ended in February 1972 when the last of the unit's aircraft returned to Australia.

In their eight year deployment the Caribous had transported 42 000 tonnes of freight and 680 000 passengers in 81 500 operational sorties utilising 115 airfields across South Vietnam.

Helicopter Operations

IROQUOIS

When the RTFV was raised to a full squadron in June 1966 it was part of a wider increase of the Australian commitment to the war effort. Joining No 35 SQN was No 9 SQN operating Iroquois helicopters.

The deployment of RAAF UH-1 Iroquois helicopters to Vietnam is something of a misunderstood and frequently misrepresented chapter of the Australian involvement in the war. It became almost fashionable in some cycles to deride the performance of No 9 Squadron in Vietnam. The reasons seem to be motivated by other factors rather than as a result of reasonable analysis.

It is however fair to say that the Senior leadership of the RAAF did not endear itself to the Army in regard to helicopter support in the months leading up to the 1966 deployment. When it was suggested by the Chief of the General Staff that the Air Force would benefit from sending two Iroquois to Vietnam well ahead of the main task force in order to get experience in a highly charged operating environment, the CAS at the

time, Air Marshal Allister Murdoch refused partly on the basis that the experience gained by No 5 SQN operating Iroquois in Malaya was more than sufficient.

This position was somewhat at odds with the RAAF's position in 1962. In the years when the RAAF had been gaining experience in counterinsurgency operations in Malaysia, including the operation of helicopters, the then CAS, Air Marshal Valston Hancock had in fact been arguing for increased representation of the RAAF in the Australian Embassy Saigon on the basis that the USAF had been highlighting that the growing conflict in Vietnam was 'an ideal proving ground for the development of techniques and aircraft in the air war against insurgent forces'⁵ At best the Air Force was being naively inconsistent or at worst disingenuous.

Against this background of interservice tension, when the RAAF No 9 SQN did deploy to Vietnam with 1 Australian Task Force, any transgression or perceived inefficiency was promptly held up as yet another example of Air Force ineptitude.

IROQUOIS AT NUI DAT

In reality the history of RAAF rotary wing operations in Vietnam 1966-71 can best be described as one of constant improvement. When No 9 Squadron first deployed into Vietnam in June 1966 the unit had the ability to airlift a maximum complement of 40 troops into or out of a secure landing zone. That was of course only if all of the squadron's eight helicopters were available.

⁵ C. Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam, Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p.23.

By the time the unit returned to Australia in 1971, they were comfortably capable of conducting a 'company plus' airlift into, or out of, a contested landing zone while concurrently providing gunship and casualty evacuation support to the operation.

This significant improvement in operational effectiveness was in fact an outward expression of the growth of the rotary wing capability within the RAAF during this period. Not only did No 9 SQN develop more effective ways and means to provide troop airlifts and logistics support, but it was able to expand the roles performed by helicopters in theatre to encompass special operations, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), gunship fire support and information operations.

One lesson that was evident even before combat flying in Vietnam started was that the very few platforms on strength could not be used in direct combat roles due to the lack of armour plating and the paucity of replacement airframes and, more importantly, the limited numbers of replacement aircrews trained in air-ground operations. So it was therefore essential that the RAAF husband its rotary wing resources lest they be lost in ill-considered operations.

To its credit the unit was able to not only sustain its tasking in direct and indirect support of Vietnam operations, but developed a robust system of progressing junior aircrew to advanced stages of proficiency. Pilots were steadily progressed in stages to qualify as a Combat Co-pilot then on to Combat Captain, Flight Leader and finally to Mission Leader.

Later, when the No 9 Squadron Iroquois were modified as gunships, the proficiencies of Gunship Co-pilot to Gunship Captain to Gunship Flight Leader were also developed, while the proficiencies required for Mission Leader were expanded.

Each and every level required the pilot to learn and then demonstrate the skills, knowledge and aptitude needed for that particular proficiency. This development program was integrated with operational tasking, thereby minimising aircraft usage on training flights, thus maintaining high availability for both planned and short notice operational tasking.

The initial deployment to Vietnam was in reality only a minimalist capability. The eight B model Iroquois available to send into theatre had only a limited lift capacity of five equipped troops. In order to meet the Australian Task Force commanders requirements for troop and logistics airlift tasks, it was necessary to enlist the aid of an additional US Army Iroquois and crew as the standing duty CASEVAC helicopter.

While the RAAF's Iroquois still performed CASEVAC missions, the fact that a fully equipped US helicopter was on hand specifically for the task I feel probably contributed to the perception that the RAAF were reluctant to fly into insecure landing sites for CASEVAC missions. However, like many aspects of the RAAF's helicopter operations, CASEVAC arrangements were misunderstood by many commentators.

The CASEVAC role was in fact a function No 9 Squadron performed regularly. In the aftermath of the Battle of Long Tan for instance, seven helicopters of No 9 Squadron launched into darkness to bring out the wounded. While a US helicopter went into the landing zone with its landing lights on, illuminating the wounded, unwounded and the armoured personnel carriers (APCs) to any nearby enemy forces, the No 9 Squadron helicopters flew into the small LZ without lights as ordered by the ground commander.

It was a risky procedure in the era before NVGs, with only the residual light showing through the APC's hatches as guidance. However all

seven helicopters managed to land and take away the most severely wounded soldiers of 'D' Company.

When the RAAF was able to purchase the larger and more powerful H model Iroquois, it was able to increase the size of the detachment in Vietnam to 16 aircraft. This resulted in an ability to carry greater loads over longer distances. The increase in capability meant that from November 1970 the RAAF was able to take over the role of the duty CASEVAC helicopter for the Australian Task Force on a permanent basis. From June 1966 to May 1971, No 9 Squadron was to perform over 4300 medical evacuations.

The improved performance of the H model Iroquois also meant that the enduring problem of providing fire support on airlift operations could be addressed through the modification of several of these new platforms as gunships.

The development of an indigenous gunship capability was a significant game changer. Once No 9 Squadron was able to conduct both the troop lifts and the fire support 'in house', the ability of Australian forces to develop mutually beneficial TTPs became viable. This ability became particularly evident in special operations conducted in support of the many SAS patrols inserted/extracted by the squadron over the course of the war.

IROQUOIS UNLOAD

Throughout the Vietnam War, No 9 Squadron worked continually to develop new and innovative TTPs and capability to better support ground operations and to meet Australia's broader intent in Vietnam. Rarely numbering more than 16 airframes the unit flew 237 424 sorties

over the course of their five year deployment with an average serviceability rate of 84.05 per cent. An outstanding effort by both air and ground crew demonstrating the RAAF's ability to mount and sustain its rotary wing capability in the most extreme of operational environments.

An effort though which cost the lives of four 9 SQN personnel.

Bomber Operations - CANBERRA

The final flying squadron to be sent to Vietnam was No 2 SQN's Canberra bombers in April 1967. Unlike the Caribous and the Iroquois, the Canberra bomber was not new to Air Force service, and was in fact in the twilight of its life of type. Prior to arriving in Vietnam, No 2 Squadron had been based at RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia, as part of the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve, and while it had seen limited service against communist insurgents in the nine years in the region, the SQN had been largely employed on training and exercises activities.

No 2 SQN was not based at Vung Tao with the other RAAF units, but at Phan Rang Air Base as part of the USAF 7th Air Force's 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. Phan Rang was a relatively new base still under development at the time of 2 SQN impending arrival. So it had been necessary for the RAAF's No 5 Airfield Construction SQN to construct accommodation blocks, administration offices as well as equipment, FLT Line and maintenance facilities before No 2 SQN could arrive.

PHAN RANG - CONSTRUCTION

With a pressing deadline 5 ACS achieved an outstanding result in completing the 2 SQN facilities on time. The only complaint was that the sewage system never worked properly from the time the SQN arrived until it left.

In total eight Canberra aircraft formed the operational flights of 2 Squadron, while another four aircraft were retained at Butterworth to provide replacement aircraft as part of the maintenance cycle and to act as attrition spares.

PHAN RANG

The mature state of the Canberra capability resulted in No 2 SQN commencing operations within four days of its arrival at Phan Rang.

These first missions on 23 April set the pattern for the next four years of strike missions. Fully integrated into the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, the Canberra's operated alongside the Wing's B-57 and F-101 Aircraft, conducting a wide range of tasks. The long range of the Canberra meant that the missions it was employed extended to the north near the Demilitarised Zone to the very south.

Initially No 2 SQN was employed on what was known as 'Combat Sky Spot missions. Individual aircraft were directed over a target area at night by a radar ground controller and directed to release its bombload when the radar picture indicated the aircraft was over the aim point.

CANBERRA - BOMBS

Within a few months however, the SQN was increasingly employed on daylight precision strike missions and at times on close air support tasks. In what was to become a hallmark of 2 SQN's operations the unit conducted constant analysis of every mission in order to refine bombing accuracy. This analysis was backed up by close attention to the calibration of the aircraft's instrument and bombing systems. Collectively the extreme focus put on accuracy paid dividends.

Using bombsights only slightly improved on those of WWII, the unit achieved remarkable results – with a good crew being able to accurately put a bombload along canal banks, narrow roads and bunker systems. Prior to arriving in Vietnam the crews were looking to bomb within 60 metres of their intended aim points. After constantly refining their systems and procedures the norm was approaching 20 metres for most crews.

Like the bombsights in use, the first tranche of bombs used by 2 SQN were in fact stock remaining from WWII. However as this stock was depleted, the SQN began to be supplied with American 750 lb bombs instead. As the new weapons were longer than the British bombs previously used, it was necessary to reduce the loads from eight bombs to six.

The targets of the SQN varied. Bomb Damage Assessments indicated that the unit was being directed against troops, bunkers, fortifications, river craft and crew served weapons such as mortars and artillery.

In total, the squadron flew over 11 900 combat missions at a cost of two aircraft and two crew killed in action.

On 3 November 1970, Canberra A84-231 failed to return from a Combat Sky Spot mission conducted well to the north of Phan Rang. While it was reported that the aircraft had released its bombs over the target area and had reported it was turning for home nothing more was known which might account for the aircraft's disappearance.

In 2009 the remains of the aircraft was located near in Quang Nam Province in a remote mountainous region. After a forensic examination of the site the remains of the two crew, PLTOFF Robert Carver and

FLGOFF Michael Herbert where located and repatriated to Australia. A study of the wreckage suggested that the aircraft had been hit by a SAM missile.

Effect on RAAF

The RAAF experience in Vietnam reinforced some of the lesson learned and retained from WWII and reminded the RAAF of several lessons which it had forgotten.

ENGINE MAINTENANCE

First was the enduring necessity for a mature equipped airbase operations capability. Both 9 & 35 SQN at Vung Tao and 2 SQN at Phan Rang required a substantial support network over and above normal SQN numbers to maintain operations. For example, No 2 SQN normal manning of 230 had to be increased to 280 in order to sustain operations and security.

C² DIAGRAM

Similarly at Vung Tao, the flying units were supplemented by No 1 Operational Support Unit, a movements control section, Air Operations Centre and a HQs element. All of which required periodic support from No 5 Airfield Construction SQN.

The C2 diagram of the RAAF forces circa 1967 provides some measure of the diversity of units required to sustain RAAF operations in theatre.

GROUND DEFENCE

Second lesson, and one which had been forgotten after WWII, was airfield security is vital and requires specialists to achieve it. When it was

appreciated in 1965 that the Air Force elements in Ubon and Vietnam required an enhanced protection force, it required nearly 11 months before a deployable airfield defence capability was available for service at Vung Tau. Prior to the arrival of the newly qualified Air Field Defence Guards, security was provided by ground and support staff, many of whom were only partially trained in ground defence and were working long shifts already.

FAC PILOT

Third lesson, and one like the ADGs, had to be relearned was the critical necessity for Forward Air Controllers to successful air-ground operations. When RAAF pilots began to be posted to US units as FACs it was first necessary to provide training either in theatre or at specialist schools in the US. The experience was without doubt beneficial to both the US and Australia. The RAAF was able to relearn an important role while the US was able to boost their FAC capability in theatre.

In a testament to the quality of the RAAF FACs of the 36 who served in the capacity, 15 were awarded DFCs, two received DSOs and six were mentioned in dispatches.

Conclusion

Today's seminar has in fact skimmed over what was a complex RAAF deployment that spanned the years 1963 to 1975. There were operations with coalition partners, with Australian Army elements and Special Forces. Also vital to the war effort was the regular AME flights conducted by C-130 and No 3 HOSP staff. There was also maritime patrol operations by Neptune aircraft as part of Operation TRIMDON, the

Neptunes were also able at one time to provide a rudimentary AEW&C capability out of Thailand.

So while I hope I have been able to cover some of the more significant elements of the RAAF experiences there are many I have not been able to give true justice to.

I would just like to close with an image of the last three Australian servicemen in Vietnam.

When Australia withdrew its forces from Vietnam during 1971-2 it did so in the expectation of successful negotiations between the US and North Vietnamese. The resulting settlement did not last.

In 1975 the North successfully invaded the South and the Vietnam we know today was born out of the result.

EVAC FLT

As the North closed in on Saigon, RAAF C-130 aircraft conducted a number of evacuations of orphans and Australian Embassy staff.

When what was supposed to be the last C-130 was due to depart it was found to be overloaded. It required the offloading of the four man ADG security section. Fortunately a spare C-130 was circling just off the coast as a contingency measure. Here you see three ADGs waiting somewhat pensively to see who arrived at the airfield first – the North Vietnamese or the RAAF C-130.

ADG

Fortunately, the RAAF got in first.

Thank you.