

ALBATROSS TO BLACK HAWK



A HISTORY OF RAAF NO. 9 SQUADRON





Herewith, a collection of historical words and images that reveal some of the joys and tragedies experienced from operating seaplanes, float planes and single-engine jet helicopters in the most harsh and challenging aviation environments in peace and war during No. 9 Squadron's forty seven years' of Royal Australian Air Force service.

For authenticity, the various formats of members' contributions have not been altered.

Prepared to enhance Australian Air Force history and for the benefit of ex No. 9 Squadron RAAF service personnel, families, descendants and affiliates.

Graeme Chalmers

Author and Researcher

No. 9 Squadron RAAF Association Inc. 11 November 2015



Albatross to Black Hawk: A History of RAAF No. 9 Squadron

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Much of the various content/media is historically important and some is unique.

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SYNOPSIS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF 9 SQUADRON

THE THREE ERAS

1925 – 1944

1962 – 1971

1972 - 1989

PREAMBLE

No. 9 Squadron RAAF and its precursor Units were on the RAAF Order of Battle during three specific periods or 'eras'.

Part of the first era was 1925 until 1936 (the HMAS Albatross period). The precursor Unit was No.101 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF. During April 1926, six Seagull Mk III amphibians arrived by ship (A9-1 to A9-6) and were erected and test flown at RAAF Point Cook then allotted to 101 FC Flight which relocated to Bowen, QLD in August 1926. On 23 February 1928, RAN sea-plane carrier HMAS ALBATROSS was launched at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney and commissioned at Sydney on 29 January 1939. No.101 FC Flight RAAF (personnel and stores) that had recently returned from Bowen, QLD to Point Cook, embarked on HMAS ALBATROSS on Port Phillip Bay on 21 February 1929.

Note. The ALBATROSS' RAN and RAAF very close association generated production of variations of the flying Unit's crest (or patch) that

symbolically embodied the Naval crown and the albatross seabird.

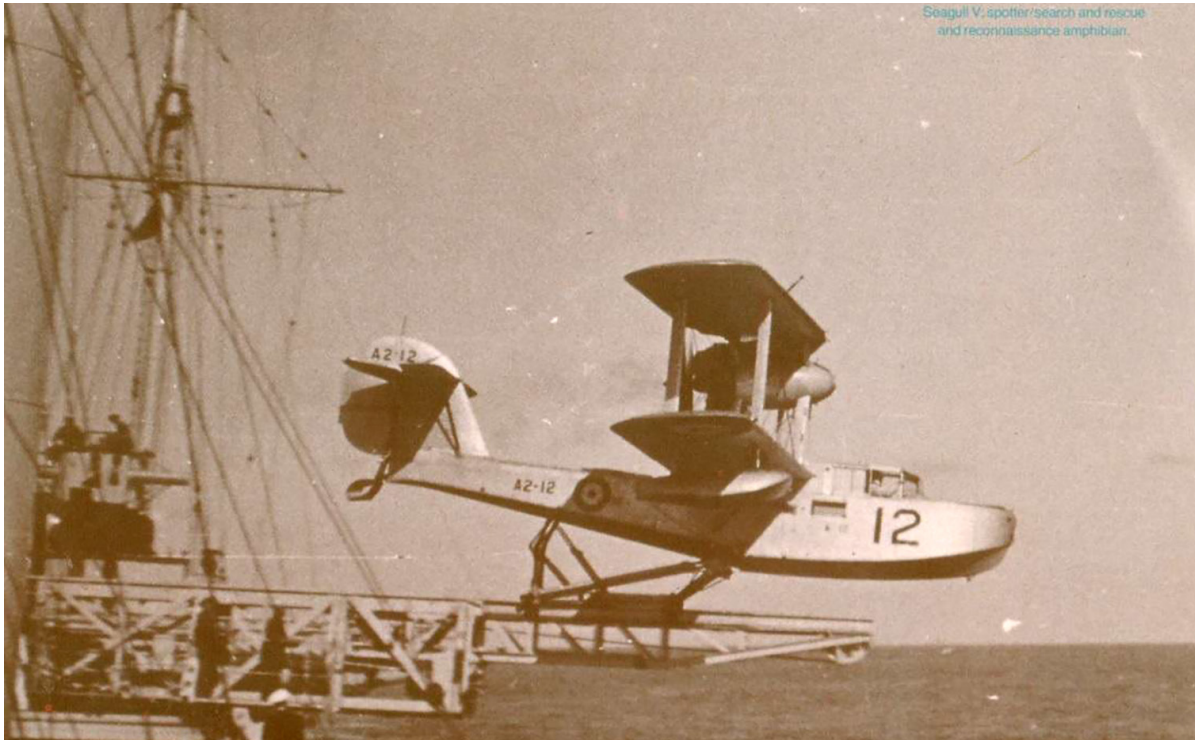
On 20 April 1936, No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF formed from No. 101 (Fleet Co-operation) Flight at Richmond, NSW and in January 1939, No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF was formed from No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF.

The second part of the first era was 1937 until 1944. On 01 January 1939, No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF was formed from No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron (Seagull V, metal hulled seaplane).

At the 1939 outbreak of WW II when flying from many RAN cruisers, No. 9 FC Squadron RAAF Detachments¹ commenced patrols against the Germans in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

This conduct continued until 1942 in these

1. No 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadron Detachment personnel were the first RAAF elements to see active service in WW II.



No. 9 FC Squadron RAAF Detachment flying from a RAN cruiser



regions and in actions as shown on the Squadron Battle Honours and reflects the sinking of a number of RAN warships with large losses of Australian servicemen. During the period January 1943 until November 1944, the Squadron was located at Bowen, QLD and conducted reconnaissance operations of the Far North Queensland region.

The second era was the period 1962 until 1971. No 9 Squadron RAAF was equipped with Iroquois helicopters and committed to the Vietnam war for over 5 years. The advance party arrived at Vung Tau on 3 May 1966, followed by the main part of the Squadron on 12 June 1966. Various, RAN and RNZAF pilots were posted to fly with No. 9 Squadron RAAF in SVN.

Progressively during December 1971, the Squadron redeployed from Vung Tau, SVN to its new home at RAAF Base Amberley in South East Queensland about 50 km from the capital city of Brisbane. Air and sea transport was used including one HMAS SYDNEY voyage.

After maintenance and re-configuration, the choppers were flown off HMAS SYDNEY to Caloundra (north of Brisbane) where they landed, shut-down and re-grouped before flying



Australian detachment for the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

south to RAAF Base Amberley.

The third era was 1972 until 1989. For 17 years following the Squadron's arrival at RAAF Base Amberley and throughout Australia and neighbouring countries, it continued to provide utility rotary-wing support to the Australian Army, and SAR and national disaster/emergency responses for civilian communities. From July 1976, the Squadron also contributed aircraft and aircrew to the Australian helicopter detachment (four Iroquois) which formed part of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

In 1986 the Australian Government decided to transfer the RAAF battlefield helicopter capability to the Australian Army. During February 1988, No. 9 Squadron RAAF began to be

re-equipped with Sikorsky S-70A Black Hawk helicopters.

Upon converting to the new aircraft, the Squadron moved to Townsville where it was disbanded on 14 February 1989. The No. 9 Squadron RAAF's aircrew and aircraft were then used to form 'A' Squadron of the Australian Army's 5th Aviation Regiment as part of the Australian Government's new policy of placing battlefield helicopters under Army command.

Transfer of RAAF Battlefield Helicopters to the Australian Army²

In November 1986, the Chiefs of Staff Com-

2. Information provided (31 December 2014) by Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd), Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron RAAF for the period September 1987 - 14 February 1989.



Black Hawk A4-105 (twin long-range fuel tanks) near Ayers Rock in 1988

mittee (COSC) decided to transfer the RAAF Battlefield Helicopters from the RAAF to the Australian Army. All members of the RAAF helicopter community were bitterly disappointed with the decision. A Transfer Plan was developed in Canberra to implement the decision which envisaged that the transfer would commence with 9 SQN at the beginning of 1989. The transfer was complicated by the initial requirement to introduce the Black Hawk to service with 9 SQN and the need to relocate the Black Hawks to new purpose built facilities at RAAF Base Townsville.

The first Army members arrived at 9 SQN in mid-1987 and the first Black Hawk arrived in February 1988. By the end of the year six Black Hawks had been delivered and the Squadron

participated successfully in Exercise SWIFT EAGLE 88. Squadron members were very happy with the impressive performance of the new helicopter.

In November 1988 the Squadron conducted farewell 'end of an era' functions and ceremonies at Amberley. The Squadron Colours were 'laid up' in a poignant and moving Service at the Air Force Chapel at Point Cook. Six No. 9 SQN Black Hawks departed Amberley and headed north on 7 December 1988. After an overnight stay at Rockhampton, they arrived at Townsville in close formation for to fly over the city to mark their arrival. On 14 February 1989 the Squadron was transferred to the Army.

Although the transfer was most challenging for all concerned, Squadron members conduct-

ed themselves with great professionalism and teamwork to successfully deliver the transfer of a new capability to the Australian Army.

Redeployment of RAAF Iroquois and Black Hawk Helicopter Personnel

In 1991, Chief of the Air Staff, AM Ray Funnell AC redeployed the 300 or so ex No. 9 Squadron RAAF personnel from 5AVNREGT to Air Force Units.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Air Force was created by Government on 31 March 1921, assuming the prefix of 'Royal' a few months later. Before 1921 the Australian Flying Corps of the Army was the main proponent of military aviation in Australia, with considerable initiative shown by the RAN in operating aircraft from warships. This initiative faltered in 1923, but some experience was gained using aircraft to support hydrographic survey of the Great Barrier Reef off the far north coast of Queensland (FNQ).

Warships and Seaplanes. In 1925, the Government opted to build a seaplane carrier for the

Navy and ordered 6 Seagull Mk. III aircraft to equip the vessel.

No. 101 Fleet Co-operation Flight RAAF (101 FC FLT) was formed at Point Cook, VIC on 01 July 1925 to operate these aircraft when delivered in 1926. Three aircraft were deployed to Bowen, QLD in late August 1926 and began land-based operations supporting the Great Barrier Reef Survey.

HMAS ALBATROSS – Operational Period. The seaplane tender HMAS ALBATROSS was launched on 23 February 1928 and was commissioned on 23 January 1929 in Sydney. The land-based Seagull Mk. III operations continued from Bowen, QLD until 101 FC FLT embarked on HMAS ALBATROSS with 6 Seagull Mk. III aircraft on 25 February 1929.

101 FC FLT operated from ALBATROSS – with some time at RAAF Base Richmond NSW – until the 26 April 1933 date when HMAS ALBATROSS was 'paid off' into reserve due to RAN cruisers having developed a seaplane operating capability.

The RAAF ordered 24 Seagull Mk. V aircraft in 1934 to perform fleet co-operation and other roles, these aircraft having a metal hull and were strengthened for catapult launching.



No. 5 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF (5 FC SQN) was formed from 101 FLT at Richmond, NSW on 23 April 1936 and continued to operate Seagull Mk. 5 aircraft until retitled No. 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF (9 FC SQN) on 01 January 1939. 9 FC SQN moved from Richmond to Rathmines, NSW at end of 1939 and then relocated to Bowen airfield with 12 aircraft in January 1943, continuing to operate aircraft detachments on Navy cruisers and conducting anti-submarine patrols plus search and rescue duties around the Great Barrier Reef. 9 FC SQN redeployed to Rathmines at end of 1944 for disbandment, due to the RAN terminating seaplane operations from its remaining cruisers.

No. 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF elements were involved in many historic naval battles during WW II, losing personnel and aircraft during military actions that resulted in the sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II, HMAS PERTH and HMAS CANBERRA.

Meanwhile, around mid-1942, upgrading began of the pre-WW2 101FLT rudimentary amphibian aircraft facilities on the Bowen foreshore to create a Flying Boat Base to host Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons (Catalina aircraft) plus No. 1 Flying Boat Maintenance Unit. But both 11SQN and 20SQN were disbanded early in 1946 as RAAF involvement at Bowen began winding down.

So in those few short years a seaplane capability had been established that included operations from RAN Cruisers and then this progressively ceased just prior to and within the year of the end of World War II (Disbanded at Rathmines, NSW on 31 December 1944). Hence, that was the introduction for No. 9 Squadron RAAF primarily through one precursor Unit, No.

9 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF.

The history of No. 9 Squadron RAAF and its precursor Units can be clearly and successfully documented in three distinct 'eras' of the overall Squadrons' operational 'lives'. Accordingly, the three 'eras' arrangement defines much of the structure for this history and these are detailed here and presented more generally throughout the No. 9 Squadron parts of the document.

THE THREE ERAS OF NO. 9 SQUADRON RAAF AND PRECURSOR UNITS 1925 - 1989

1925 until 1944 (first era). This included the operational period(s) of No. 101 Fleet Co-operation Flight RAAF, Nos. 5 and 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadrons RAAF and the operational relationship with HMAS ALBATROSS during 1923 - 1933 (Seagull Mk. III and V aircraft) and, No. 9 FC Squadron operations from numerous RN, RAN and RNZN warships (Seagull Mk. V and Walrus aircraft).

1961 until 1971 (second era). The No. 9 Squadron RAAF and No. 5 Squadron RAAF operational and training period that employed the Bell Iroquois Utility helicopter, generally called the 'Huey'.

1972 until 1989 (third era). This period entailed No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois helicopter operations and the Sikorsky Black Hawk Utility Helicopter introduction into the RAAF and some operations. The final event was the No. 9 Squadron RAAF Disbandment on 14 February 1989 at Townsville.

Clearly, there were striking aviation and

technical differences during the three eras and situations included:

- naval support operational conduct employing seaplanes leading up to the end of World War II,
- the planning and introduction of jet engine utility helicopters into RAAF service from 1962, e.g. logistics, engineering and equipment supply under USA Foreign Military Sales arrangements,
- aircrew and technical tradesman training demands (undertaken by No. 5 Squadron RAAF at RAAF Base Fairbairn ACT),
- the 1966 deployment of No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois helicopters for combat operations in the Vietnam War, often called 'the helicopter war',
- introduction by No. 9 Squadron RAAF of the Black Hawk helicopter into RAAF / ADF service throughout 1988, and
- the squadron relocation to Townsville and its disbandment on 14 February 1989.

There were immense challenges to efficient and safe conduct for the No. 9 Squadron and associated personnel who flew, maintained and supported the air operations.

During the **first era**, challenges included severe maritime weather and environments, the difficult and dangerous ship-board activity itself and the available materials and components used in early versions of amphibian and seaplane aircraft such as canvas, wood and 'goop'. Also, there were limitations in communication and other aircraft and personal equipment and,

the actual observations and reporting of enemy shipping and engagement.

At the time of its allotment to combat operations in Vietnam War in June 1966, during the last five years of the **second era**, No. 9 Squadron RAAF was ill-equipped for the task at hand as recorded in the historical facts. Initially, operating eight UH-1B Iroquois helicopters, some daunting challenges were the SE Asian tropical weather with the monsoonal rain storms, high temperatures and humidity, flying at maximum all-up-weight (AUW) or with an authorisation to conduct flight above the Huey's OEM designated AUW and, conducting high AUW missions in the bush and jungle often into and out of small landing zones (LZ) or landing sites (LS). These were added to by the limitation of one on-board radio navigation aid and the requirement for night operations with medical evacuations ("Dustoff") of Australian, New Zealand, Vietnamese and US forces. Of significance was the high aircraft flying hour rate of effort (ROE) on a daily basis that generated exceptional maintenance and logistics demands on the squadron engineers, technical and non-technical tradesmen. Then, of course, there were the close encounters with the enemy when our Australian (AS) or New Zealand (NZ) soldiers were in contact with the enemy and sought helicopter fire support, re-supply of ammunition, 'dustoff', or all three.

The **third era** for No. 9 Squadron commenced at RAAF Base Amberley, QLD in late 1971 with a small advance party thence the arrival of the aircraft, equipment and some personnel from Vietnam in late December aboard HMAS SYDNEY. The third era officially concluded on the tarmac at the RAAF Base in Townsville on 14

February 1989 when No. 9 Squadron RAAF was disbanded and transferred its aircraft, personnel and equipment to the ARMY 5th Aviation Regiment, through 'The Transfer of Battlefield Helicopters to Army' arrangements.

All CO's Reports always included the Unit's Establishment and Strength of personnel for the month and at times CO's reports were presented as an Annex to the Details of Operations

COMMANDING OFFICERS' REPORTS AND OPERATIONS RECORDS

The Details of Operations (A51) for No. 9 Squadron RAAF's Second Era commitment in South Vietnam were most comprehensive with eleven columns on the page headed:

Air Force Orders (AFO) provided guidance for Unit Monthly Reports generally using Form A50 for Commanding Officers' Reports and Form A51 for the recording of squadrons' Operational Details. **First Era** naming on the forms was OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK; **Second Era** used DETAILS OF OPERATIONS and from 23 December 1971, UNIT HISTORY SHEET was used during No. 9 Squadron's **Third Era**.

- DATE
- AIRCRAFT #
- CREW
- SORTIES
- FLY TIME
- RNDS FIRED
- AREA-TYPE OF OPERATION
- PAX
- MEDEVACS
- FREIGHT

SECRET

DETAILS OF OPERATIONS

MONTH APRIL 1971 UNIT NO 9 SQUADRON SHEET NO 1

| DATE | AIRCRAFT NO | CREW | SORTIES | TIME | RDS FIRED | AREA OF OPERATION AND TYPE OF OPERATION | PAX | MED | FREIGHT LBS |
|----------|-------------|--------------------------------------|---------|------|-----------|--|-----|-----|-------------|
| 1 APR 71 | A2-703 | Redman Armstrong Datterman Eudwig | 22 | 7.40 | | Phuoc Tay Patrol Extraction Patrol Insertion Visual Recce Logistic Support Administration (Op) | 30 | | 8500 |
| " | A2-766 | Long Robbins Sibley Mannen | 23 | 6.30 | | " " Troop Positioning Patrol Extraction Patrol Insertion Logistic Support Administration (Op) | 48 | | 4900 |
| " | A2-723 | Fyers Ford Johnson Hadel | 20 | 6.15 | | " " Troop Positioning Patrol Insertion Visual Recce Logistic Support Administration (Op) Administration (RAAF) | 47 | | 3000 |
| " | A2-770 | Klitocher Fuller Vidler Starke | 5 | 3.10 | | " " Patrol Extraction Logistic Support Patrol Insertion | 9 | | 500 |
| " | A2-771 | Klitocher Fuller Vidler Starke | 10 | 2.25 | | " " Logistic Support Administration (Op) | 9 | | 3000 |
| " | A2-770 | Fuller Vidler Starke | 1 | .20 | | " " Administration (Op) | 1 | | |
| " | A2-378 | Batten VanLouvern Dazens Nepura | 16 | 3.45 | | " " Troop Positioning Logistic Support Administration (Op) | 28 | | 2000 |
| " | A2-379 | Hillhouse Brumby Hilland Mitche | 9 | 3.00 | | " " Administration (Op) | 28 | | |
| " | A2-376 | Cleak L. Bishop Orzech Griffith | 4 | 1.20 | | " " " (RAAF) | 6 | | |
| " | A2-149 | Wittman Wilson Moran Gilboy | 6 | 4.45 | 200 | " " Gunship Ops | | | |
| " | A2-772 | Goodall Peters Rowley Millack | 6 | 4.45 | 600 | " " " " | | | |
| " | A2-383 | Freedman Duff Pinkerton Colloy | 3 | 1.30 | 1000 | " " " " | | | |
| " | A2-833 | Bishop | 1 | .20 | | " " Air Test | | | |

SECRET

Example of a 9 SQN A51 from April 1971

SYMBOLY



NUNQUAM NON PARATUS: Never unprepared. The Naval Crown within the crest reflected the strong association of No. 9 Squadron RAAF with the Navy with clear examples shown above and below:



Navies, Armies and Air Forces are essentially mother organisations and military personnel usually relate more so to units with which they served. Historically, symbols of various forms have been adopted as a means of identifying units in battle and these usually become revered icons that instil Unit spirit.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NO. 9 SQUADRON CREST

101 FLT created its own crest but it was never accorded official recognition by the Sovereign. In 1936, when 101 FLT became 5 Squadron, a unit crest was designed, which was approved officially in 1939 for 9 Squadron after the unit number was changed from 5 Squadron in 1939.

The Black Browed Albatross breeds mainly in the Falkland Islands in the Atlantic Ocean east of Argentina about 52 degrees south. The Albatross wanders the southern oceans, usually at or below the sub-tropics. It mates for life and returns to the same nest. Thus, the head of the Albatross on the 9 Squadron crest denotes loyalty.

101 FLT became No. 5 Squadron (5SQN) in 1936 and a formal Unit Crest was designed, this becoming the Official Crest for No. 9 Squadron (9SQN) soon after the Unit number was changed in 1939.

The RAAF units' association with HMAS ALBATROSS and the RAN generated variations of the unit crest that symbolically embodied the Naval Crown and albatross seabird. This symbolism was the centrepiece for all subsequent RAAF Fleet Co-operation Units until disbandment of No. 9 FC SQN RAAF in December 1944. The symbology 'came alive' again in 1962 when



VIDEMUS NEC VIDEMUR:
We see without being seen

No. 9 Squadron RAAF was reformed and awarded a close copy of the original unit crest in 1963 shown here.

The ship's bell from HMAS ALBATROSS (see image on the following page) was presented to 101 Flight by Captain C. J. Pope, RAN when the vessel was paid off into the reserve in 1933. Following a number of custodial RAAF units, it was presented to Royal Australian Naval Air Station HMAS Albatross in January 1950. The sacred bell, pictured below, is now an Australian Heritage Item and reposes in the Chapel at Nowra. The Chief of Navy has graciously approved its use in No. 9 Squadron Association commemorative proceedings.



The ship's bell from HMAS ALBATROSS used in No. 9 Squadron Association commemorative proceedings

THE NO. 9 SQUADRON STANDARD

Military Standards or Ensigns – Origin

Although lost in antiquity, it is known that the Assyrians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all had ensigns and standards that were revered symbols. Also, Standards have been used by British Forces for some centuries. Enshrined on the Standard are the battle honours recording the proud tradition of the Unit concerned and constituting a memorial to those whom have gone before, thus contributing to the Unit tradition.

RAAF Standards or Ensigns

Australian military Unit's Battle Honours are reverently recorded on a Unit's Standard.

Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Operational Squadrons qualify for consideration of The Standard after 25 years of service or having earned the Sovereign's appreciation for especially outstanding operations.

No. 9 Squadron RAAF – Squadron Standard

The Standard was presented by His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, AIRMSHL Sir Colin Hannah KCMG, KBE, CB, KStJ, during a Ceremony at RAAF Base Amberley, QLD on 21May 1975.

The Standard is a fringed and tasselled silk-en banner in Royal Air Force blue, mounted on a pike surmounted by a Golden Eagle. It has a decorative border of roses, thistles, shamrocks, leeks and wattle.

In the centre is the Squadron Crest portraying an Albatross head encircled by the naval crown. The motto is VIDEMUS NEC VIDEMUR (to see and not be seen). White scrolls on each are inscribed with the battle honours of the Squadron (see image on the following page).

Past No. 9 Squadron personnel and families would regard the Squadron Standard as the pre-eminent item of Squadron/Unit Symbolology.

Additionally, there are 8 Battle Honours on the No. 9 Squadron Standard although the Unit participated in a number of actions embarked on warships that were accorded other Battle Honours not reflected on the Standard. Some of these actions involved the loss of aircraft and personnel.

THE NO. 9 SQUADRON STANDARD



**A moth-eaten rag on a worm-eaten pole
It does not look likely to stir a man's soul;
'Tis the deeds that were done 'neath the moth-eaten rag
when the pole was a staff and the rag was a flag.**

— Sir Edward Hamley

The No. 9 Squadron RAAF Standard presented by His Excellency the Governor of Queensland, AIRMSHL Sir Colin Hannah KCMG, KBE, CB, KStJ, during a Ceremony at RAAF Base Amberley, QLD on 21 May 1975

PART 1

THE FIRST ERA, 1925 – DECEMBER 1944



Group portrait of five flight engineers (corporals) of 9 Squadron, and one naval rating (sitting right) who are responsible for the preparation and maintenance of HMAS Australia's Walrus (Seagull V), Amphibian aircraft (circa 1942). Identified, standing left, 34572 Corporal Raymond John Bennett No 9 Squadron, RAAF.

THE FIRST ERA, 1925 – 1944

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 1 July 1925 | RAAF No. 101 (Fleet Co-operation) Flight formed at RAAF Point Cook, VIC (relocated to Richmond, NSW in October 1925) |
| August 1926 | No. 101 FC FLT moved to Bowen, QLD (from Richmond) |
| 23 February 1928 | Operations with HMAS ALBATROSS 23 February 1928 until 26 April 1933 (paid-off) |
| 20 April 1936 | No. 5 Fleet Co-operation Squadron formed from No. 101 Fleet Co-operation Flight |
| August 1936 | No. 101 FC FLT re-named No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron |
| 1 January 1939 | No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron formed from No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron |
| 9 January 1941 | No. 5 Squadron reformed at Laverton, VIC as 5 Army Co-operation Squadron equipped with Wirraway aircraft and disbanded at Pearce, WA on 18 October 1946 |
| 31 December 1944 | No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron disbanded at Rathmines, NSW |

THE AIRCRAFT OPERATED, INCLUDING DESIGN AND TECHNICAL DETAILS

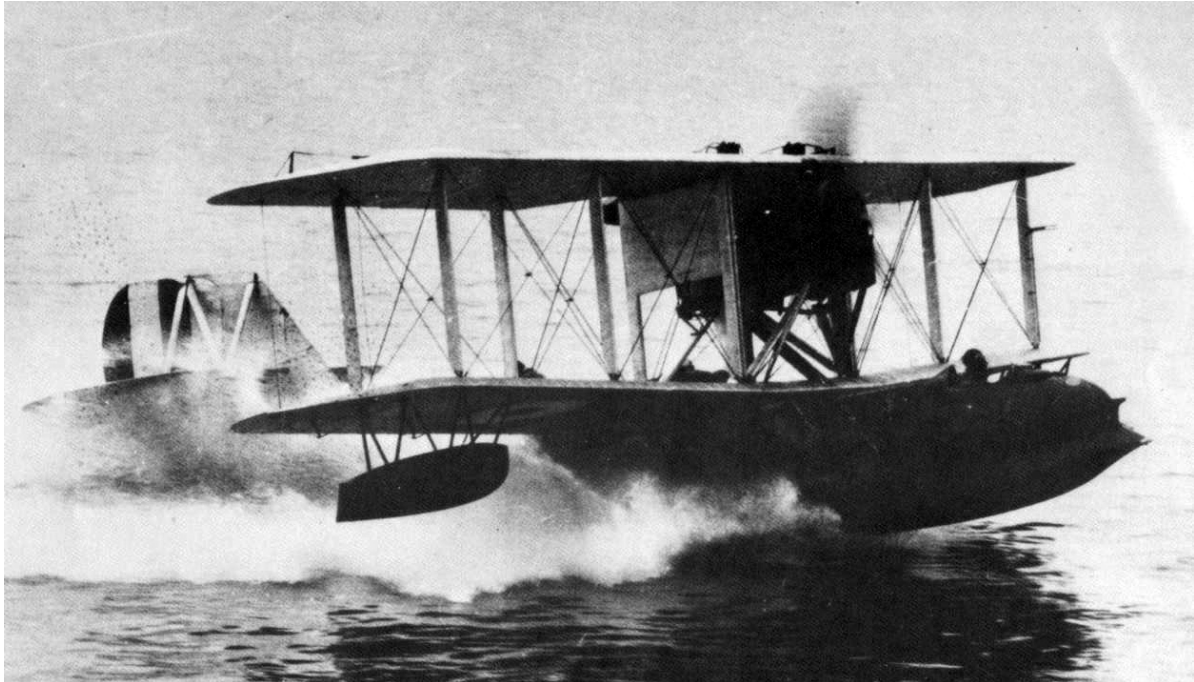
The three aircraft types operated were Seagull III, Seagull V and Walrus. The RAAF identified this generic family as Seagull, whereas British forces termed them Walrus. At times, replacement aircraft were borrowed from other forces, hence intermingling of the aircraft terminology.

The earlier Seagull III had a propeller forward of the engine and the aircraft was lowered and recovered from the sea by a shipboard crane. The Seagull V had a pusher propeller and was strengthened for catapult launch, although still requiring recovery onboard ship by crane.

As can be seen at the next images, Seagull III (A9 designation) and Seagull V (A2 designation)

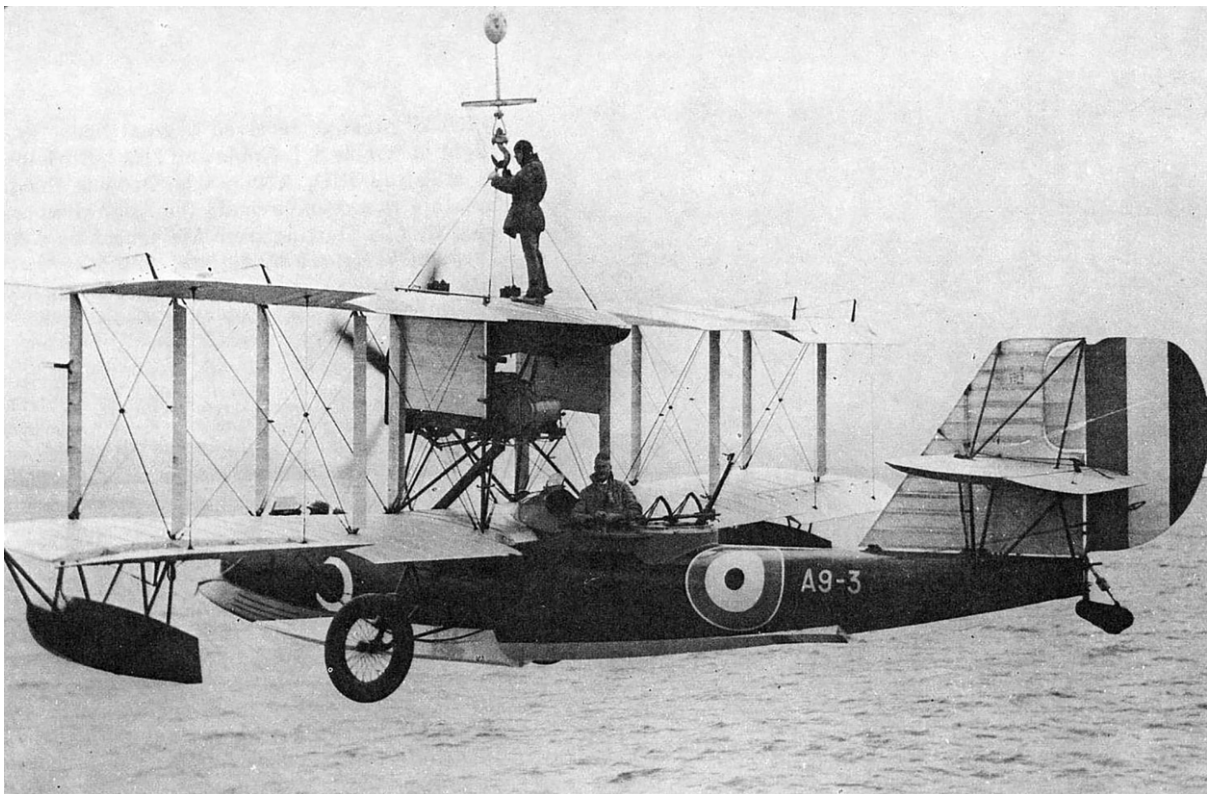
were markedly different aircraft. 24 Seagull V were built especially for the RAAF and all had silver livery as clearly depicted in the following third image.

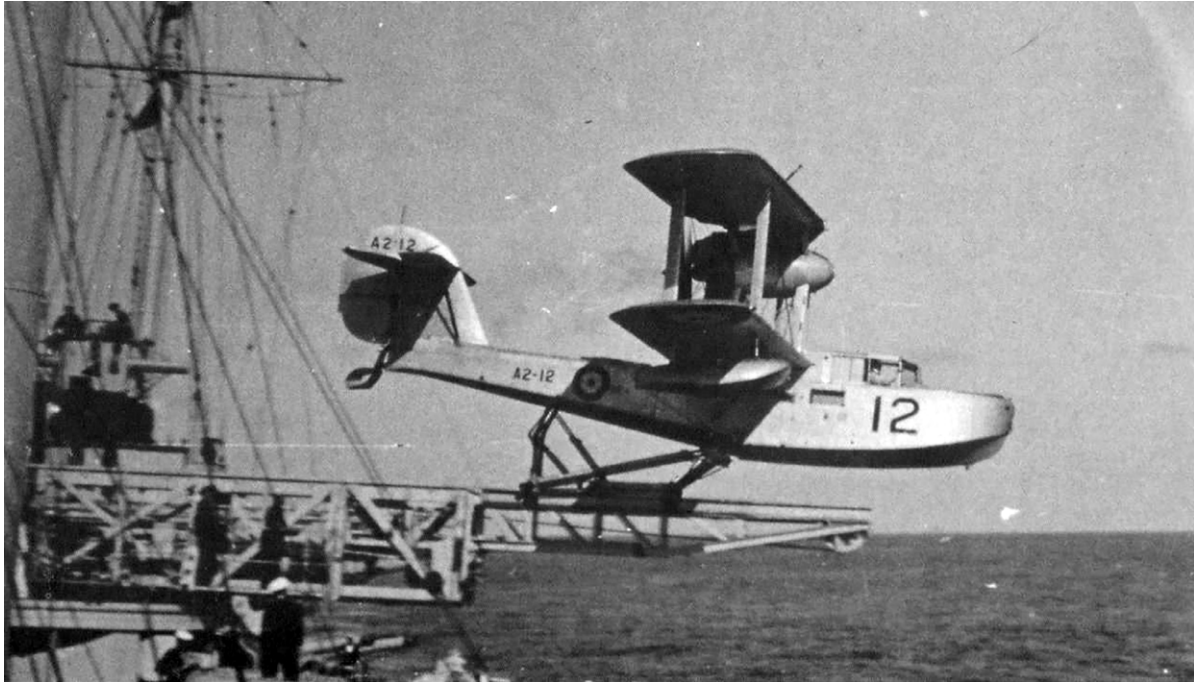
A2-4 had historically significant operational service with 9FC SQN between 1937 and 1944 on HMAS AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY and PERTH. It became VH-ALB from 1960-1972 and was seen airborne in the early 1960's in light blue livery. It was then privately owned, suffered damage during a forced landing in 1970 and was finally traded with the RAF Museum for a Spitfire (sadly forfeiting some very significant 9SQN historical value). Unfortunately, some historical accuracy had also been sacrificed through painting of the aircraft in an RAF camouflage livery that was inappropriate for Seagull Vs which were only operated by the RAAF. The forward mounted machine gun is not apparent in any photogra-



Above: Seagull III (propeller forward of engine)

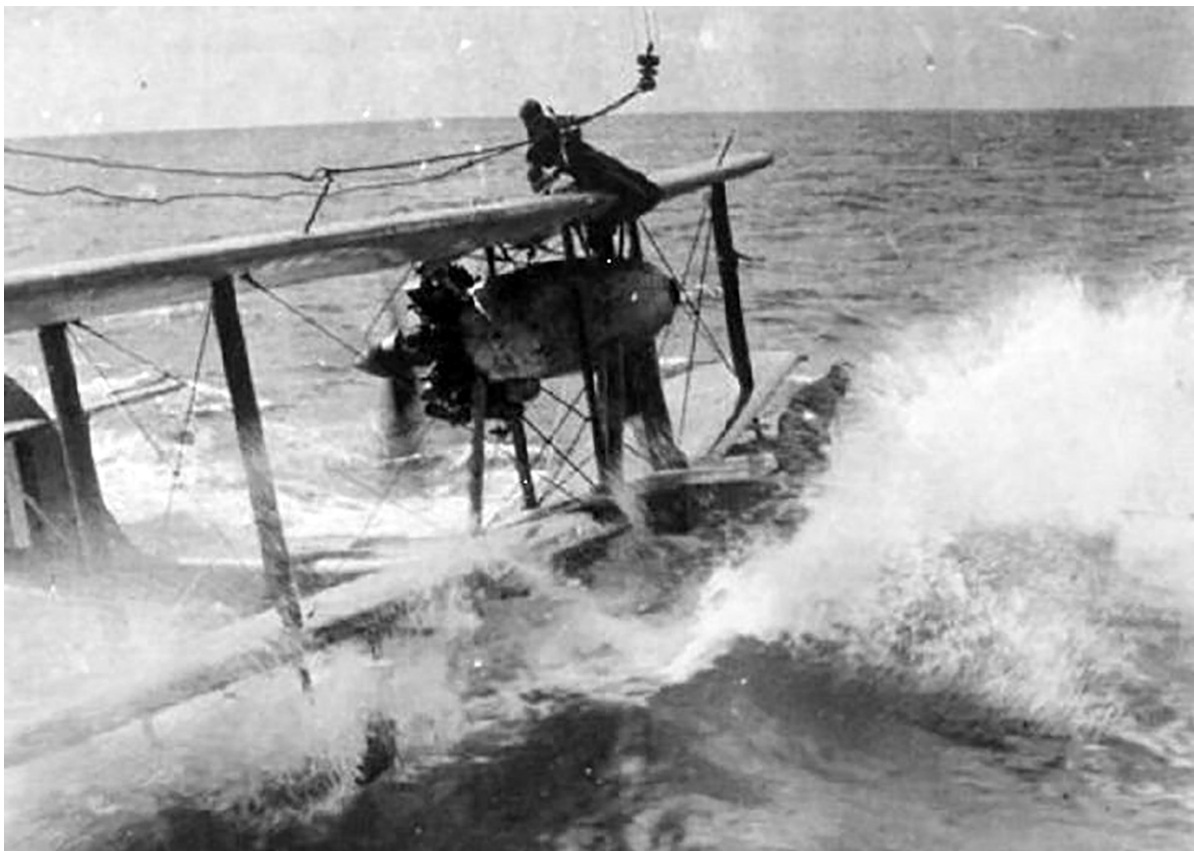
Below: The Seagull Mk. III was lowered to, and recovered from the sea, by shipboard crane





Above: Seagull V (propeller aft of engine)

Below: Recovery of a Walrus aircraft



phy of Seagull Vs viewed in Australian archives although some British aircraft were so armed.

Following the initial purchase of 24 Seagull Vs, the British decided to manufacture the aircraft for their own needs and termed it the Walrus with differing versions being produced. The RAAF ultimately acquired 27 Walrus aircraft which were operated by 13 different Units with some being replacements for Seagull V aircraft losses by No. 9 SQN. Walruses operated by the RAAF mostly had RAF/RN livery and retained the aircraft registration numbers allotted by those Services.

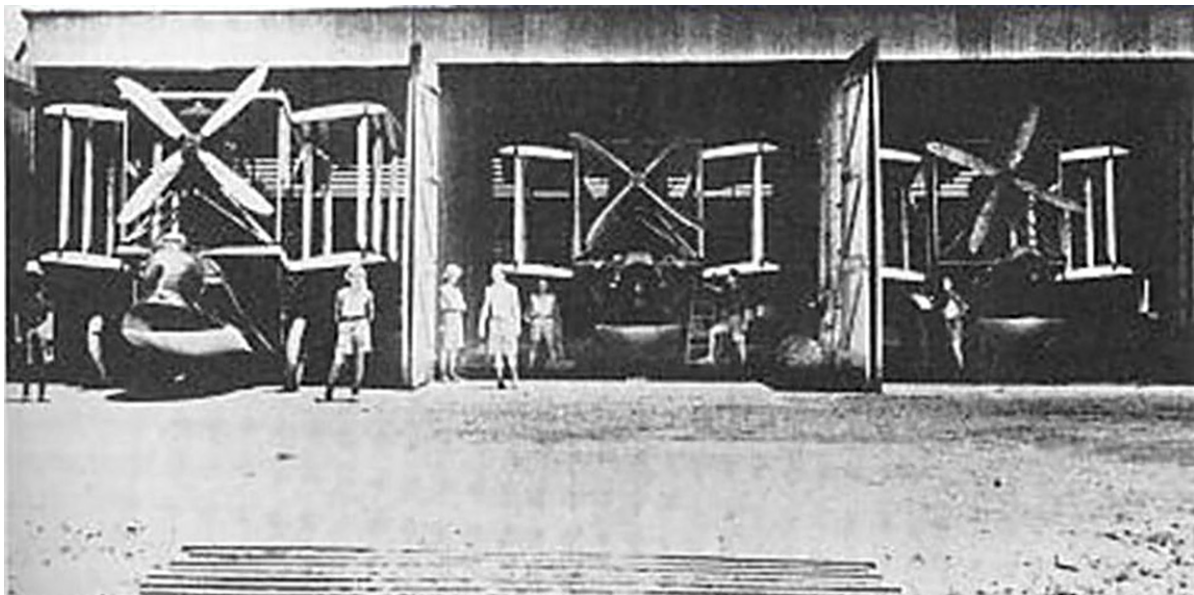
There are 8 Battle Honours on the No.9 Squadron Standard, although the Unit participated in a number of actions while embarked on warships that were accorded other Battle Honours not reflected on the Standard. Some of these actions involved loss of aircraft and personnel. Overall, Nos. 101 Flight and 9 Squadron

existed variously for 47 years as operational units of the Royal Australian Air Force.

THE THREE ERAS OF NO. 9 SQUADRON RAAF COMMENCED WITH NO. 101 FC FLT RAAF

No. 101 Fleet Co-operation Flight (101 FC FLT) RAAF was formed at Point Cook, Victoria, on 01 July 1925 to operate three of the 6 Seagull Mk. III seaplanes ordered by the Government. Following arrival by ship in April 1926, the six Seagull Mk III amphibians (A9-1 to A9-6) were erected and test flown at RAAF Point Cook and allotted to 101 FC FLT. Three of these aircraft were deployed to Bowen, QLD in August 1926 and subsequently in that month, No. 101 FC FLT began land-based operations supporting the Great Barrier Reef survey.

No. 101 FC FLT RAAF used the Yacht Club on the foreshore as a base. Also, a hangar-like 3



101 Flight foreshore hangarage at Bowen, QLD – Seagull Mk. III aircraft

bay shed was built to accommodate three aircraft with their wings folded. Adjacent working facilities were also established.

Operational Control and Crewing. In January 1928, Cabinet declined the continuation of the RAN Fleet Air Arm. RAAF was to provide the aircraft pilots and maintenance personnel for the new seaplane carrier with the RAN to provide observers and telegraphists although naval officers, until the 1930's, could still undertake pilot training.

This explains the subsequent RAAF and RAN manning for the various ships' and aircraft detachments. Navy had Operational Control of the embarked RAAF aircraft.

launched at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney on 23 February 1928 and land-based Seagull Mk. III operations continued from Bowen un-

til December that year. HMAS ALBATROSS was commissioned in Sydney on 23 January 1929.

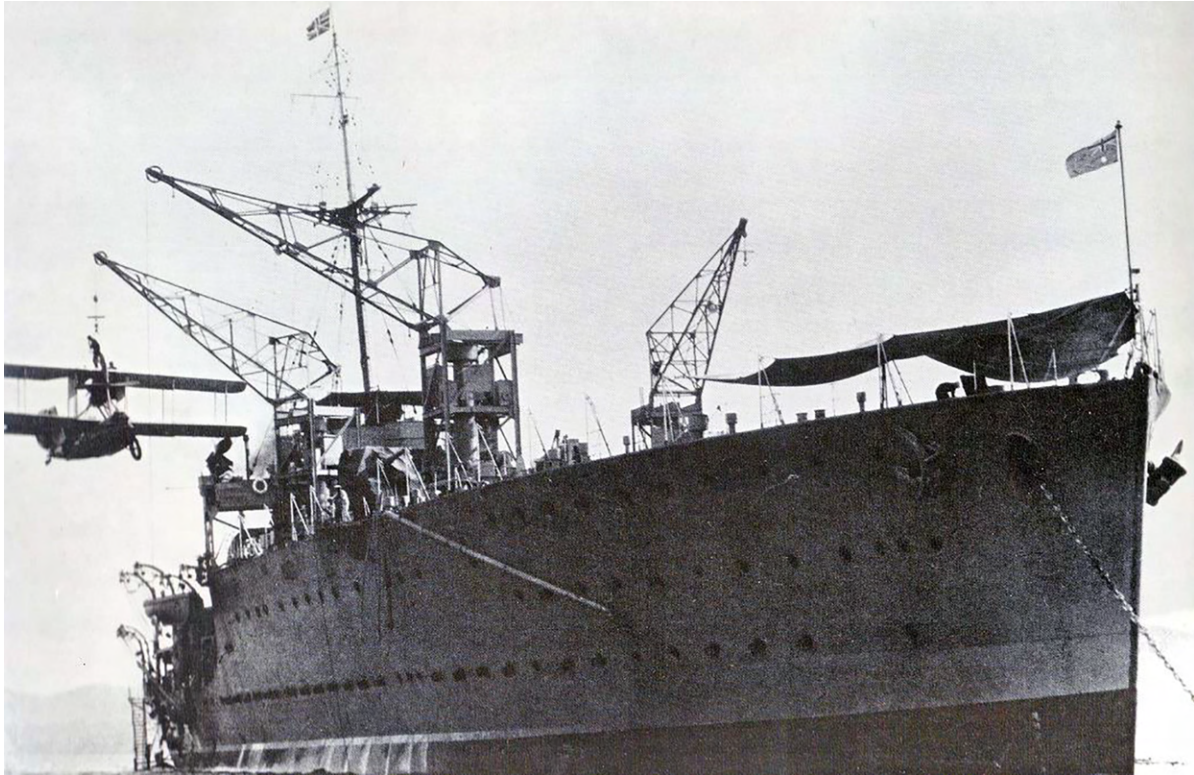
101 FC Flight (personnel and stores) which had returned from Bowen, QLD to Point Cook, VIC embarked on HMAS ALBATROSS on Port Phillip Bay on 21 February 1929. At Geelong, on 25 February 1929, the six Seagull Mk. III amphibian aircraft were hoisted aboard HMAS ALBATROSS.

The Flight operated from HMAS ALBATROSS over some four years (1929 - 1933) with some time at RAAF Base Richmond, NSW until 23 April 1933, when the ship was paid off into the Reserve Fleet reserve due to RAN cruisers having developed a seaplane operating capability. No. 5 Fleet Co-operation Squadron, RAAF.

The Unit was formed from 101FLT at Richmond, NSW on 23 April 1936 and continued to



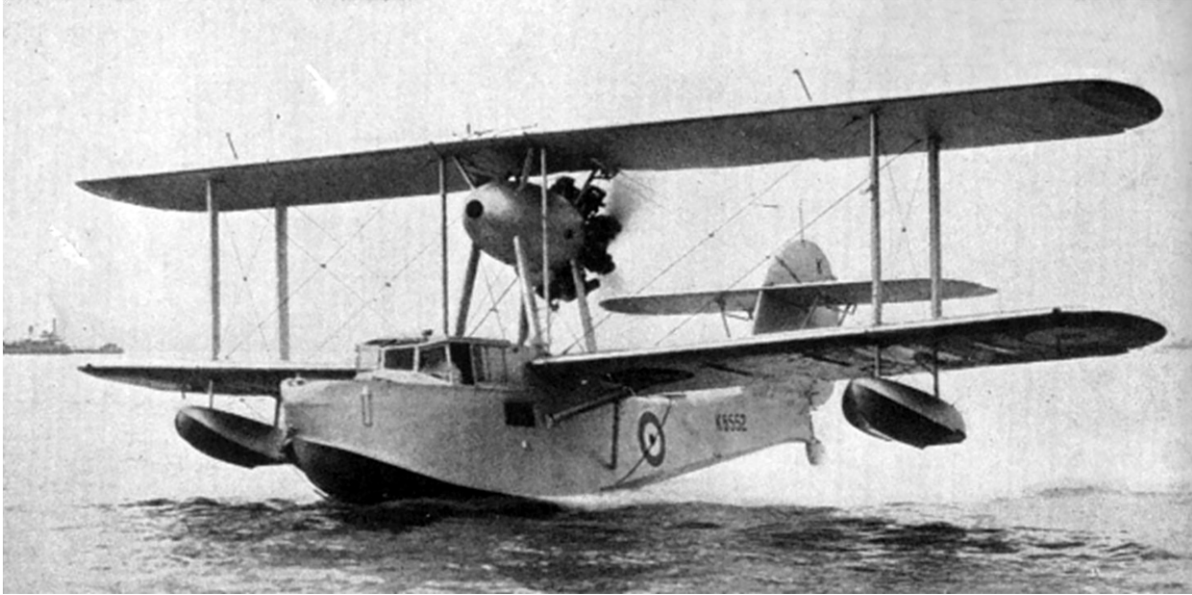
HMAS ALBATROSS: Launched 23 February 1928; paid off 26 April 1933. She was laid up for five years within Sydney Harbour at Garden Island and on 19 April 1938 was accepted by the Admiralty as part payment towards the new cruiser HMAS HOBART; in October 1938 commissioned into the Royal Navy as HMS ALBATROSS.



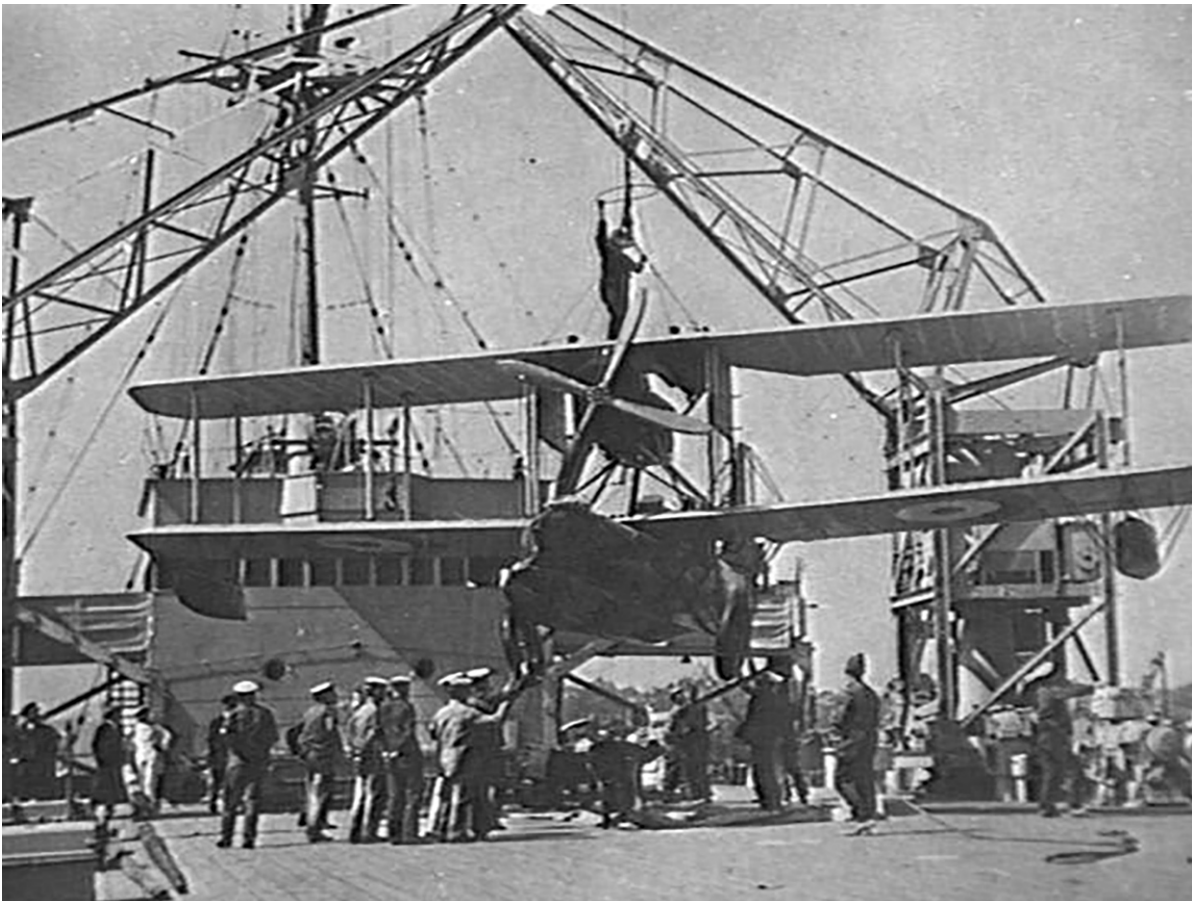
HMAS ALBATROSS and Seagull Mk. III seaplane



Seagull Mk. V seaplane



Walrus Amphibian. The RAAF identified the generic family as 'Seagull' whereas British forces termed them 'Walrus'. At times, replacement aircraft were borrowed from other forces, hence intermingling of the aircraft terminology.



1937 UNTIL 31 DECEMBER 1944
NO. 5 AND NO. 9 (FLEET CO-OPERATION) SQUADRONS RAAF

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| From 1936 | All RAN cruisers HMAS HOBART, HMAS SYDNEY, HMAS PERTH, HMAS AUSTRALIA and HMAS CANBERRA equipped with Seagull V amphibian aircraft (metal hull) |
| 1937 - 1939 | No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron (established from 101 FC Flight) continued Naval Support from RAN heavy cruisers |
| 23 February 1928 | Operations with HMAS ALBATROSS 23 February 1928 until 26 April 1933 (paid-off) |
| 1 January 1939 | No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron was formed from No. 5 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron; the Squadron Headquarters was stationed at Richmond in late 1939. |
| 1939 | At the outbreak of WW II and from many RAN cruisers, No. 9 FC Squadron Detachments* commenced patrols against the Germans in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans * No. 9 FC Squadron Detachment personnel were the first RAAF elements to see active service in WW II |
| December 1939 | No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron relocated to Rathmines, NSW |
| June 1939 - 1942 | Detachments operated from HMAS HOBART, HMAS SYDNEY, HMAS PERTH, HMAS AUSTRALIA and HMAS CANBERRA in regions and in actions as shown on the Squadron Battle Honours |
| 25 Sep 1940 | Three Detachment members lost their lives due to enemy action -Dakar, Senegal, West Africa |
| 20 Nov 1941 | The sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II by German Raider 'Kormoran' near Shark Bay, WA. Eight Detachment members lost their lives. |
| 01 Mar 1942 | Four Detachment members on HMAS PERTH were KIA during enemy action in the 'Battle of the Sunda Strait', Java, Netherlands East Indies. |
| 09 Aug 1942 | HMAS CANBERRA was sunk during the 'Battle of Savo Island' with five Detachment members losing their lives. |
| 14 Sep 1944 | Detachment member LAC Ernest George Toe died in captivity post the 'Battle of the Sunda Strait' |
| Jan 1943 - Nov 1944 | The Squadron was located at Bowen, QLD conducting reconnaissance operations of the Far North Queensland region |
| circa 25 Oct 1944 | Walrus X 9559 was destroyed on the water from enemy action. Two crew on board were executed ashore near Karasau Island, PNG while one other died of wounds - (Pilot Officer E. Walter BERNIE, Pilot, RAAF / Temporary Captain Morris EVENSEN, Air Liaison Officer, AIF / Warrant Officer Joseph BROWN, Aircrew, RAAF) |
| 31 December 1944 | No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron was disbanded after Naval Air Strategy changed. |

operate Seagull Mk. V aircraft until retitled No. 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadron RAAF on 01 January 1939.

No. 9 FC SQN moved from RAAF Richmond to Rathmines, NSW at the end of 1939 and then relocated to Bowen airfield with 12 aircraft in January 1943, continuing to operate aircraft detachments on Navy cruisers and conducting anti-submarine patrols plus search and rescue duties around the Great Barrier Reef until November 1944.

No 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF redeployed to Rathmines at the end of 1944 for disbandment (31 December 1944), due to the RAN terminating seaplane operations from its remaining cruisers.

Around mid-1942, upgrading began of the pre-WW2 101FLT rudimentary amphibian aircraft facilities on the Bowen foreshore to create a Flying Boat Base hosting Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons operating Catalina aircraft, plus No. 1 Flying Boat Maintenance Unit. Both 11SQN and 20SQN were subsequently disbanded early in 1946, as RAAF involvement at Bowen began winding down.

No. 5 and No. 9 Fleet Co-operation Squadrons RAAF - OPERATIONS

Unit History Sheets or equivalent reports on operations for the period 1933 - 1944 were sourced from the Office of Air Force History. These can be accessed from the website at: 9sqn.com.au/ORB

GEORGE MOORE MASON

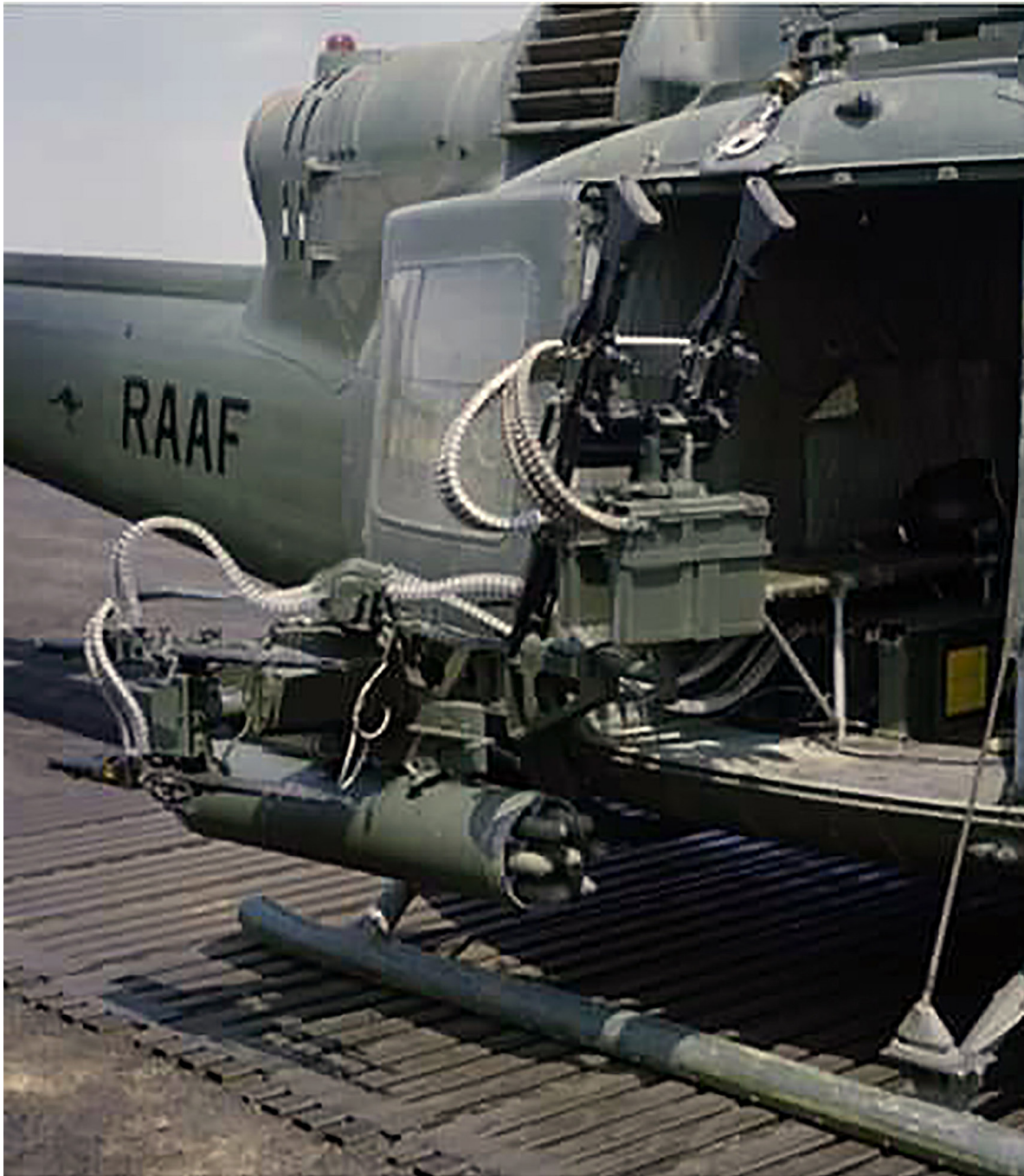
George Moore Mason was born in Sydney on 10 March 1918. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) at Mascot, NSW, on 8 January 1940; his service number was 260691.

He served as a Pilot for some 6 1/2 years through most of the WW II years and discharged from the RAAF with the rank of Squadron Leader on 31 July 1946. His posting location at discharge was 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight.

His story is included as Appendix A on page 141.

PART 2

THE SECOND ERA, 1962 – 1971



THE SECOND ERA DISPOSITION, 1962 – 1971 (END OF YEAR)

| | |
|---------------|--|
| June 1962 | RAAF No. 9 Squadron reformed at RAAF Williamtown, NSW (moved to RAAF Fairbairn, ACT November 1962) |
| 4 May 1964 | RAAF No. 5 Squadron reformed at RAAF Fairbairn, Canberra, ACT |
| 13 June 1964 | No. 5 Squadron relocated to RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia |
| 12 April 1966 | Butterworth Unit became No. 5 Squadron Detachment 'C' (and was disbanded on 23 May 1966) |
| 12 April 1966 | No. 9 Squadron at RAAF Fairbairn renumbered RAAF No. 5 Squadron |
| 3 May 1966 | RAAF No. 9 Squadron Detachment 'A' arrived in Vung Tau, SOUTH VIETNAM |
| 6 June 1966 | Eight No. 9 Squadron Iroquois helicopters were flown off HMAS SYDNEY to Vung Tau, SOUTH VIETNAM |
| 12 June 1966 | No. 9 Squadron RAAF main party arrived in Vung Tau, SOUTH VIETNAM |
| December 1971 | No. 9 Squadron RAAF redeployed from Vung Tau to RAAF Base Amberley, QUEENSLAND |



9 SQN Work area – circa 1967

1961 TO MAY 1966

Acknowledgement. The No. 9 Squadron Association is indebted to AIRCDRE R. A. Scott DFC AFC, (Ret'd) for writing and providing 'Recollections of Early Days'. It was written specifically for the History Project, covers a wide-range of issues that existed during those early times of No. 9 Squadron's operations before, during and after the South Vietnam (SVN) Conflict and is a unique and significant contribution. The Association thanks Ray Scott for his efforts in this regard. 'Recollections of Early Days' is included as Appendix F.

Further, most experienced past No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN personnel would also acknowledge his competence and exceptional operational awareness through the astute development of No. 9 Squadron RAAF Flying Standard Operations Procedures (SOP) and the impact of this SOP guidance during the squadron's future operational conduct in SVN.

Author's Note: Those Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were the basis for RAAF and Army Aviation helicopter operations and guidance for ADF helicopter aircrew for twenty plus years after No. 9 Squadron RAAF VIETNAM returned to Australia at the end of 1971.

1962 – 1963, some observations

Arrival of the helicopters transported by Hercules C-130 transport aircraft highlighted many deficiencies (loading, rigging, lashing etc) and despite ongoing liaison with AMTDU and the loadmaster fraternity to address these issues, the problems remained for many years.

The Squadron personnel designed and pro-

duced ground support equipment (GSE) for both Base and Field operations; air and ground crew training was ongoing, including homing to rescue beacons – the British SARBE and US URC-10 beacons.

During 1962, FLTLT K.J. (Keith) Taylor, Engineering Officer and squadron maintenance personnel underwent Iroquois UH-1B training.

On 29 October 1962, eight Bell Iroquois UH-1B arrived at RAAF Fairbairn (A2-384 to A2-391 inclusive) and the first RAAF crew to fly a UH-1B in Australia occurred in November 1962.

In December 1962 a second order of Iroquois UH-1B aircraft was made and delivered twelve months later (A2-714 to A2-721 inclusive).

High altitude training commenced in February 1963 near Mt Kosciusko and thence in Papua New Guinea (PNG) when two aircraft were transported by RAAF C-130 to Lae, PNG.

The major role for the squadron soon became Army Support and, due to manning constraints, the squadron was fully extended with tasking. The debate now started between Army and 9 Squadron RAAF regarding living in the field with the Army when on exercise – referred to by some as the 'tent vs pubs' argument. It never ended (for the RAAF) until the end of RAAF helicopter operations. One difference was that 9 Squadron support was requested for all Army exercises, but not many Army units went to all field exercises. One Commanding Officer 9 Squadron declared 'you do not have to practice bleeding'. More difficult arguments arose over air and ground crew fatigue, Army tactical security issues when in the field, and the affect on aircraft and crew availability.

1963 - 1966

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 1963 | Lyndon Johnson becomes the US President after President John Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas in November. American military advisers in South Vietnam (SVN) number 15,000. |
| April/May 1964 | Ray Scott and Keith Taylor (Engineering Officer) visit Borneo and Vietnam and flew with and observed US Army Aviation helicopter operations and procedures including UH-1B gunship operations. These visits influenced the development of the Royal Australian Air Force Vietnam Standing Operational Procedures for No. 9 Squadron, issued July 1968 by OC RAAF Contingent Vung Tau (TFAC). |
| May 1964 | No. 5 Squadron RAAF re-formed at Canberra, ACT, equipped with four Iroquois UH-1B helicopters transferred from No. 9 Squadron and moved to Butterworth, Malaysia to be an anti-terrorist force element during confrontation with Indonesia. The aircraft were transported by HMAS SYDNEY and arrived at Penang on 17 June 1964. |
| 8 - 20 June 1964 | RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) formed at Butterworth, Malaysia and moved to Vung Tau, SVN. RTFV re-named RAAF No. 35 (Transport) Squadron (Caribou SRT aircraft) (1 June 1966); air operations conducted under Operational Command of the United States 7th Air Force.) |
| Late 1964 | A third delivery of eight aircraft occurred: A2-1018 to A2-1025 fitted with the Lycoming 1100 shp T53-L-11 engine (upgraded T53-L-9) |
| 1965 | USAF Rolling Thunder airstrikes commence against North Vietnam (March) / The first night bombing missions commence over the Ho Chi Minh Trail / US Special Forces troops start interdiction of the Trail / NVA establishes Group 565 to secure the Trail from ground attack / B 52s bomb the Trail in Laos on December 11 - first use of B 52s in Laos / Two marine battalions land in Vietnam - America's first combat troops. |
| 29 April 1965 | Australian Prime Minister Menzies commits the first Australian combat troops to the Vietnam War; the 1st Battalion RAR was located at Bien Hoa near Saigon as part of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade and their first ground action occurred NW of Saigon in June 1965. |
| 6 December 1965 | WGCDR Royston posted as Commanding Officer No 9 Squadron RAAF |
| end of 1965 | American troop strength in Vietnam nears 200,000 |
| 8 March 1966 | Australian Prime Minister Holt announces substantial increase of Australian forces in Vietnam. This included a combined ARMY-RAAF Task Force and the Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR) was to be Phuoc Tuy Province. HQ Australian Forces Vietnam was established in Saigon. |
| 12 April 1966 | No. 9 Squadron at RAAF Fairbairn, ACT, disbanded for one day. |
| 12 April 1966 | No. 5 Squadron RAAF assumes No. 9 Squadron position at RAAF Base Fairbairn, ACT to facilitate 9 SQN's move to Vietnam. No. 5 Squadron RAAF at Butterworth, Malaysia becomes RAAF No. 5 Squadron Detachment 'C' itself being disbanded at Butterworth on 23 May 1966. |

1963 - 1966 CONTINUED

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 13 April 1966 | WGCDR Ray Scott posted as Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron RAAF |
| mid - 1966 | No. 5 Squadron RAAF commenced aircrew and ground crew training as a 'feeder' for No. 9 Squadron RAAF in Vietnam; this specific function continued until end-of-year 1971 when No. 9 Squadron RAAF returned to Australia. |
| 3 May 1966 | The Advance Party - RAAF No. 9 Squadron Detachment A arrived at Vung Tau, South Vietnam (SVN). |
| 12 May 1966 | Base Support Flight (BSF) Vung Tau, SVN, arrived and commenced support for the RAAF contingent that included the existing No. 35 Squadron RAAF (Caribou) and the soon-to-arrive No. 9 Squadron (Iroquois) personnel. BSF re-named 1 Operational Support Unit on 19 September 1968 (1OSU). |
| Author's Note. | Sources of information include: UNITS OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE - A CONCISE HISTORY - Volume 4 MARITIME AND TRANSPORT UNITS (Compiled by the RAAF Historical Section), AGPS, 1995 and MISSION VIETNAM, George Odgers, AGPS Canberra 1974. The No. 9 Squadron RAAF Operational Commitment in SVN was from June 1966 until December 1971; a specific segment for that period commences at page 65. |

The period 1961 until May 1966 - Helicopters for the Royal Australian Air Force

During April 1961, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) ordered eight Bell Iroquois utility gas turbine engine helicopters titled Bell HU-1B from the Bell Helicopter Company in the USA. The US Army later changed the naming to Bell UH-1B.

These Bell Iroquois UH-1B aircraft were commonly referred to as 'Bravos'; the D and H model helicopter that subsequently came into RAAF service direct to No 9 Squadron in Vietnam were respectively known as 'Delta' and 'Hotel'.

June 1962, No. 9 Squadron RAAF Reformed

No. 9 (Fleet Co-operation) Squadron RAAF formed from No. 5 Squadron RAAF in January 1939 and, as the pre-cursor Unit to No. 9

Squadron RAAF, operated until its disbandment on 31 December 1944.

On 11 June 1962, RAAF No. 9 Squadron was reformed at RAAF Williamtown, NSW, with SQNLDR Ray Scott appointed as Commanding Officer (CO). The squadron was to be 'operational' by June 1963 in the Search and Rescue role and equipped with the UH-1B Bell Iroquois helicopters (ordered in 1961).

The Unit was formed by FLTLT Brian Sullivan. However the infrastructure, buildings, hangarage and accommodation for personnel allocated to No 9 Squadron were assessed by Ray Scott as inadequate, in disrepair or non-existent. The intervention by SQNLDR Scott with RAAF Staff in Canberra on these matters no doubt contributed to the direction that No. 9 Squadron was to move from RAAF Base Williamtown and so No. 9 Squadron 'relocated' to

RAAF Base Fairbairn, ACT, during November 1962.

Aircraft Technical Training. In 1962, (then) FLTLT K.J. (Keith) Taylor, Engineering Officer and squadron maintenance personnel underwent Iroquois UH-1B training.

Aircrew Training. Iroquois pilot training

(H34 Choctaw helicopter) was conducted at Fort Rucker, USA and the six pilots returned to Australia (RTA) in late August 1962. One technical NCO on the Procurement Team, SGT Keith Wadling, underwent basic rescue crewman training. The pilots pictured below at Fort Rucker, USA are:

Squadron Leader Raymond Alfred Scott, Flight Lieutenant Leigh Oxley Hindley, Flight Lieutenant Donald Couldery White, Flight Lieutenant Kenneth David Clark, Flight Lieutenant James Henry Cox, Flight Lieutenant Robert Andrew MacIntosh of the Royal Australian Air Force, graduating from Helicopter Instrument Flying Course (Special), in residence at the United States Army Aviation School, Fort Rucker, Alabama. Colonel Oliver J. Helmuth, Deputy Assistant Commandant awarded diploma. (6 Jul 62) *(the original 6 pilots of 409 Apr)*



US Army Aviation School, Fort Rucker, Alabama, 6 Jul 62. — Colonel Oliver J Helmuth, Deputy Assistant Commandant, awarding diplomas for graduation from Helicopter Instrument Flying Course (Special) to the following RAAF pilots (left to right): Squadron Leader Raymond Alfred Scott, Flight Lieutenant Kenneth David Clark, Flight Lieutenant Leigh Oxley Hindley, Flight Lieutenant James Henry Cox, Flight Lieutenant Donald Couldery White, and Flight Lieutenant Robert Andrew MacIntosh.



Above: RAAF Base Fairbairn – view from the base front gate in winter

Below: Living Quarters, RAAF Base Fairbairn, ACT, snowfall, July 1965





Above: Arrival of the first helicopters. On 29 October 1962, eight Bell Iroquois UH-1B arrived at RAAF Base Fairbairn (A2-384 to A2-391 inclusive); assembly of the aircraft was completed under the guidance and training of a Bell Helicopter Technical Representative

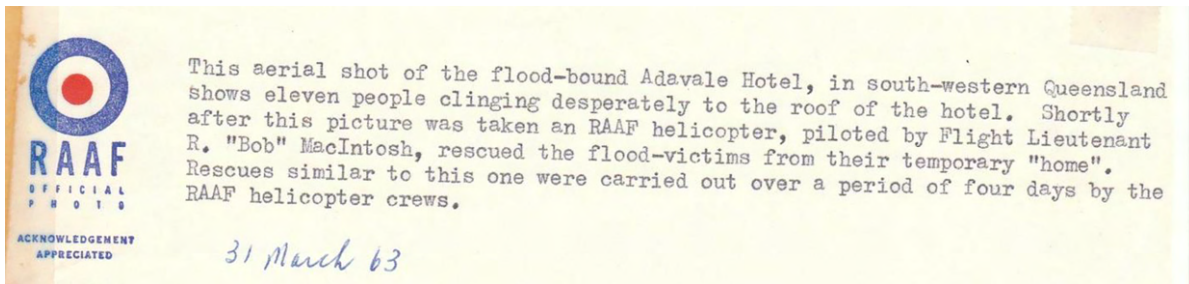
Below: A line-up of Iroquois UH-1B 300 series helos at RAAF Fairbairn in February 1963



RAAF IROQUOIS HELICOPTERS

RAAF IROQUOIS SUPPORT TO THE CIVILIAN COMMUNITY, 1962 – 1966

There were many and varied tasks that were conducted during the early days of Air Force helicopter operations. The three images with comment that follow are excellent examples of that task variety; two are from the 1963 floods in Australia and the third from a 1965 civilian aircraft fuselage recovery in PNG.



31 March 1963, eleven people are clinging to the roof of the Adavale Hotel, during floods in south west Queensland. The people were rescued by a 9 Squadron Iroquois helicopter flown by Flight Lieutenant Bob MacIntosh and crew. There were similar rescues over 4 days by RAAF helicopter crews.

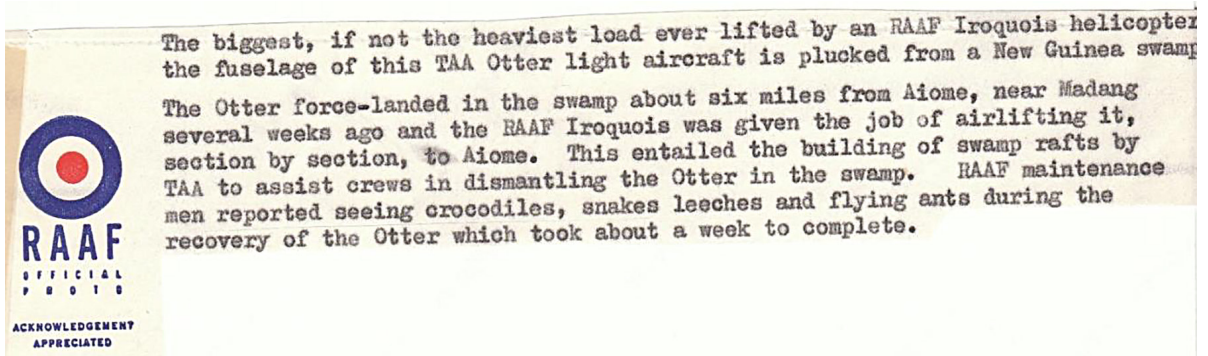


April 1963, six of the 9 Squadron RAAF crew who flew two 9 Squadron Iroquois helicopters which rescued 93 people, and dropped food and medicine to isolated homesteads in the Queensland floods. Photo taken on return to RAAF Base Fairbairn ACT. Left to right: Sergeant G Buttress, Flight Lieutenant K J Taylor, Flight Lieutenant R MacIntosh, Squadron Leader R Scott, Sergeant K Waddling, and Corporal M Henschke.

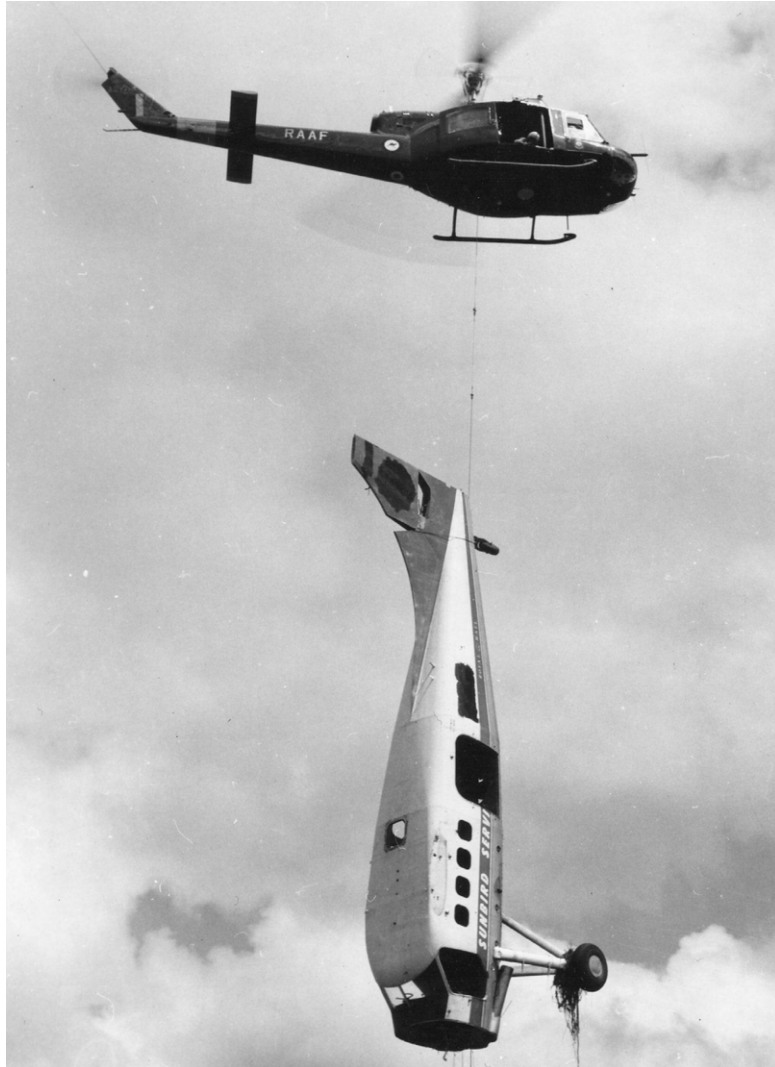
Appendix C. Iroquois helicopters A2-384 to A2-510, & A2-714 to A2-721.

Appendix D. Iroquois helicopters (A2) allotted to and flown by No. 9 Squadron RAAF during the South Vietnam Commitment.

Appendix E. Assorted rare photographs.



February - March 1965. A Trans Australian Airways (TAA) Otter aircraft forced landed in a swamp about six miles from Aiome near Madang PNG. A 9 Squadron Iroquois helicopter and crew were tasked with recovering the Otter to Aiome. TAA built rafts to help dismantle the Otter in to manageable load for the helicopter, helped by RAAF maintenance crew. The recovery took about a week. The recovery crew sighted crocodiles, snakes, leeches, and flying ants.



Big Lift, 2 -5 March 1965, crew: Ray Scott and Marty Donohue

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE ELEMENTS – SOUTH VIETNAM

AIR OPERATIONS – SOUTH VIETNAM 1966 – 1971

During the Squadron's commitment in South Vietnam, it provided utility helicopter support to 1st Australian Task Force elements and at times, to personnel from the ARVN and South Vietnamese Regional Force. The wide scope of those supported elements may be appreciated from the information presented in the following section.



Above: A 'hot' extraction of an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) long range reconnaissance patrol by an Iroquois helicopter of No 9 Squadron. The pilot and captain of the aircraft on this mission was Lieutenant Commander Rowley Alan Waddell-Wood, who was also officer-in-charge of the detachment of RAN pilots who served with No 9 Squadron from February 1968 to March 1969. Image: Flying Officer Alexander (Alex) Gall. ©Australian War Memorial.

The Australian Order of Battle for Vietnam War: Royal Australian Air Force

Headquarters Royal Australian Air Force Element, Australian Force Vietnam Headquarters Saigon

Royal Australian Air Force Contingent, Vung Tau

Royal Australian Air Force Caribou Transport Flight, 8th August 1964 – 1st June 1966 Base Support Flight, May 1966 – April 1968, Vung Tau

Number 1 Operational Support Unit, February 1968 – February 1972, Vung Tau

Number 5 Squadron Airfield Construction Squadron, 1964 – 1972, Vung Tau, and Phan Rang

Royal Australian Air Force Element 161 Recce Flight 14th September 1965 – 8th March 1972, Nui Dat No. 35 Squadron, 1st June 1966 – February 1972: The first RAAF operational unit to see service in Vietnam, the RAAF transport flight arrived at Vung Tau in August 1964 with six Caribou aircraft. The unit was redesignated as No. 35 Squadron on 1 June 1966 and left Vietnam in February 1972.

No.9 Squadron, April 1966 – November 1971: No. 9 Squadron, equipped with Iroquois helicopter to support the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF).

No. 2 Squadron, April 1967 – June 1971: The third and last RAAF operational squadron to serve in Vietnam was No. 2 Squadron. I was based at Phan Rang and returned to Australia in June 1971, 13 years after having left Australia from Darwin en route to Butterworth, Malaysia.

RAAF Members also served with the United States Air Force during 1964 – 1972: RAAF fighter pilots were given the opportunity of serving in Vietnam as Forward Air Controllers. In addition to duty as FACs, six fighter pilots also saw service in American Phantom aircraft Squadrons in Vietnam.

RAAF NURSING SERVICE (MEDEVAC FLIGHT): RAAF nurses tended the wounded on the medical evacuation aircraft which transported them from Vietnam to Australia usually via Malaysia.

RAAF CHAPLAINS: RAAF Chaplains attended to the spiritual needs of RAAF personnel as well as Australian and US troops.

NO. 9 SQUADRON RAAF IN SOUTH VIETNAM – OPERATIONAL SERVICE

3 May 1966 –No. 9 Squadron RAAF Detachment 'A' arrived in Vung Tau, South Vietnam.

06 June 1966 – No. 9 Squadron elements arrived at Vung Tau aboard HMAS SYDNEY; the eight Iroquois UH-1B helicopters were flown to Vung Tau airfield. These aircraft were the third batch of Bravos delivered to the RAAF (A2-1018 through A2-1025 inclusive). The main party of No. 9 Squadron RAAF arrived at Saigon via Qantas chartered aircraft on 12 June 1966 thence travelled to Vung Tau by bus.

12 June 1966 – No. 9 Squadron RAAF arrived in Vung Tau, SOUTH VIETNAM

December 1971 – No. 9 Squadron RAAF rede-

ployed from Vung Tau to RAAF Base Amberley, QUEENSLAND

Operational Area

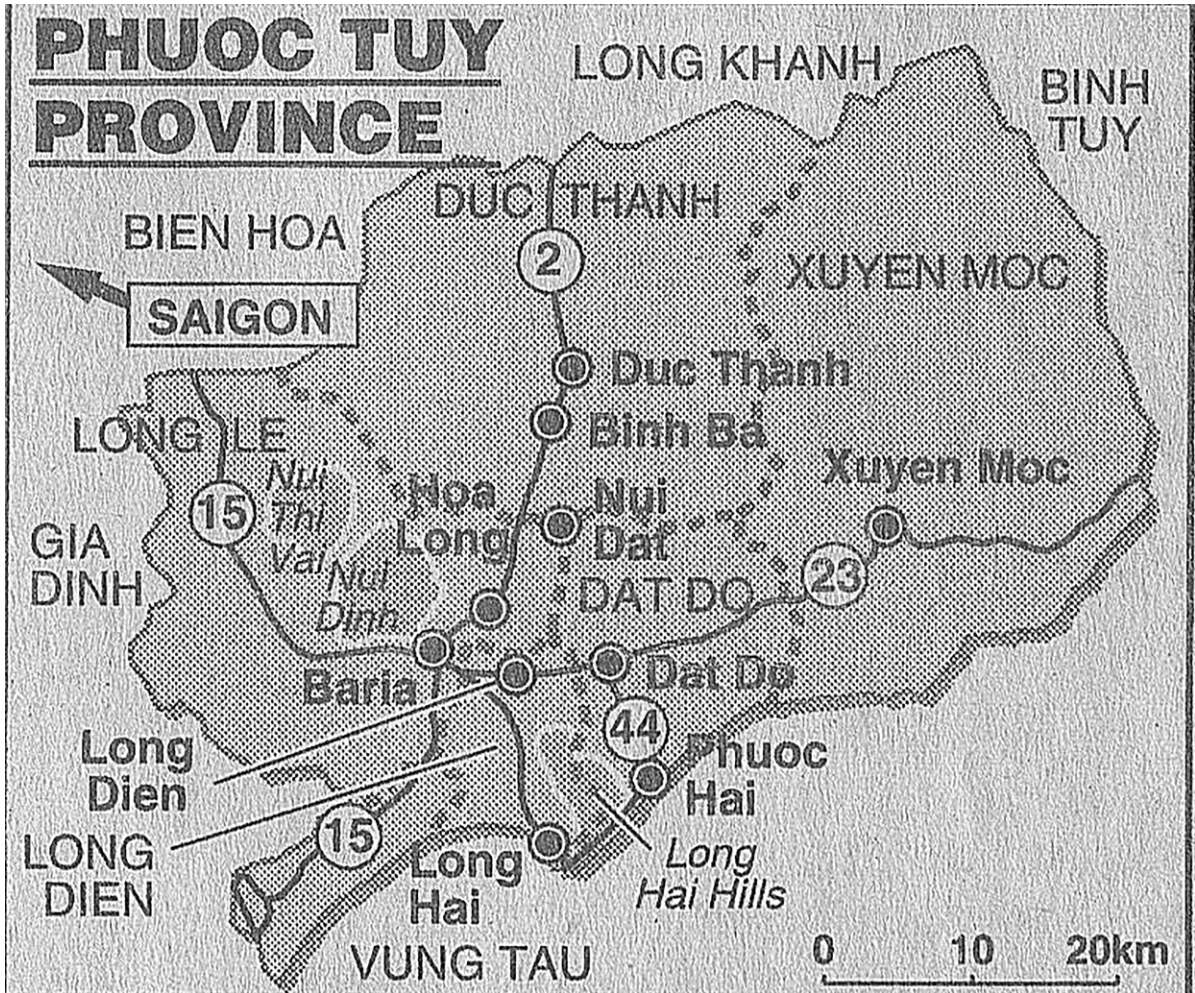
The operational area during the Vietnam War is defined in Schedule 2 of the VEA as the area of Vietnam, including the waters contiguous to the coast of Vietnam for distance of 185.2 kilometres (100 nautical miles) seaward from the coast. The period during which Vietnam service was active is specified to commence from 31 July 1962 to and including 11 January 1973. In 1997, service rendered in the operational area 'Vietnam (Southern Zone)' between 12 January 1973 and 29 April 1975 was also deemed as warlike service. See maps on the following pages.



VIETNAM: AN ASIAN BATTLEFIELD

Although it included several significant ethnic minorities, Vietnam was dominated by the culturally homogeneous Vietnamese, who had long expressed a strong sense of national unity. The partition of the country in 1954 laid the basis for the subsequent conflict.

Military history records state No. 9 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force having served operationally for some 5 1/2 years in the war in Vietnam. This map shows Phuoc Tuy Province relative to other locations.



1 ATF Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR)

The TAOR was Phuoc Tuy Province which was about 25,000 sq km in size, not a large area but varied in terrain, waterways, coast and tropical climate; ADF Vietnam veterans would be familiar with many of the places named/located on the two map/chart extracts appearing above and on the next page.



June 1966

WGCDR Ray Scott was posted as Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron RAAF and took the Squadron with its eight Bell UH-1B Iroquois helicopters to Vietnam in June 1966.

FLTLT K.J. (Keith) Taylor was the first Senior Engineering Officer (SENGO) of No. 9 Squadron in Vietnam.

No. 9 Squadron RAAF maintenance personnel supported Australian Army Aviation Units such as 161 Recce Squadron at Luscombe Field, Nui Dat.

No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron (5ACS)

RAAF Detachment A deployed to Vung Tau, SVN and was tasked to undertake the significant works program on the Vung Tau Airfield environs (hangarage, work and security facilities, catering, ablutions and accommodation).

5ACS departed Vung Tau in August 1967.

Author's Observation. Based upon my personal ADF helicopter Command, flight instruction, pilot and air liaison experience over a long period (1970 – 2000), there is little doubt that (then) WGCDR Ray Scott was the patriarch of No. 9 SQN and the Air Force Helicopter fraternity from 1962 and until No. 9 SQN RAAF was disbanded at Townsville, QLD on 14 February 1989.

Ray Scott conducted the planning, research and coordination (in particular with Keith Taylor) necessary to establishing a RAAF helicopter capability and its preparation for combat. His initiative and competence prepared the squadron for the success enjoyed during the 5.5 years in Vietnam. His development of such a realistic and outstanding set of No. 9 SQN RAAF Irquois Helicopter Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) – Vietnam, was but one example. These proved to be operationally effective for a small Unit such as No. 9SQN RAAF, SVN particularly in the specific tactics and manoeuvres that enabled and sustained the successful force preservation, appreciation of limitations and mutual support aspects.

No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Tasks

It all looked quite straight forward in the terms of the No. 9 Squadron Standard Operating Procedures – SVN (SOP) sheet that aircrew retained as the basis (legend) for recording the day’s flying sorties / operations break-up in the Flight Authorisation Book (RAAF A-71) and in their individual Log Books.

Author. The copy here is of the original item that still remains in my Pilot’s Flying Log Book (AFO 10/J/1) and at the time of writing is 45 years old.

The formal guidance for the Recording of Daily Flying Activity was contained at Chapter C/8 of the SOP.

In reality though, straight for-

ward flying operations were often not the case regardless of whether the flights were planned or un-planned.

The majority of the tasks flown by aircrew of No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN were challenging and sometimes hazardous due to influences on the ambient conditions such as local weather (hot and tropical with increased Density Altitude) and seasonal change, the high aircraft all-up-weight (AUW) particularly for the gunships and the small landing sites (LS) or landing pads (LP) often surrounded by tall trees and, the enemy threat. No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN helicopter support to the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) was considered the most dangerous of the Air Force deployments with aircrew frequently exposed to close range enemy ground fire.

NO 9 SQUADRON - VUNG TAU SVN
LOG BOOK SORTIES
LEGEND

| | | |
|------|---|--|
| TP | - | Trooplift |
| PI | - | SAS Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Insertion |
| PE | - | SAS Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol Extraction |
| VR | - | Visual Reconnaissance |
| MED | - | Medevac |
| LS | - | Logistic Support |
| ADM | - | Administration/Liaison |
| CC | - | Command & Control Aircraft |
| CA | - | Civil Affairs and Psychological |
| TEST | - | Air Test |
| CS | - | Compass Swing |
| TRG | - | RAAF Training |
| SPEC | - | Special Task (Specified): Sniffer, Leaflet Drop, Sector RF Ops |
| GUN | - | Gunship Operations |

NOTE: For Aircrew Record of Operational Tour (Form PP138), Gunship Ops are listed as 'strikes - attacks'; all other sorties are 'other ops'.

Planned and Un-planned Tasks.

Planned events were briefed to participating aircrew and they were outlined on each Aircraft Captains' Pilot Mission Brief (PMB) which he carried on a 'clip or knee board' in the aircraft. At the end of the flying day the PMB which by then recorded the sortie, freight, pax, flight time and other relevant information would be handed to the OPSO and expanded upon if necessary (particularly for INTELL).

Un-planned events were usually 'time critical' due to the potential for 'loss of life', friendly battle casualties during engagement or withdrawal after contact with the enemy, and with non-combat serious or life threatening injury to AS soldiers.

A No. 9 SQN RAAF Iroquois helicopter un-serviceability or damage that dictated a 'forced landing' or aircraft shut down somewhere in

the TAOR was also in this category. The No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Bushranger' gunships and slick helicopters and / or the 'Dustoff' would be 'scrambled' to get airborne as quickly as possible. The helicopters were involved mainly in the transportation of troops, SAS Patrol Insertions and Extractions, resupply for troops in the field, casualty evacuation ('Dustoff'). Other wide-ranging and varying tasks were grouped as Administrative Tasks (ADM. - either for RAAF or 1ATF), and Special Tasks (SPEC. - 'Sniffer' operations, tasks in support of downed aircraft or rescue of personnel, tasks external to the TAOR and tasks of an unusual or non-repetitive nature).

Below, pictured in late June 1966, Dennis Olsen, Crewman, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN and a No. 9 SQN RAAF Iroquois. Dennis' tour period was 13 April 1966 until 09 June 1967.





Kanga Pad, Nui Dat, 1966. No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN group – Max Hayes, Bill Shepherd, Keith Munday, Jim Roche, Gordon Buttriss, Bob Grandin

13 June 1966

No. 9 Squadron's first operational mission was flown in support of a 1st Australian Task Force unit, the 5th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (5RAR) and was the air transport of 9,000 lb of ammunition to Nui Dat.

Start of the often 'difficult times' between Army and RAAF within HQ 1ATF at Nui Dat

10 July 1966

The first Special Air Service (SAS) patrol extraction (PE); 6 patrol members lifted from a landing pad (LP) by two No. 9 Squadron Iroquois. Enemy ground fire directed at the two choppers on the LP with the door gunners returning fire. The SAS PE continued without further incident. This PE was conducted with-

out gunship support as the US Army gunships arrived late on the scene.

Note: This first SAS PE is also an example of a 'hot' extraction (patrol extraction by helicopter, under enemy fire).

Intelligence indicated that the dominant enemy in the 1 ATF TAOR were the Viet Cong 274 Regiment (5th Viet Cong Division) and the Provincial Mobile Battalion D445 (VC).

18 August 1966

Battle of Long Tan – No. 9 Squadron was involved in supporting D Company 6RAR

21 August 1966

Another SAS patrol under enemy ground fire was extracted from a LP north of Nui Dat by a

No. 9 SQN RAAF 'slick' helicopter, again without gunship support.

Note. Gunship helicopters were 'choppers' configured with purpose built weapons e.g. mini guns and rockets and tasked solely with providing offensive air support for Army / land force elements.

Note. Slick helicopters were armed with door guns for self protection only and conducted the

wide-ranging tasks such as troop lift, logistic support, patrol insertion/extraction and medical evacuation (Dustoff) and many other special tasks.

The following pages are extracts of the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Commanding Officer's Report (A50) concerning the 'hot' SAS Patrol Extraction (PE) without any form of gunship support that took place on 21 August 1966:

SECRET

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

UNIT HISTORY SHEET
(AFO 18/F/5)

Form A 50
(Revised May, 1951)

of (Unit or Formation) NO. 9 SQUADRON

No of Sheet 28

| Place | Date | Summary of Events | References to Appendices |
|------------------|-----------|---|--------------------------|
| | | <p>ition, but the situation became critical due to a shortage of ammunition, and the company faced total annihilation.</p> <p>Two Squadron aircraft, one captained by Flt Lt C.M. Dohle and Flt Lt F.P. Riley were alerted and loaded with 1,100 pounds of ammunition. Most of the load was carried in the first aircraft, and the plan was for the second aircraft to take-off and establish contact and locate the position of the company. Unfortunately very heavy rain started to fall through the area which, apart from reducing the visibility considerably, necessitated the flight being carried out at tree top level. The company location finally was established after smoke was thrown. The drop of ammunition, which was in containers wrapped in blankets, was then successfully carried out whilst the aircraft hovered at the top of 30 foot rubber trees. At the time that the drop took place, the whole company had only one hundred rounds of ammunition remaining. Just as the aircraft were leaving the area the rain reached its maximum intensity reducing visibility to less than 100 yards.</p> <p>During the engagement the company suffered moderate to heavy casualties, and a maximum effort by the Squadron to evacuate casualties was requested. The Squadron provided seven aircraft and these waited on the Task Force LZ until a pad was cleared and secured. At 2340 hours the Squadron Commanding Officer followed a US Army special medevac helicopter into the LZ. The rest of the aircraft, with the exception of the seventh which was a back-up, landed in rotation, the last being some 30 minutes behind the first. The outline of the LZ was indicated by the tail and dim head lights of APC's (Armoured Personnel Carriers). The aircraft did not show any lights whatsoever, so the Squadron pilots are rightly proud of the job they did in landing under such difficult circumstances. It was subsequently learnt that the army force on the ground would have preferred the aircraft to show some lights as they had no idea of the whereabouts of the aircraft until it actually touched down. However, as the LZ could have been under enemy observation and was vulnerable to mortar attack, the Squadron considers that showing any form of lighting would have been most unwise.</p> | |
| TUNG TAU VIETNAM | 21 Aug 66 | <p>(Special Air Services)</p> <p>On the morning of the 17th of August four SAS patrols were inserted into separate areas to the North of the Task Force. One of these patrols was extracted on the 19th August and a re-</p> | |

SECRET

SECRET

| Date | Summary of Events | References to Appendices |
|------|---|--------------------------|
| | <p>quirement arose to extract the remaining patrols.</p> <p>An aircraft flown by Flt Lt L.O. Hindley established the approximate positions of these patrols and then some hours later four aircraft with Flt Lt Hindley as the lead aircraft departed to extract the three patrols.</p> <p>On homing to the first patrol position by SARBE, Flt Lt R.A. Macintosh established communications with the patrol and learnt that there was a VC force of estimated company strength in the immediate vicinity, with some VC on the southern edge of the LZ at GRY5 493866. He requested the two escorting armed UH-1Bs to strafe the area, but due to poor communications they could not locate the LZ. Flt Lt Macintosh then flew over the area at 1000 feet to lead the armed helicopters in hoping they could spot the LZ panels. Whilst on this run the aircraft was fired on, the crew counting three separate shots, one of which they were sure hit the aircraft. The gunships also received fire from the same area which was about 1000 metres North-East of the LZ. The gunships still couldn't see the LZ and only succeeded in firing into another rice paddy 600 metres to the south.</p> <p>Flt Lt Macintosh then decided that he would have to go in for the pick up without support from the armed helicopters, as further delay probably would result in SAS patrol being overrun. Whilst on finals and at about 800 feet the crew heard the aircraft being fired on by both single shot and automatic weapons. Whilst on the LZ the fire continued, with the two door gunners returning the fire. The patrol ran to the aircraft firing as they ran, whilst ducking at times to permit the door gunners to fire over their heads. With the patrol aboard, the aircraft lifted off and at this stage a VC dressed in camouflaged greens ran from the track line in order to get a better shot at the aircraft. One of the door gunners, LAC Taylor, saw the figure appear, took aim and fired. The VC threw his arms into the air and reeled backwards, so the Squadron feels confident in claiming one VC KIA. Sporadic fire was heard until the aircraft was at about 1000 feet on climb out. The aircraft then returned to Task Force where it was inspected thoroughly but fortunately there were no hits on the aircraft.</p> | |

SECRET

SECRET

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

UNIT HISTORY SHEET
(AFO 18/F/5)

of (Unit or Formation) NO 9 Squadron

Form A 50
(Revised May, 1951)

No of Sheet 79

| Place | Date | Summary of Events | References to Appendices |
|-------|------|--|--------------------------|
| | | <p>The other two patrols were then extracted from GRY5 480824 and YS 496803 and although there were known enemy in the area, there were no sightings.</p> <p>The failure of the US Army gunships to locate the initial source of fire unfortunately tempted the Squadron aircraft participating to divert from two standard procedures, ie never fly between twenty (20) and fifteen hundred (1,500) feet unless absolutely necessary, and never circle over the top of the pick-up landing site. The heavy fire encountered has forced this lesson home to the pilots involved.</p> | |
| | | <p style="text-align: right;"><i>R.A. Scott</i> (R.A. SCOTT) Wing Commander Commanding Officer</p> | |

18 October 1966

The first squadron aircraft destroyed was Iroquois A2-1018 (Bravo Model). The replacement aircraft was UH-1D A2-085 (Delta Model).

George Medal for Gallantry

Resulting from the crash of RAAF Iroquois A2-1018 which had been carrying a cargo of ammunition and explosives, No. 9 Squadron Crewman, Sergeant Gordon Buttriss, was awarded the George Medal for Gallantry for his display of courage and actions in hazardous circumstances when he instrumentally saved four personnel from the crashed helicopter before it caught fire and ignited the explosive cargo.

Below, a delightful photograph/newspaper clipping from The Sun, Wednesday 15 February 1967:



November 1966

First reported battle damage to a 9 SQN RAAF aircraft; Iroquois A2-1021 rotor wash initiated a friendly anti-personnel mine.

No 5 ACS completes the Bellman hangar at the No. 9 Squadron RAAF maintenance facility, Vung Tau Airfield .

1966-1967

Two replacement aircraft, the larger Iroquois UH-1D (Delta) A2-085 and A2-649, were delivered. (Another six were delivered to No. 5 Squadron RAAF, A2-505 through A2-510).

Early 1967

A dedicated No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois helicopter (Dustoff 01) was tasked to provide 24 hour aero-medical evacuation (AME) support and was stationed at the 8th Field Ambulance (8 Fd Amb) Nui Dat helipad. The 8 Fd Amb used the call sign 'Red Earth'. A second Iroquois (Dustoff 02), also on 24 hour AME support, was positioned at the No. 9 Squadron RAAF lines at Vung Tau. The crew of Dustoff 02 also conducted night flying training from Vung Tau Airfield. The call sign for the 1st Australian Army Field Hospital (1AFH) located within the Army 1st Australian Logistic Group (1ALG) facility at the Vung Tau Back Beach area was 'Vampire.'

RAAF and Army Medical Orderlies became part of the Dustoff aircraft crew complement from this time.

From Feb 1967

5 ACS, Det. B, deployed to Phan Rang, SVN for construction works to support No. 2 Squadron RAAF then had a short stint at Vung Tau.

SQNLDR Clive Cotter posted in as SENGO No.

9 Squadron (27th March).

Australian Government approved No. 9 squadron's aircraft strength to 16. A staunch effort was required to overcome RAAF Technical Branch preference for UH-1B or D models with the L-11 engine on fleet compatibility grounds rather than the UH-1H with the more powerful L-13 engine based on a demonstrated operational requirement.

April 1967

No. 2 Squadron RAAF deployed to Phan Rang, SVN; operated as part of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, USAF.

No. 5 Squadron RAAF had become the helicopter training Unit for No. 9 Squadron RAAF, the Search and Rescue (SAR) Flights located at a number of RAAF Bases, and the RAN. The Navy pilots were posted to either No. 9 Squadron for operational duty or to No. 5 Squadron as flying instructors (QFI).

Iroquois UH-1B A2-1019 was written-off due to heavy landing damage after its L-11 engine compressor failed however, it was recovered successfully. The replacement aircraft was Iroquois UH-1D A2-649.

The following is the assessment of what



This late 1964 photograph is of No. 5 SQN RAAF Iroquois UH-1B (Bravo Model) A2-1019 in the hover on the tarmac at RAAF Base Fairbairn ACT prior to its service in South Vietnam



The badly damaged A2-1019 at No. 9 SQN Vung Tau after recovery

could be done with A2-1019 written by Clive Cotter, Senior Engineering Officer (SENGO), No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN (original letter can be found at 9sqn.com.au/a2-1019):

Helicopter UH 1-B, A2-1019

May 1966

In April 1967, A2-1019 had an engine failure as result of enemy action and crash landed in South Vietnam and was later lifted out by a US Ch47 (Chinook) and returned to Vung Tau.

A2-1019 was considered to be a 'write off' and a replacement aircraft (UH-1D) was purchased from the US Army. About June 1967 another helicopter (A2-1024) was extensively damaged and written off. However, the tail boom of A2 -1024 was in a

serviceable condition and retained as a spare.

About this time I decided that it was possible to rebuild one helicopter from the serviceable components of the two crashed aircraft together with some serviceable components salvageable from crashed US Army helicopters which had been placed in a locked compound near our operating area and for which I had access.

At first the rebuilding was carried out on a part time basis (this started at the beginning of August 1967) but later the project was stepped up and carried on as a full time project even though at times parts from the hybrid machine were used to keep other 9 Sqn helicopters flying.

On September the 22nd 1967 the rebuild A2-1019

(it retained that number because the front fuselage had belonged to the original 1019 and that is the part on which the data plate is affixed on all UH-1 during manufacture).

It completed a successful test flight and was returned to the squadron inventory.

Although US Army operators were at first dubious of our ability to complete the task of rebuilding 1019 in the field and without sophisticated jigs and equipment, it is interesting to note that after the successful completion of our task the US Army embarked on a program of rebuilding their own crashed helicopters which previously had been stored in their Vung Tau compound (Graveyard).

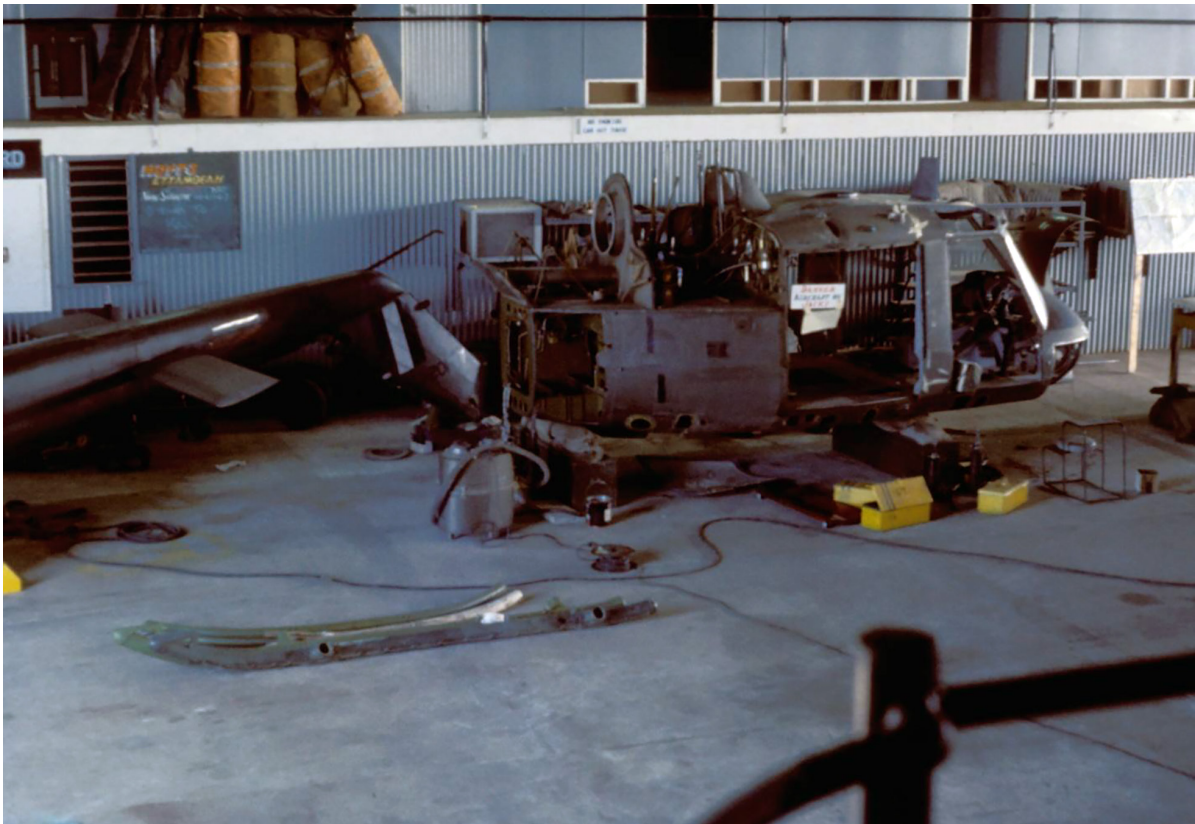
Interestingly enough it was at this time that I was relieved of the key and denied further access to the compound by the US Army.

The rebuilding of A2-1019 reflects the ingenuity and technical skills of the squadron maintenance personnel. Not to be overlooked are the facts that firstly, there was a saving in the cost of purchasing a UH-1 from the US Army (at that time in the order of \$330,000) since the rebuilt 1019 although replaced by another purchased from the US Army, then replaced another of 9 Sqn's aircraft which was subsequently written off; and secondly, the hybrid A2-1019 is still in a serviceable flying condition at the time of writing.

I consider that because of the history of this helicopter it should be considered as the most worthy contender to be placed in the Australian War Memorial.

Regards,

Clive



A2-1019 fuselage in the No. 9 SQN hangar with the tail boom from A2-1024, July 1967. Source: Graeme Wilson, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 19 May 1967 until 15 May 1968

Since the AWM helicopter display was opened around 2008, A2-1019 has been the centre-piece of the Vietnam section display; two display photographs follow, courtesy of the AWM. The display is exceptionally innovative and of great historical significance for the ADF, RAAF and ARMY considering the commitment

in South Vietnam became known as 'The Helicopter War'.

Tremendous credit must go to all who were involved with mounting the display. The No. 9 Squadron RAAF Association members and their families are indebted and heartily thank the Australian War Memorial people.



April 1967

No. 2 Squadron RAAF deployed to Phan Rang, SVN; operated as part of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, USAF.

6 September 1968

First 'sniffer' mission flown by No. 9 Squadron RAAF aircraft.



Above: No. 9 Squadron hangar tool board; 'Huey' Warner at left. Hugh Warner, Airframe Fitter, served with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 25 May 1967 until 22 May 1968.

Below: Engine compressor damage/failure of Iroquois A2-1022 that occurred on 11 May 1967.





Airframe Fitters 'Robbie' Gee (left) and Ken Bischof (right), No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, 'at work' in the Vung Tau hangar in June 1967



Above: Command and Control radio fitment in the cargo compartment of a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois. Referred to as 'Charlie Charlie', the multiple radios allowed an Australian Army Formation Commander to communicate with all Army elements of that particular formation or group during a 1 ATF Operation.

Below: Peter Beath, Airframe Fitter, during a Bien Hoa attachment in 1968. Peter was with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 2 April 1968 to 26 March 1969.





On the tarmac hut floor is the 'sniffer' apparatus that was stowed/attached to the Iroquois cargo compartment floor.

Group Captain (GPCAPT) Michael John Haxell DFC, RAAF (Ret'd), General Duties Pilot and Flying Instructor

Group Captain Haxell was generally known within the Air Force as 'HAX'. By any yardstick, this 'boy from Sydney' was one of the RAAF's most outstanding airmen and officers, certainly within the Air Force's helicopter fraternity.

He joined the Air Force as an apprentice airframe fitter, re-mustered, successfully conducted his pilots' course and Iroquois helicopter conversion and flew helicopter combat operations in SVN with No. 9 Squadron RAAF during his tour of duty 04 November 1966 until 15 November 1967. He was posted to No. 5 Squadron RAAF at RAAF Base Fairbairn and

apart from doing many and varied RAAF courses through the development of his career, he is best known for his long-term and consummate flying instruction for the many keen but 'ham fisted' young students converting to the 'Huey' en route to join No. 9 Squadron RAAF in the Vietnam War.

The hallmarks of his high order flying and instructional skills included empathy (aircraft and student), a 'learning environment' that was relaxed and enjoyable, use of humour and a de-briefing style that seemed 'non-critical' of the students' abilities or lack thereof.

When he finished flying, 'HAX' fulfilled a number of roles at Air Force Office in Canberra, and retired as a Group Captain.

| Place | Date | Summary of Events |
|---------|-----------|---|
| UNG TAU | 10 AUG 67 | Immediately after insertion a LRRP contacted what they estimated was a platoon-sized enemy force and came under enemy fire. Albatross Lead, Flt Lt CILL (0316957) called Flt Off HAXELL who was flying the inserting aircraft, back to the pod. A successful extraction of the five-man patrol was completed under enemy fire and no damage or wounds were incurred. |
| | 12 AUG 67 | At 1430 hours a LRRP called for emergency extraction near KUYEN NGU, a recognised VIET CONG area of influence. The lead aircraft, captained by Flt Lt MORRIS (0219176) directed the "click" captained by Flt Off HAXELL into the small pod in which the LRRP was pinned down under fire. While egressing the patrol in the pod severe damage was caused by enemy fire, covering an engine oil line and depriving the captain of power indications. Due to the direction of enemy fire and the size of the pod, a difficult down-wind take-off was required. This Flt Off HAXELL successfully completed before nudging the aircraft back to a safe landing. HAXELL's crew was Flt Lt DODDS (0316956), Col WEAVERWAY (A19305), and Lt REINRE (A116918), while MORRIS's crew was Flt Lt BAXTER-STADRE (0310799), Loc McCREADIE (A219844), and Loc MALCOLM (A110334). |

An extract of the 9SQN RAAF report for 12 August 1967 relating to Mick Haxell and his crew's flight actions under enemy fire. See also Appendix G, Hax's 'Recollections of a Boggie Pilot'.

End of 1966

400,000 American combat troops in Vietnam. Free World Military Armed Forces (FWMAF) in support of the South Vietnamese military defence of South Vietnam included US, AS, NZ, ROK, Thai and Philippine defence force elements.

1967

RAN Pilots and No. 9 Squadron RAAF. During 1967, eight RAN pilots attached to the RAAF were posted on a twelve month flying tour of duty with No. 9 Squadron RAAF in Vietnam. Source: Navy News, 1968.

June 1967

SQLNDR P. Reed posted as CO No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN.

No. 9 Squadron airframe and paint shop facilities constructed. At Kanga Pad, Nui Dat, the main helicopter landing and parking area refuel facility became operational.

July 1967

RNZAF Pilot postings to No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN. These postings commenced in July 1967. Up until the withdrawal of the Squadron in December 1971, sixteen 'Kiwi' pilots of varying rank (seconded from No. 3 Squadron RNZAF), served a 12 month 'tour of duty' with No. 9 Squadron SVN with FLGOFF Brian Senn being the last pilot to do so in 1971. The first two 'Kiwi' pilots so posted were FLTLT A.R. Mills GDPLT who arrived in SVN on 4 August 1967, and FLTLT J.B. Clements GDPLT who arrived on 10 November 1967.

Notably, five of the RNZAF pilots were awarded a DFC.

No. 9 Squadron RAAF experienced its first operational casualty (12th July) – Leading Aircraftman John ‘Jake’ Henson was hit by ground fire during a re-supply task.



RNZAF Pilots awaiting morning transport to the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Vung Tau flight line were L/R: ‘Punchy’ Paterson and Gordon Wood, circa mid-1970.

July, 1967

RNZAF Pilots For Vietnam

Iroquois helicopter pilots of the Royal New Zealand Air Force are to serve with the RAAF in Vietnam.

One RNZAF pilot will be sent at a time for a six months tour of duty with No 9 Sqn, RAAF, for operational experience. No 9 Sqn forms part of the Australian Task Force, Vietnam.

Before proceeding to Vietnam, the pilots will undergo an orientation phase of up to two months at RAAF Base, Fairbairn, to ensure they are familiar with RAAF helicopter operational procedures.

The first pilot under the scheme is now being selected in New Zealand.

An RNZAF officer at present serving on exchange with the RAAF No 5 Helicopter Sqn would also go to Vietnam.

This officer, Flt Lt J. B. Clements, would spend six months in Vietnam before returning to New Zealand at the end of his exchange duty.

The Acting Minister for Defence (Mr Bury), said the arrangement with the New Zealand authorities would be to the mutual benefit of both Air Forces and it would provide RNZAF helicopter pilots with operational experience.

OUR MEN IN VIETNAM



SIX OF THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY PILOTS flying with the RAAF's No. 9 Iroquois helicopter squadron in Vietnam, pictured together before going out on missions in support of the Australian Task Force. Eight Navy pilots are on 12 months'

attachment to the RAAF. In the picture (l to r) are Sub.-Lt. Ken Vote, of Sydney; Lt. Andy Craig, of Melbourne; Sub.-Lt. Geoff Vidal (Sydney), Sub.-Lt. Marty Ward (Nowra, NSW), Lt. Tony Hill (Nowra, NSW), and Sub.-Lt. John "Bomber" Brown (Sydney).



No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Pilots at an evening briefing in May 1971 at Vung Tau airfield. Standing rear, from left: Phil Smith, Peter Armstrong, John Buchanan, Dick Waddy, John Dahlitz, Ian Clark RN-ZAF, Reg Van Leuvan, Ron Bishop, Chris Peters RNZAF, Peter Drury, Rhys James, Garry Dunbar, Warren Duff, Greg Walsh, Adrian Pullar, Graeme Chalmers. Seated front from left: Ken Clark, Robin Klitscher RNZAF, Peter Mahood (incoming CO 9SQN, Everitt 'Lofty' Lance, Peter Coy outgoing CO 9SQN, Norm Goodall.



FLTLT Ian Clark GDPLT RNZAF, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 1971



'Kiwi' pilot Brian Senn RNZAF awaiting the VIPs at a Fire Support Base (FSB) in 1971.



L/R: Chris Peters and Brian Senn, RNZAF in 1969.

Albatross 05 was the dedicated call sign of the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN aircraft tasked to transport VIPs. When VIP tasks were over for the day, 05 would be tasked 'as required' along with the other No. 9 SQN RAAF Iroquois helicopters.

The Aussies and Kiwis got on very well together when flying and socially, although some banter or 'minor sledging' did occur. However, this cannot be said of the plaster of paris model

of the flightless bird native only to NEW ZEALAND that hung by a stainless steel chain in 'Kiwi Corner' of the Officers' Mess at Vung Tau. The following photograph is the replacement for the battered previous bird that had undergone many indignities at the hand of RAAF 'bograt' pilots. The 'duty of care' by the Kiwis to protect this endangered species did not last for long as within minutes of the bird's installation, the new plaster kiwi mascot 'had a dart up its nether regions'.

The following photograph shows FLGOFF Chris Peters, Pilot RNZAF with mascot 'KIWI'.



AVM Robin Klitscher CBE, DFC, AFC, RNZAF (Ret'd). RK was an impressive, no nonsense and highly respected and likeable officer and pilot who excelled in all aspects of his tour of duty with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN (Author's Comment from personal observation).

6 August 1967

The first No. 9 Squadron pilot operational casualty was SQN LDR Jim Cox. When hovering to conduct a hoist rescue of 7 RAR troops (Operation Ballarat - Battle of Suoi Chau Pha), enemy fire commenced and he sustained a bullet wound to his leg after the bullet had ripped through his flying boot. Co-pilot PLTOFF Pete Davidson took control and flew the battle-damaged helicopter back to base.

September 1967

A2-1023 and A2-1025 were badly damaged by enemy ground fire.

3 October 1967

Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. Corporal John 'Snow' Coughlan Iroquois Crewman, was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal (CGM) for his exceptional bravery and actions in rescuing injured and burned crew members of a crashed US Army gunship helicopter. CPL Coughlan had been winched down to the crash site following the Albatross 04 (FLTLT Bob Thompson, pilot) response to the gunship's distress call and after searching and locating the wreckage in known enemy territory. Below, 'Snow', gentleman and great character, ANZAC DAY 2013 in Melbourne:



October 1967

No. 9 Squadron aircraft revetments on Vung Tau Airfield were completed.

November 1967

Iroquois aircraft aerial spraying rig was manufactured by squadron personnel. Squadron commenced aerial spraying operations at Nui Dat. Later on, UH-1H A2-380 became the dedicated 'spray aircraft' with an ever-present and pungent chemical smell.

December 1967

John Grey Gorton became Australian Prime Minister after the death of Prime Minister Harold Holt.

Feb-Mar 1968

From the Government's 1967 decision and order for 16 Iroquois UH-1H (Hotel) aircraft, A2-376 to A2-383 were delivered direct to No. 9 Squadron at Vung Tau, SVN. The Bell Iroquois Hotel model was fitted with the Lycoming 1400 shp T53-L-13 engine.

25 March 1968

SQNLDR R.H. (Ron) Tucker posted as No. 9 Squadron SENGO.

23 April 1968

Vung Tau Airfield receives heavy enemy rocket attack; No. 9 Squadron equipment was undamaged but 50 yards from the No. 9 Squadron hangar a US Caribou transport aircraft was destroyed.

21 May 1968

WGCDR J.A. Paule posted as Commanding Officer (CO) No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN.

WGCDR J.A. Paule – Author’s comment from personal observation. John Paule was a highly effective Squadron Commander and esteemed by most people that worked with, or for him. ‘JP’ as he was known, was Commanding Officer of No. 9 Squadron RAAF on two occasions: 1968–1969 in SVN and 1973–1975 at RAAF Base Amberley QLD. After an exceptional Air Force career, ‘JP’ retired with the rank of Air Vice-Marshal.

July 1968

The remaining Iroquois UH-1Hs (Hotel) were delivered similarly in July, A2-766 to A2-773 inclusive.

This action enabled the Iroquois Bravos to be

returned to Australia to No. 5 Squadron RAAF at Fairbairn ACT and the Search and Rescue (SAR) Flights at RAAF Darwin, Williamtown, Pearce, Butterworth in Malaysia and, the Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU) at RAAF Edinburgh SA.

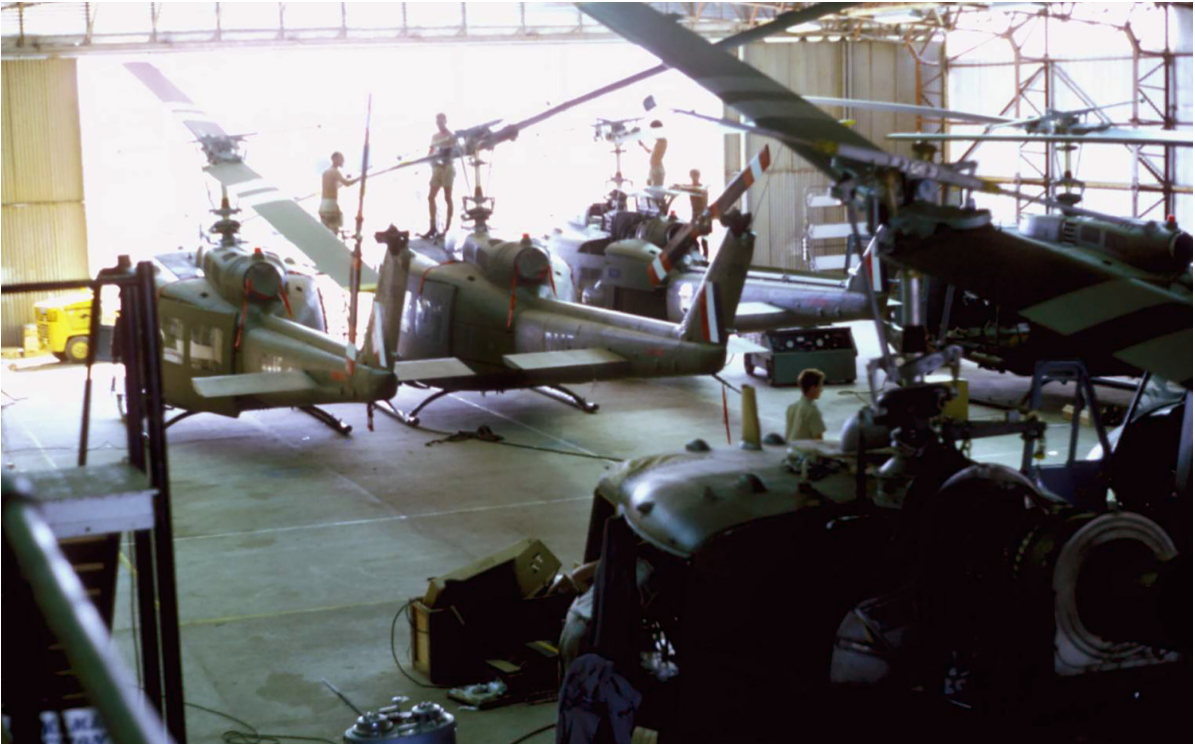
July 1968

‘RAAF VIETNAM SOP FOR NO 9 SQUADRON’ was first issued.

No. 9 Squadron ‘in-house’ Gunship Development was underway led by Squadron Leader Brian Dirou DFC, Pilot. The prototype aircraft was UH-1H A2-773; flight trials commenced and development continued until November.



John Paule at the Plaque Dedication conducted at the AWM on 3 June 2006



Above: Bell Iroquois UH1-H (Hotel) helicopters being accepted at the Vung Tau No. 9SQN hangar in February 1968.

Below: L/R: Ian Fogarty, Joe Driver and Tony Lea at their RAAF Pilots' Course Graduation function in 1968.



No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois 'Gunships'

In July 1968 a No. 9 Squadron 'in-house' Gunship Development commenced, led by (then) Squadron Leader Brian Dirou DFC, Pilot (See Appendix H, Wing Commander Brian Dirou DFC). The prototype aircraft was UH-1H A2-773 (displayed at the AWM in Canberra). Flight trials commenced and development continued until November. The Australian government approved purchase of some weapon kits in December 1968. Through January 1969, there was further No. 9 Squadron 'in-house' Gunship Development; 7 sets of gunship equipment were in location and the modification of six aircraft began. In March 1969, 'in-house' Gunship Air-

crew and Maintenance training began.

September 1968

A2-769 suffered Category 4 damage and was subsequently rebuilt at a local US Army Iroquois maintenance facility.

late January 1968

Tet Offensive 1968. Disregarding the seven day truce from 27 January until 3 February, the VC, backed by the regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA), launched a massive offensive throughout South Vietnam. No. 9 Squadron RAAF was heavily involved in providing air support. American troop strength peaks at 540,000.



No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois Bravo Model A2-1025 'Ned Kelly' with L/R: SGT Ernie Moore, FLTLT Bob Thompson, SQNLDR Jim Cox and LAC Ted Maxwell.

January 1969

Iroquois A2-149 was received as a replacement aircraft.

18 March 1969

SQNLDR D.A. (Don) Tidd posted as No. 9 Squadron SENGO.

21 April 1969

No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN 'in-house' Gunship Development 'Bushrangers' became operational.

The following is a Gunship Project Progression document contributed by Brian Dirou:

Gunship Project Chronological Progression

Initial 9SQN gunship experimentation involved fitment of borrowed obsolescent XM16 weapon system equipments to a Bravo model aircraft.

| Date | Aircraft | Crew | Duration | Task/Mission |
|---------|----------|-------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 09Mar68 | A2-1025 | Cox/Dirou/Maxwell/Moore | 1.00 | Ned Kelly Ops 1&2 |

The Bravo model was considered too performance limited for the gunship role and the unit had begun re-equipping with Hotel model aircraft so the goal became investigation of Hotel model suitability.

Initial XM21 weapons system equipment fitment experimentation for Hotel model aircraft was conducted in the hangar beginning in May 1968 utilizing A2-380.

| Date | Aircraft | Crew | Duration | Task/Mission |
|---------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------------------------|
| 27May68 | A2-380 | Dirou | 1.00 | Firing trials Ned Kelly Mk. 2 |
| 29May68 | A2-380 | Dirou | 1.00 | Firing trials Ned Kelly Mk. 2 |
| 29May68 | A2-380 | Paule/Dirou | 1.10 | Firing trials Ned Kelly Mk. 2 |

Fitment of the XM21 armament system on Hotel model rear external stores stations was considered a non-viable concept. Use of forward external stores stations for mounting of miniguns was progressed.

A2-773 was used for all the on ground project development work from about July 1968 preceding flight trials of the Bushranger configuration that began in September 1968.

| Date | Aircraft | Crew | Duration | Task/Mission |
|---------|----------|----------------|----------|--|
| 18Sep68 | A2-773 | Paule/Dirou | 1.25 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 22Sep68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Ward | 1.30 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 25Sep68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Ward | 1.45 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 29Sep68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Haylock | 4.35 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 17Oct68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Haylock | 3.15 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 18Oct68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Parsons | 2.30 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 19Oct68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Dalmolen | 1.35 | Firing trials for Bushranger configuration |
| 28Jan68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Creelman | 0.50 | Doorgun trials |
| 14Feb69 | A2-773 | Dirou/Budd | 2.00 | Harmonization firing |
| 13Mar69 | A2-773 | Dirou/COMRAAFV | 2.30 | Bushranger familiarization |

The following aircraft were progressively modified for the Bushranger configuration in this sequence: 773, 772, 383, 377, 149, 382, 703 (maybe others). A2-773 was used virtually continuously for aircrew and maintenance training from 18Mar69 until 19Apr69. A2-772 became available post-gunship modifications on 07Apr69 and A2-383 on 14Apr69.

The Bushrangers were declared operational on 21Apr69 crewed as follows:

| Date | Aircraft | Crew | Task/Mission |
|---------|----------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 21Apr68 | A2-773 | Dirou/Lynch/Amos/Richardson | Bushranger 71 |
| 21Apr68 | A2-383 | Butler/Tardent/Jesinowski/Martin | Bushranger 72 |
| 21Apr68 | A2-772 | Budd/Bradford/Love/Rennie | Bushranger 73 |



Above: Nev Pratt, ADG and No 9 SQN RAAF gunner, pictured at twin starboard M60 machine gun station during a mission to Cambodia in late Nov 70 - see pages 98 & 99, Detachment to Phnom Penh. Twin machine guns were fitted to the three Huey slicks on that mission. Normally slicks were fitted with one machine gun per side.

Below: Bob Upham, GDPLT re-arming a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Bushranger' gunship at Kanga Pad, Nui Dat in late 1970.



FLGOFF Bob Upham MID GDPLT, No. 9SQN RAAF SVN

Bob served in SVN with No. 9 SQN from 21 January 1970 until 21 January 1971. He was a skilled 'slick' and gunship pilot, determined, highly respected and was valuable mentor for the less experienced aircrew.

Also, and unknown to most, he was a very keen and talented photographer who used flair and innovation in his works.

Author's Note and 9SA Acknowledgement. Bob also took numerous photographs at the 2012 Commemoration, Reunion and 'Welcome

Home Huey 771' event at RAAF Aviation Heritage Centre on RAAF Base Amberley and these can be viewed in the photo archive at <https://raafdocumentary.com/bob-upham-photos/>. The 9SA acknowledges Bob's support through his high quality contributions (SVN and subsequently); his efforts have significantly enhanced many aspects of the Albatross to Black Hawk History Project.

A selection of historical, quality photographs from Bob's No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN tour is presented below.



A No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Bushranger' at the re-arm point Kanga Pad, Nui Dat; the 'hot refuelling' PSP area in the left background.



A look through one of the gunship weapon sights



'Bushranger' gunship Armament Control Panel



'Bushranger' gunship Weapon Select Panel – 2.75 inch rockets HE x six, single fire or pairs; WP x one, single fire for target marking.



Rocket pod, weapon head at front.



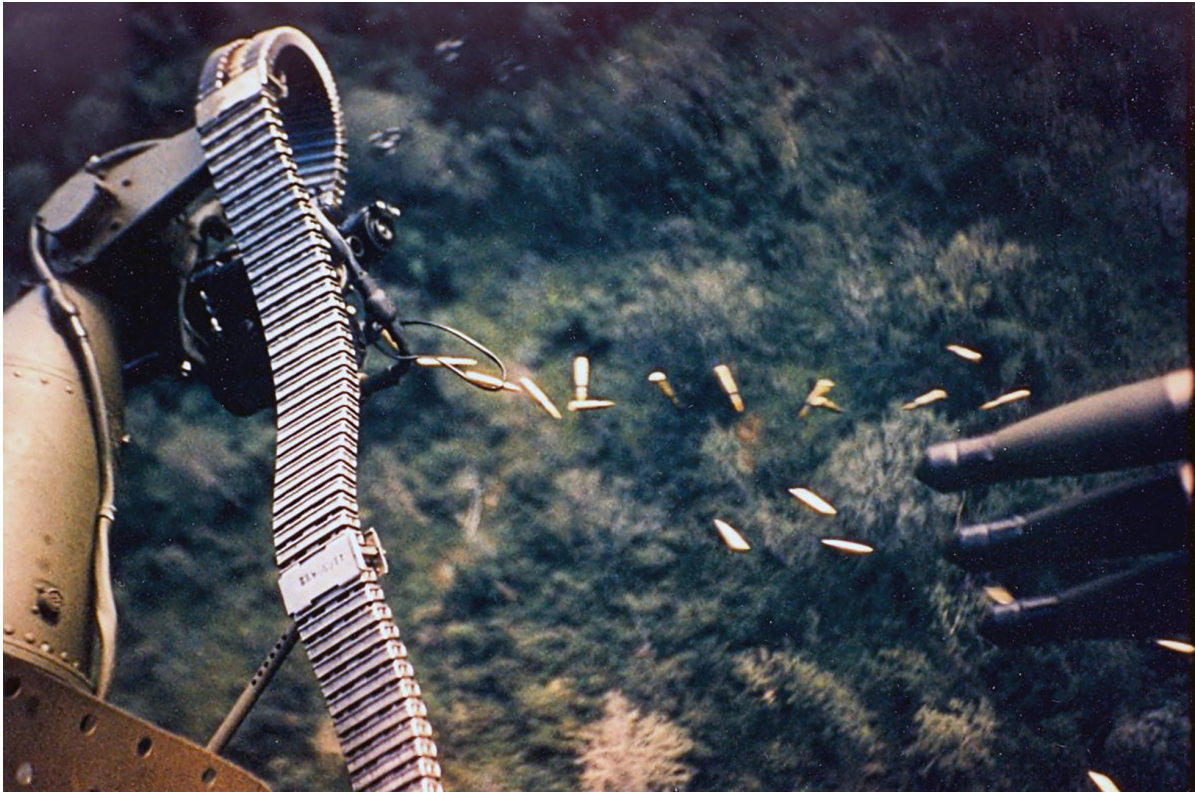
A 'Bushranger' gunship 'breaks left/away' after its firing pass; crewman suppressing the target with the twin M60 door guns. The correctly flown pattern meant that as the crewman completed his firing suppression the second gunship of the light fire team (LFT) rolled in to commence its firing pass with the aircraft's fixed forward-firing weapons (mini guns and rockets).



'Bushranger' right crew station and the twin 7.62mm M60 door gun fit



Iroquois A2-377 right door gun fit



Above & Below: 'Bushranger' mini gun firing – ejection of spent cases,





Above: A No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Bushranger' gunship take-off from Kanga Pad to the West.

Below: A 'Bushranger' gunship in flight.





Above: 'Bushranger' twin 7.62mm M60 door guns.

Below: 'Bushranger' Gunner's view over the twin M60's.





Above: 'Bushranger' impact of a ripple of 2.75 inch HE rockets.

Below: No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Land Rover and gun trailer at Vung Tau airfield.





Jack Lynch, pilot, No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN, re-arming the mini-guns on one of the 'Bushies' in 1969 - 1970. Source: unknown.



Al Lamb and Peter Robinson loading a 9SQN gunship at Nui Dat in 1969 Source: unknown.



No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN light fire team (LFT) approaching to land to the east at Kanga Pad, Nui Dat. The terrain features in the background are the Nui Dinh and the Nui Thi Vai hills. Source: Bob Up- ham

From: [Shane Casey](#)
Sent: Thursday, March 10, 2016 9:53 AM
To: ghchalms5@bigpond.com
Subject: A2-773 status

Dear Graeme,
thank you for your email regarding A2-773. The aircraft is currently located in our large technology annex at Mitchell ACT. We have taken its rotors off, but other than that, it is 'as delivered'. Unlike much of our collection, the Iroquois is stable, stored in a regulated environment, and doesn't need any interventive conservation work. Although it is not currently on public display, we run pre-booked guided tours for groups of 20-30 individuals through the annex on a fortnightly basis, during which we typically spend some time talking about its history. We also have open days, in which we might get several thousand people through. I would venture to suggest that a good 10,000 people might have seen the aircraft since its arrival here. We are also more than happy to take interested individuals out to see the aircraft (or any particular object).

We were very lucky to have an ex RAAF technician - Rob Gee (you probably knew him) - working as a volunteer collecting information on the aircraft's configuration in Vietnam and the various modifications that had been made. Rob made a great contribution until his untimely death. Since then we have acquired from the ADF miniguns, rocket pods and recently a collection of M60s, (unfortunately, very badly and visibly rendered safe) which would allow its Bushranger configuration to be achieved. There are no immediate plans to display the aircraft in our main galleries, as we already have a UH 1B on display in a sound and light show there, but we are hoping to expand our storage and display space soon - hopefully more items will be able to be displayed. We still need to compile much more information on the Iroquois, get more personal stories associated with it. Perhaps your work will help with that aspect? We would be more than happy to receive any information and photos you or your former colleagues might have on the aircraft.

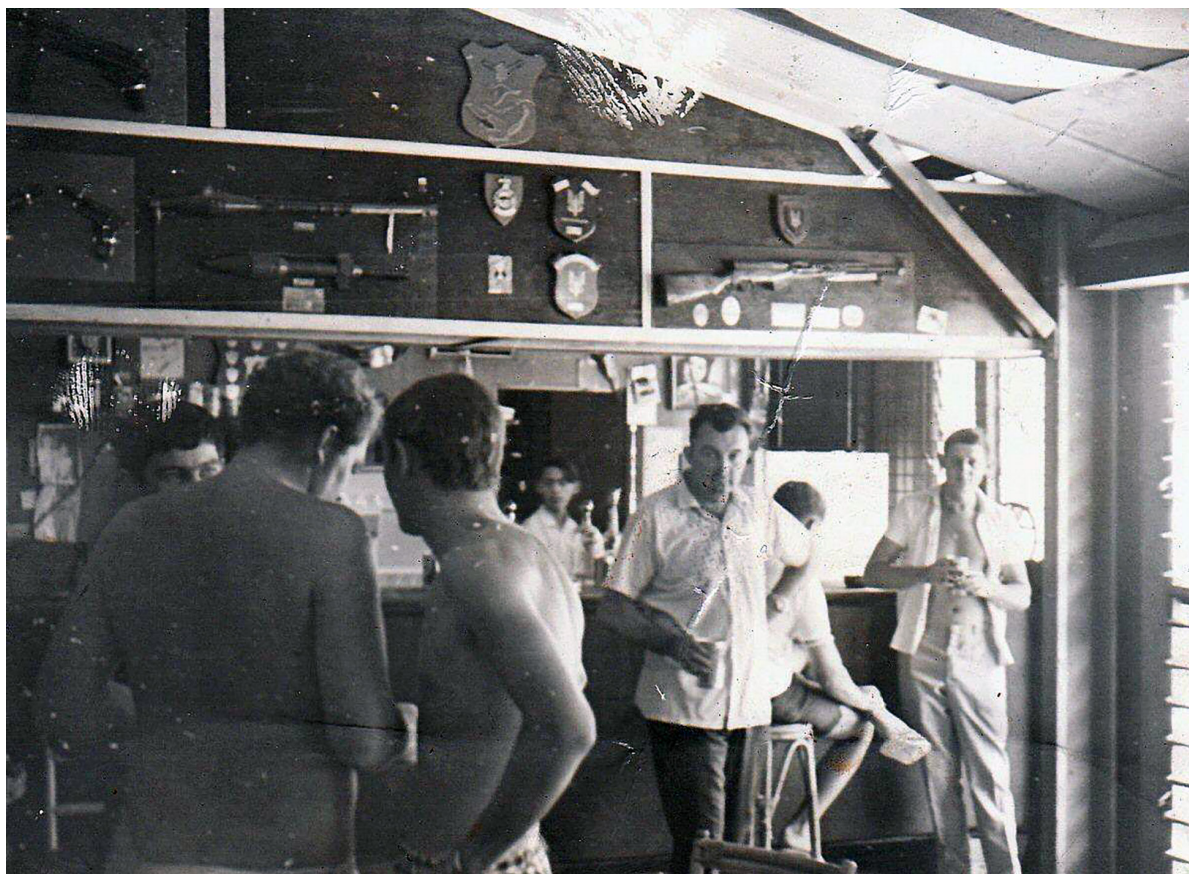
Yours sincerely

Shane Casey

Senior Curator, Military Heraldry and Technology
Shane.Casey@awm.gov.au | t 02 62636008 | 0457481719
Australian War Memorial | GPO Box 345 Canberra ACT 2601 | www.awm.gov.au

Please send any large attachments to me [here](#).

Author's follow-up: Status of A2-773 at the AWM (March 2016)



Above: Airmen's Mess Bar at RAAF Vung Tau; with its collection of captured weapons.

Below: Ettamogah Pub, Vung Tau, and Friday night seafood buffet.



1969 – 1970

Sixth Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (6 RAR) did two tours in South Vietnam, 1 April 1966 – 5 July 1967 and 7 May 1969 – 28 May 1970; the latter tour was as 6 RAR/ NZ-Anzac Battalion.

14 May 1969

WGCDR R.W. 'Nugget' Hibben posted as CO No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN.

17-19 August 1969

The Dustoff Iroquois crewed by Bob Treloar, Jim Satrapa, Tony Huntley and John Kerins received nineteen enemy hits when supporting A Coy 5RAR elements who were engaged in fierce fighting; A Coy had suffered 1 KIA and 31 WIA. American Dustoff and No. 9 Squadron RAAF Dustoff aircraft and crew attempted hoist recoveries of the wounded covered by the Bushrangers' heavy fire. FLGOFF Treloar was awarded the MID for his action. FLGOFF Mike Tardent, the 'Bushranger 71' aircraft captain provided vital support during this action and he was later awarded the DFC.

15 October 1969

A2-381, hydraulic failure during SAS Patrol extraction by rope; crashed and was written off.

January 1970

A2-376 sustained battle damage due to a mine detonation and had 32 holes patched.

13 February 1970

Enemy mine damage to A2-379 piloted by PLTOFF Ian Fogarty. See images further along.

7 March 1970

SQNLDR K.J. (Keith) Taylor posted as SENGO on his second tour of duty with No. 9 Squadron

at Vung Tau.

26 March 1970

A2-770 received two rounds of ground fire.

22 April 1970

Prime Minister Gorton announced that one of the Task Force's three battalions on the OR-BAT would not be replaced in November 1970 (8RAR).

May 1970

WGCDR P. Coy posted as CO No. 9 Squadron.

4 May 1970

Due to engine failure just north of Vung Tau airfield, the pilot of A2-110 flew a successful auto-rotation onto mudflats. Although the aircraft had been immersed in sea water it was recovered by a US Army Chinook helicopter before nightfall. Following maintenance A2-110 continued in RAAF service until December 1989.

20 June 1970

A2-382 (gunship), received enemy fire in the Long Hai hills and due to battle damage (engine and fuel tanks) an emergency landing was made on a beach about two miles from the incident location. The aircraft could not be recovered before nightfall; engulfed in sea water and written-off.

A2-768 hit by 18 enemy rounds; off-line for five days for repairs.

A2-377 sustained ground fire damage to its fuel tank

The No. 9 Squadron Forward Servicing Party (FSP) arrangement was established at Nui Dat.

Below, are three excellent photos contributed by SGT Ray Evans taken during 6 RAR's second tour of duty in SVN. Ray took these from the pax/cargo compartment of a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Huey' when redeploying to Nui Dat:



Above: A 'digger's' view from a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Huey' en route to Nui Dat. Nui Dat itself is the hill feature seen in the background, upper left.

Below: Nui Dat from the 'Huey', Ray Evans 6 RAR.





Long finals to Kanga Pad, Nui Dat. The pilot is WGCDR Pete Coy DSO, Commanding Officer No. 9SQN RAAF SVN from 7 May 1970 until 6 May 1971.



No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, Ian Fogarty GDPLT with George Edwards DFM, ADG/Iroquois Gunner, in 1969.

15 OCT Alb 02, Wg Cdr R.W. Hibben (037568) GDPLT started a rope extraction of SAS patrol 32. Whilst the patrol was still on the ropes the CO experienced a hydraulic failure. The patrol were dragged a few yards before release. The aircraft, A2-381, crashed at YS694979 and was classed Cat 5 damage and later destroyed by a SAS demolition team. The crew and patrol were flown to Vampire for examination. The CO was released but Flt Lt M.K. Woolf (055160) GDPLT the co-pilot was detained and had stitches put into head cuts. A46554 AC May T.A. ADG (Gunner) was detained with a back injury and A216972 Sgt Pinkerton T.J. ENGRITT (Crewman) who was unmarked was detained for 24 hours for observation. A changeover of 6 RAR return to Nui Dat was completed without incident. Some companies of 6 RAR were inserted into the "Light Greens" and Xuyen Noc.

Above: Incident report for the A2-381 crash (hydraulic failure during SAS Patrol extraction by rope) 15 October 1969.

26 OCT Buchrangers covered a US dust off aircraft D058 who was called forward by C/S 12 of 9 RAR. The American aircraft received groundfire and returned to base. A second US dust off, D056, arrived at the same time as Alb 03 and D056 was directed into a secure winch point. Whilst Alb 03 was holding high as a spare. BR72, Plt Off J.H. Driver (045529) GDPLT was flying top cover and BR 71, Plt Off B.A. Brown (045400) GDPLT went down and circled the winching aircraft D056. Almost at the completion of the winch ground fire hit BR 71 and a strong smell of fuel and a crewman report of fire persuaded Plt Off Brown to leave the area and head for the nearest clearing. The aircraft flew normally however and another call from the crewman to say the smoke was streaming fuel made Plt Off Brown change his mind about landing in the bush and he continued about another three clicks and landed safely at FSB Diggers Rest. The American aircraft completed his winch in the meantime and Alb 03, Flt Lt M.K. Woolf (055160) GDPLT went in to do a lift out of 1 Aust KIA from the same winch point, BR 72 came to support Alb 03 if required. Alb 03 had just come to the hover when tracer was directed at Alb 03 and BR 72. BR 72 turned to roll in on the fire position and Alb 03 disappeared, no radio calls were heard. Dragon 33, a US Army Cobra, and Alb 04 eventually found Alb 03 as the light was falling. Crew of Alb 03 was winched out and taken to Vampire where the injuries to the crew were found to be as follows. Flt Lt M.K. Woolf (055160) GDPLT, captain of aircraft, broken bone in right thumb, cuts and contusions to legs and face; Plt Off D.V. Knights (0317786) GDPLT Co-pilot, broken jaw. A18779 Sgt Parker F.J. OLKA (Crewman) cuts to face, and A223690 AC Price R.J. ADG1 (Gunner) crushed 1st lumbar vertebra. The aircraft was examined the next day by the Engineering Officer, pronounced Cat. 5 and destroyed in situ by explosive charges.

Above: Incident report for Iroquois A2-769 (Albatross 03), 26 October 1969.

Below: Post-crash photograph of A2-769.



with No 9 Sqn in Vietnam. AC Manson, 19, comes from East Perth. He joined the RAAF two years ago, and has served 10 months in Vietnam.

Right: Wearing his flak jacket, helmet, and with his M60 machine gun fully armed, LAC Peter Armstrong, a helicopter crewman serving with the RAAF in South Vietnam, is ready for action. LAC Armstrong is a member of No 9 Sqn, which operates Iroquois helicopters out of Vung Tau.



Above: LAC Peter Armstrong, Iroquois Gunner, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, during the period 11 February 1969 until 22 December 1969.

Right: Tony Lea, GDPLT No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN and a 'Huey' on Kanga Pad, Nui Dat in 1969. Tony served in SVN from 25 February 1969 until 21 January 1970.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

UNIT HISTORY SHEET

(AFO 18/F/5)

Form A. 50
(Revised May, 1951)

of (Unit or Formation)...NO. 9 SQUADRON.....

No. of Sheet 2174

| Place | Date | Summary of Events | References to Appendices |
|---------|-----------|---|--------------------------------|
| VUN TAU | 11 FEB 70 | with unknown results. BR 71 (Plt Off J. Lynch (045551) GDPLT) led HFT for 4 hours 15 minutes as cover for G Coy 5 RAR's engagement with an occupied enemy bunker system. Alb 03 (Gp Capt R. McKimm (022084) GDPLT) winched out one Australian with shrapnel wounds to legs from YS457527 and took him to Vampire. NDO 1 (Plt Off J.A. Wheel (0216300) GDPLT) and NDO 2 (Flg Off M. Walker (0316481) GDPLT) flew cover for US Dustoff 22 who winched out one wounded Aust from YS5467. Patient had shrapnel wounds to thighs and was winched out using jungle penetrator. Patient passed out on way up and after becoming entangled in a tree, was eventually taken to Vampire. | |
| | 12 FEB 70 | Only note of interest today was TP of H Coy 6 RAR from the old FSB Ash to Nui Dat. | |
| | 13 FEB 70 | Black Friday for some but the luck of the Squadron continues! During the extract of SAS patrol C/S 31 by Alb 03 (Plt Off I. Fogarty (0317512) GDPLT) from YS710800 a mine was detonated by rotor downwash on lift out when the A/C was at a height of 4 - 8 ft. Not realising exactly what had happened and assuming the enemy were on the Pz, the captain elected to fly the A/C out. The aircraft finally landed 1100 metres away. Patrol 31, which had subsequently been extracted by Alb 04 (Flt Lt F.P. Riley (0216204) GDPLT) and Patrol 11, previously extracted without incident, were re-inserted to secure the downed A/C. Alb 04 extracted Alb 03 crew. SAS Patrol C/S 22 was then extracted from YS692704 and re-inserted with the other 2 patrols. The damaged A/C was recovered by OH-47 and the three patrols eventually extracted without incident. Fortunately no-one was injured but the aircraft sustained Cat 2 damage. | <i>W. P. ...</i> <i>...</i> |
| | 14 FEB 70 | A quieter day after yesterday's excitement. Three SAS patrols were extracted: C/S 19 from YS672744 | |

Enemy mine damage to A2-379 piloted by PLTOFF Ian Fogarty detailed above from the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Unit History and two photographs of the helicopter damage on the following pages.



A2-379 enemy mine damage, 13 February 1970.



A2-379 enemy mine damage, 13 February 1970.

Tracker Dogs¹

Of all those sent to Vietnam eleven members of the Australian Army carried out their allotted tasks without a word of complaint, which was all the more commendable considering they could not return home when their tour of duty ended. These veterans were, of course, the tracker dogs used by the Australian Task Force.

The dogs were the core of Combat Tracker Teams that were used from 1967 until the last combat troops departed in 1971. Normally two dogs were assigned to each of the Australian Battalions of the Task Force at Nui Dat. Each dog would complete around a three year tour before they were 'retired'. On occasions, as when 2RAR was replaced by 4RAR, which arrived with Milo and Trajan, there were three dogs in the battalion.

Generally, a Tracker Team consisted of the two dogs and their handlers, two visual trackers and two cover men (a machine-gunner and a signaller). However, each Battalion had their own way of doing things and so you will find, for example, in 6RAR during their second tour from June 1969 to May 1970 there were 3 teams in use.

The dogs were trained at the Infantry Centre, at Ingleburn in NSW, and came from a variety of sources, including the local pound. One, Marcus, was donated by Sir Roden Cutler VC. They were outstandingly successful in carrying out their tracking task and, although not trained to detect mines, the dogs were intelligent and sometimes able to do so.

The Australian Army policy was that the dogs would not be brought home at the end of their service. One reason, perhaps not ad-

¹ Obtained from DVA Web Site

equately explained at the time, related to an Army veterinary report which noted that large numbers of American tracker dogs in Vietnam had died from a tropical disease, thought (but not confirmed) to be transmitted by ticks. The report recommended that no tracker dogs be allowed back into Australia "even under strict quarantine".

Homes were found with European or Australian families resident in Saigon for 10 of the 11 dogs. One dog, Cassius, died of heat exhaustion after a training run.

In order of arrival in Vietnam, the dogs were

- Cassius
- Justin
- Caesar
- Marcus
- Tiber
- Janus
- Julian
- Milo
- Trajan
- Juno
- Marcian

After a contact with the enemy, tracker dogs were sometimes flown to the location to assist in the follow up action e.g. following blood trails.

Warren Duff, GDPLT No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, recalled using the Iroquois helicopter rescue hoist to winch down a tracker dog and its handler and this might have been the only instance of it happening. 'Duffy' served with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 18 February 1971 until 20 December 1971.



Above: Helicopter Insert of Sappers with their tracker dog - hot, wet and dangerous work. Source: Graeme Chalmers No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN late 1970.



Right: An Australian tracker dog and soldier in SVN. Source: AWM

Below: Tracker dog and handler in a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Huey' - image source, unknown.



FLGOFF Chris Beatty DFC, GDPLT RAAF

Chris Beatty, GDPLT, served in South Vietnam with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 13 May 1969 until 13 May 1970 and on 22 April 1970, he was awarded the DFC for his flying performance in combat with No. 9 SQN.

Due largely to his piloting skill, he was posted to Central Flying School (CFS), the 'flying instructors' school' at RAAF Base East Sale VIC where he made a valuable contribution from July 1975 until 1978.

Subsequently, Chris served for a number of years with No. 12 SQN RAAF flying and instructing on the Boeing CH-47C Medium Lift 'Chinook' helicopter from RAAF Base Amberley SE QLD and was Commanding Officer No. 12 SQN RAAF during the period 6 December 1984 to 29 November 1987. Nicknamed 'Speedball', Chris had a most significant and successful RAAF career and retired with the rank of Air Commodore.

28 June 1970

No. 9 Squadron RAAF Vietnam completed 40,000 flying hours 'in country'.

July 1970

Iroquois A2-110 – 'The Snake Incident': This aircraft was involved in an unusual "un-air-worthy" incident when it was discovered that a 1.6 metre-long snake had taken up residence, requiring considerable dismantling of the aircraft before the unwelcome passenger could be removed.

Maintenance personnel detect cracking tail booms on a number of aircraft.

Replacement aircraft Iroquois A2-703 and A2-723 were collected from Pleiku, SVN, and a



A youthful Chris Beatty in a 9SQN RAAF 'Huey' in 1969.

fourth gunship was configured and was 'put on line' on 31 July 1970.

Gloucester Cup 1969/1970 awarded to No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN

3 July 1970

A2-768 crashed; written-off. Crewman LAC Duncan McNair was seriously injured and sadly, he died as a result of those injuries on 20 July 1970.

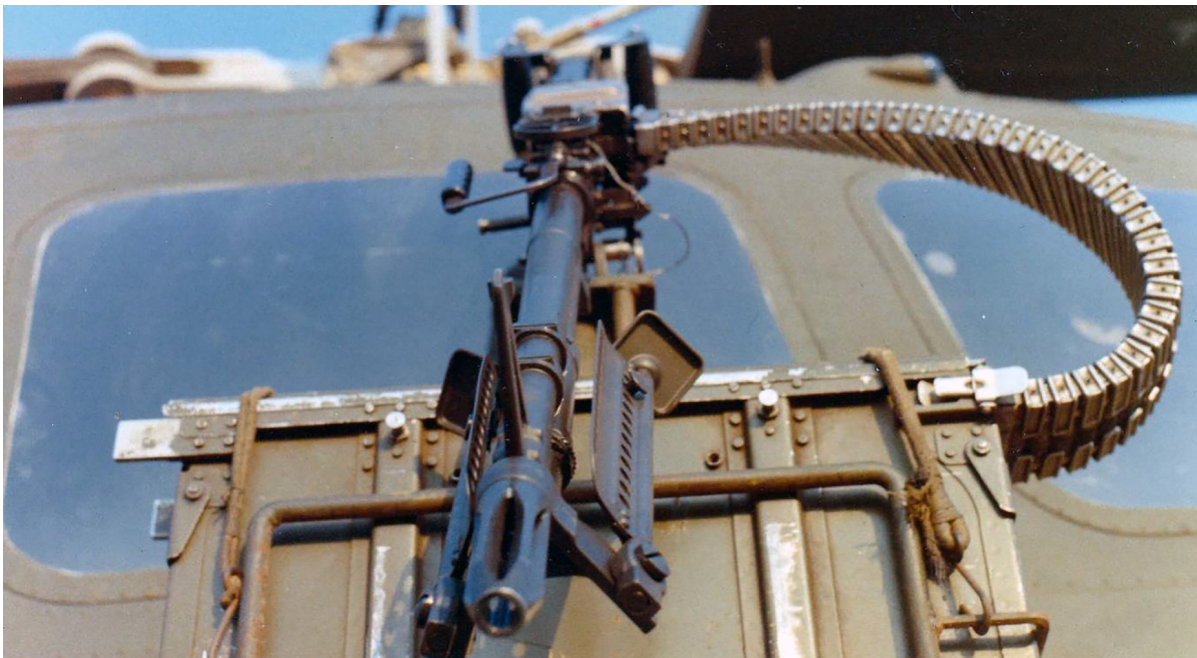
November 1970

Special ground handling wheel fitments were manufactured to enable movement of gunships configured with rocket pods. Modifications to the Iroquois under-fuselage were done so that each 'slick' aircraft could carry a Stokes Litter externally but still give crewman access for in-flight hover rescues using the stokes fitted to the hoist cable. Air Transportable Cabins for the FSP at Nui Dat were received.



Above: No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois A2-723 at the (RED EARTH) 'Dustoff' Pad, Nui Dat circa July 1971 (dry season). Image: Graeme Chalmers

Below: Single 7.62 mm M60 door gun as fitted to A2-723 and all No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'slick' configured Iroquois helicopters. Image: Graeme Chalmers





Above: One of the dedicated National Serviceman, 3798621 Private David E. Kennedy, Medical Orderly, 8th Field Ambulance, Royal Australian Army Medical Corps: Image: Graeme Chalmers

Below: The Duke of Gloucester Cup is the coveted operational proficiency trophy awarded to a RAN, Army and RAAF unit each year so it was a great feat for No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN to win this award for three years during its 5 1/2 year tenure in SVN:

The Minister for Air, Senator Tom Drake-Brockman (pictured below) inspects No 9 Sqn, at Vung Tau, South Vietnam on July 6, prior to presenting the squadron with the Gloucester Cup. It was the second year in succession that No 9 Sqn had won the trophy. Pictured on the Minister's right is the squadron CO, Wg Cdr Peter Coy.



**RAAF
NEWS**

Vol 12, No 7

PHAN

PILOTS, navigators and RAAF who will fly an aircraft in Australia are all States.

The first party of ten navigators from RAAF Base, Amberley, left for Davis Montham Air Force

1966 - 1967,
1968 - 1969, and
1970 - 1971 (eoy).



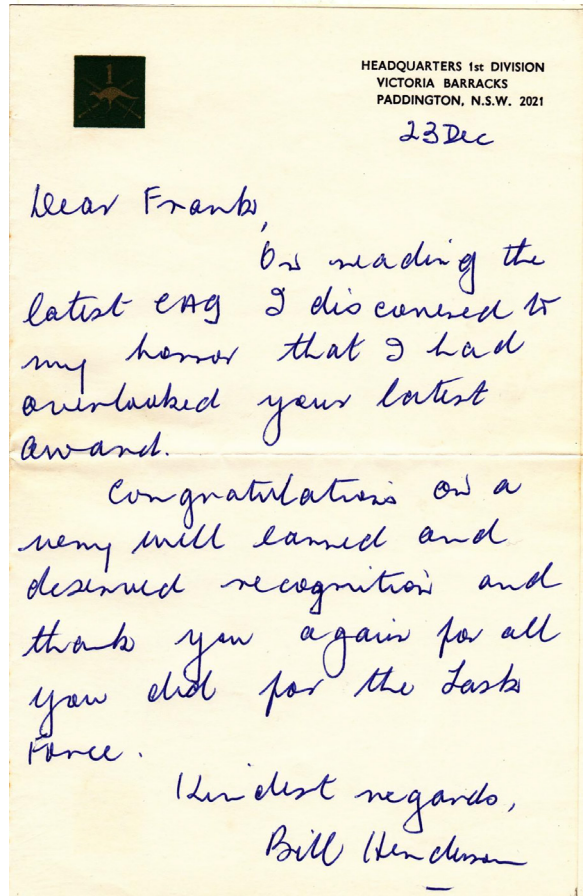
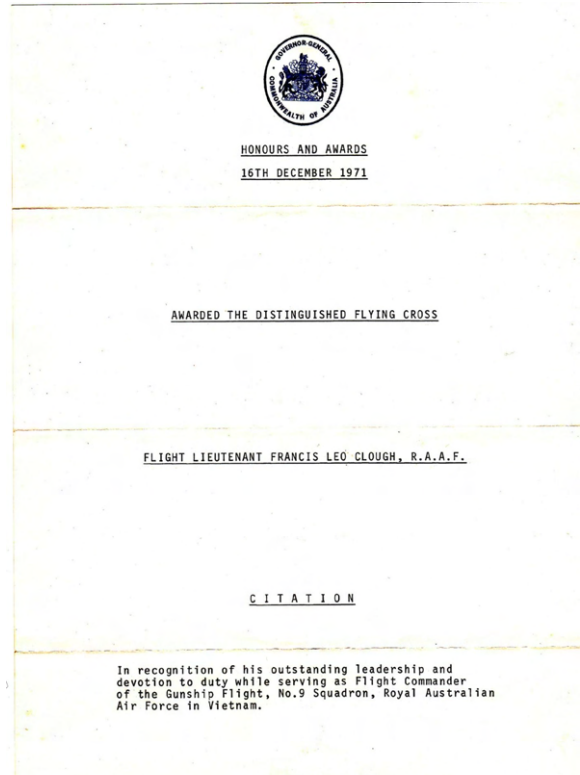
SQNLDR Frank Clough DFC GDPLT, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN photographed at a squadron meeting during his second No. 9 SQN tour, in late 1970.



He was from Sydney and a talented sportsman and later he was a RAAF fighter pilot for many years. Subsequently, he served two tours with No. 9 SQN in SVN, 12 May 1967 to 6 June 1968 and, 14 May 1970 until 11 February 1971. His specialty was with No. 9 Squadron's 'Bushranger' Iroquois gunships, was the Flight Commander of the Gunship Flight and, he was awarded the DFC in December 1971.

Frank was one of one of the great characters of the RAAF especially at No. 9 SQN and was admired by all who had the good fortune to have known him.

Above right is his distinguished flying cross award and a hand written congratulatory note from Brigadier Bill Henderson CDR 1st ATF.



30 November 1970

SQNLDR Mac Weller posted as SENGO No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN.

December 1970

A2-773 took enemy ground fire when supporting 7RAR soldiers about 5 nm east of Xuyen Moc and due to the considerable damage (fuel, instrument and electrical systems) it was landed and recovered by US Army Chinook. A2-377 was also working with 773 and she received one hit which required skin repair and a main rotor change.

23 February 1971

On a Dustoff mission to the Long Binh area, aircraft A2-376 piloted by FLGOFF Warren Rhone, conducted an auto-rotation near Sanford airstrip and transmitted an emergency radio call. Most squadron aircraft went looking for 'our downed bird' but after a short time were recalled as A2-376 and the crew were reported as safe. A US Army Chinook helicopter external-loaded 376 back to Vung Tau (cause of the incident was a Fuel Control Unit (FCU) malfunction).

March 1971

Back in Australia at that time, serious floods occurred in New South Wales. FLGOFF Nick Hobson DFC of No. 5 SQN RAAF located in Canberra ACT, was awarded the Air Force Cross (AFC) for his notable participation in the flood support operations.

The note of congratulations from Senator Tom Drake-Brockman, Minister for Air, stated in part: '... The outstanding service you have given to the Royal Australian Air Force, and in particular the professional competence and determination you displayed in rescue operations during the March 1971 floods in New South Wales, have made this a very well deserved award ...'.

8 March 1971

No. 9 Squadron RAAF Vietnam completed 50,000 flying hours 'in country.' This occurred on No. 9 Squadron Iroquois call-sign Albatross 01 (Zero One) captained by PLTOFF Graham Christian with FLGOFF Bob Redman as co-pilot.



'Hobbo' strapping in to a No. 9 SQN RAAF Iroquois helicopter at Kanga Pad, Nui Dat SVN circa APR 1969 – APR 1970, assisted by Geoff Smith.



Above: No. 1 Iroquois Helicopter Gunners' Course, RAAF Base Fairbairn ACT, November 1970.

Below: Relaxing on a hot evening at RAAF Vung Tau, in December 1970, are No. 9 SQN RAAF Pilots Dave Ozanne DFC (left) and Arnold Fox (right)





Aerial view en route Vung Tau to Nui Dat from the Left Pilot's Seat of a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois at 2000 feet AMSL during the 1970 wet season. Source: Graeme Chalmers.

Below: No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN aircrew photograph, Nui Dat, SVN between 1 October - 13 December 1970. Standing from left: Ken Clark; Col McCubbin; Ian Cameron; Gary Jones; Ron Bishop; Peter Sherriff; Ron Betts; Graeme Chalmers, Mick Castles; Rod Ranger; Bob Stephens. Kneeling: Bryan Rowley; Barry Hogan; Phil Smith; Dave Freedman; Aivars Vilcins; Nev Sinkinson; Peter Armstrong; Murray Welch; Chris Peters RNZAF.



SECRET

DETAILS OF OPERATIONS

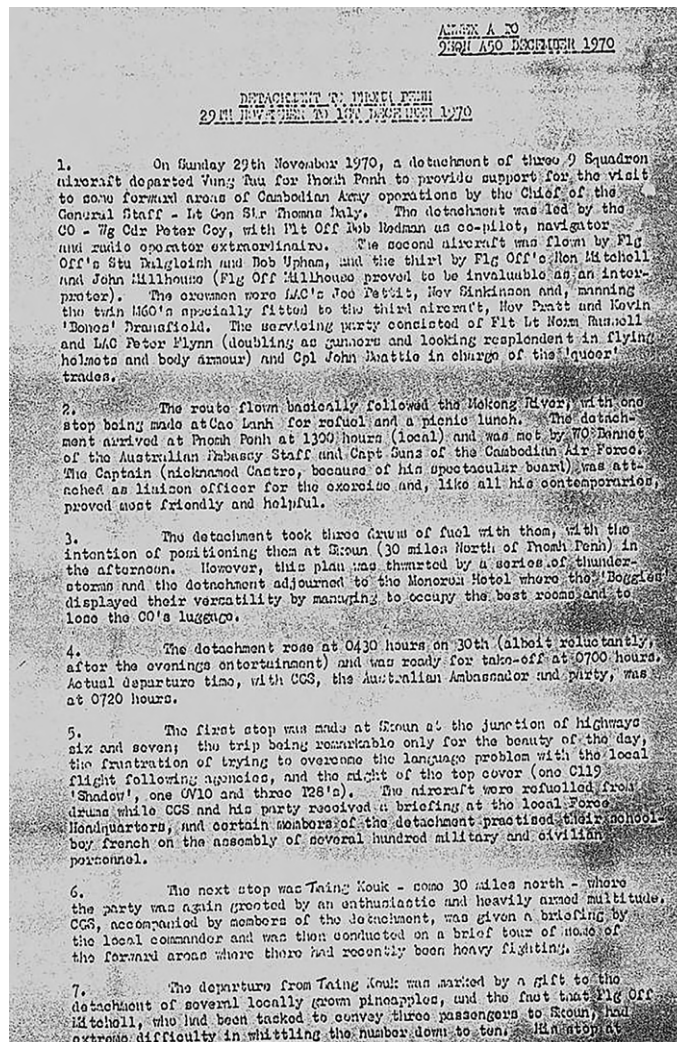
UNIT NO 9 SQUADRON

MONTH NOVEMBER

SHEET NO 37

| DATE | AIRCRAFT NO | CREW | SORTIES | TIME | RDS FIRED | AREA OF OPERATION AND TYPE OF OPERATION | PAX | HE |
|------|-------------|--|---------|------|-----------|---|-----|----|
| 30 | A2 - 703 | COY, REDMAN, PETTIT, RUSSELL | 9 | 6.15 | | HELICOPTER SP CGS VISIT LONG BINH | 22 | 7 |
| | 771 | MITCHELL, MILGROUSS, PRATT, DRANSFIELD | 10 | 6.25 | | " " " " " " | 20 | 12 |
| | 723 | UPHAM, DALGLEISH, SIMKINSON, FLYNN | 5 | 3.20 | | " " " " " " | 15 | 5 |
| | 723 | DALGLEISH, UPHAM, SIMKINSON, FLYNN | 3 | 2.40 | | " " " " " " | - | |

An interesting "Away" task for No. 9 Squadron is detailed here in this 1970 report (above and below) that took place between 29 November and 1 December 1970. A transcript is provided on the next page.



9 Sqn A50 DECEMBER 1970

DETACHMENT TO PHNOM PENH

29TH NOVEMBER TO 1ST DECEMBER 1970

1. On Sunday 29th November 1970, a detachment of three 9 Squadron aircraft departed Vung Tau for Phnom Penh to provide support for the visit to some forward areas of Cambodian Army operations by the Chief of the General Staff – Lt Gen Sir Thomas Daly. The detachment was led by the CO – Wg Cdr Peter Coy, with Plt Off Bob Redman as co-pilot, navigator and radio operator extraordinaire. The second aircraft was flown by Flg Off's Stu Dalgleish and Bob Upham, and the third by Flg Off's Ron Mitchell and John Millhouse (John Millhouse proved to be invaluable as an interpreter). The crewmen were LAC's Joe Pettit, Nev Sinkinson, and manning the twin M-60's fitted to the third aircraft, Nev Prat and, Kevin 'Bones' Dransfield. The servicing party consisted of Flt Lt Norm Russell and LAC Peter Flynn (doubling as door gunners and looking resplendent in flying helmets and body armour) and Cpl John Beattie in charge of the 'queer' trades.

2. The route flown basically followed the Mekong River, with one stop being made at Cao Lanh for fuel and a picnic lunch. The detachment arrived at Phnom Penh at 1300 hours (local) and was met by WO Bennet of the Australian Embassy Staff and Capt Sun of the Cambodian Air Force. The Captain (nicknamed Castro, because of his spectacular beard) was attached as liaison officer for the exercise and, like all his contemporaries, proved most friendly and helpful.

3 The detachment took three drums of fuel with them, with the intention of positioning them at Skuon (30 miles north of Phnom Penh) in the afternoon. However this plan was thwarted by a series of thunderstorms and the detachment adjourned to the Monorom Hotel where the 'Boggies' displayed their versatility by managing to occupy the best rooms and to lose the CO's luggage.

4. The detachment rose at 0430 hours on 30th (albeit reluctantly, after the evening's entertainment) and was ready for take-off by 0700 hours. Actual departure with CGS, the Australian Ambassador and party, was at 0720 hours.

5. The first stop was made at Skuon at the junction of highways six and seven, the trip being remarkable only for the beauty of the day, the frustration of trying to overcome the language problem with the local flight following agencies, and the might of top cover (one C119 'Shadow', one OV10 and three T28's). The aircraft were refuelled from the drums while CGS and his party received a briefing at the local force Headquarters, and certain members of the detachment practised their school boy French on the assembly of several hundred military and civilian personnel.

6. The next stop was Tang Kouk – some 30 miles north – where the party was again greeted by an enthusiastic and heavily armed multitude. CGS, accompanied by members of the detachment, was given a briefing by the local commander and was then conducted on a brief tour of some of the more forward areas where there had recently been heavy fighting.

7. The departure from Tang Kouk was marked by a gift to the detachment of several locally grown pineapples, and the fact the Flg off Mitchell, who had been tasked to convey three passengers to Skoun, had extreme difficulty in whittling the number down to ten. His stop at Skuon proved equally as interesting in that, quite apart from his passengers not wanting to disembark, a further six or seven were keen to board. 'Bones' Dransfield's efforts to solve the problem physically proved fruitless, but after ten minutes of confusion, during which the top cover dwindled away and the CO became somewhat tense, Flg Off. Millhouse's command of the French language won the day and the flight proceeded to Phnom Penh.

8. After CGS and his party deplaned, the aircraft were refuelled and, by prior arrangement, the detachment took off for Skoun to evacuate wounded and sick Cambodian Army personal to Phnom Penh. The top cover was not available for this trip and, as the CO's command of the local language had not improved regarding the flight following agencies, it was deemed prudent to restrict the operation to one trip only.

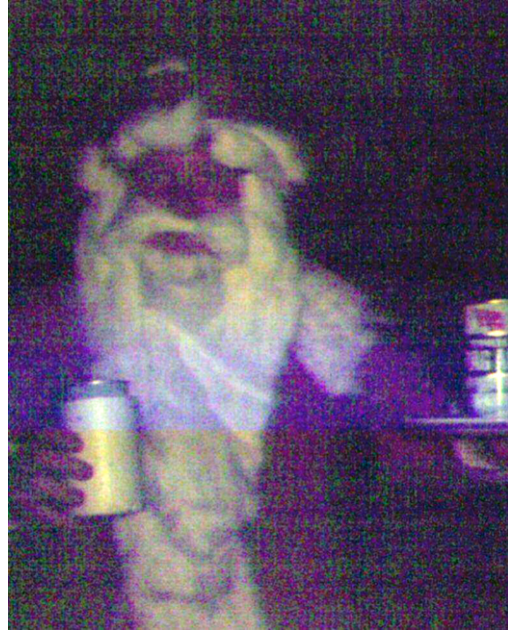
9. A total of 31 personnel including 7 stretcher cases, were evacuated in the one 3 aircraft lift. The popularity of the Mitchell/ Millhouse aircraft was again in evidence and they lifted 15 passengers.

10. The remainder of the 30th was devoted to absorbing some of the local 'culture' and the detachment returned to Vung Tau on 1st December.

END

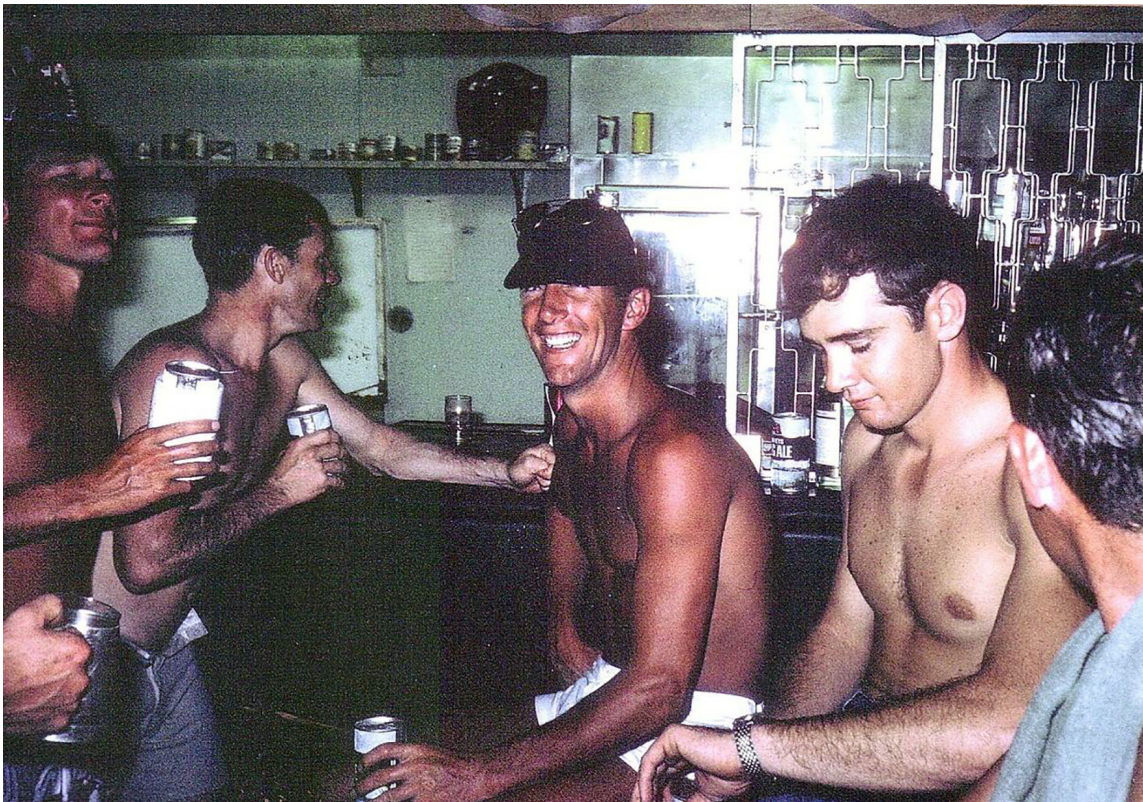


Above: The likeable character Ken 'The Crowd' Phillips, GDPLT No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, taken around Christmas 1970.



Right: Ken as Santa bearing gifts for the good No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'boggies' on Christmas Eve 1970.

Below: RAAF Vung Tau Airmens' Club Christmas Drinks in December 1970. L/R: Phil Smith, Nev Sinkinson, Graeme Chalmers and Bob Mitchell.



SAS and No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN

The next few paragraphs are an extract from Episode 3, *Phantoms of The Jungle*, a documentary produced around 2014 about the ASASR in South Vietnam. The extract records what past CO No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, WgCDR John Paule DSO AFC, and past SAS members stated:

SAS

Most SAS patrols depended on the helicopters of 9 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force. At first these helicopters were unarmed. This made SAS operations very risky. So the pilots modified their own gunships, but without first asking their masters in Canberra.

John Paule

Had we asked permission to develop a gunship the answer would have come back, "No, you can't because the aircraft is incapable of being a gunship." In fact the U.S. Army told us that our aircraft was incapable of being a gunship. But after nine months of creative effort and scavenging from the Americans – success.

9 Squadron had its own gunships, the Bushrangers – with rocket pods, (pause) multi-barrelled mini-guns, (pause) and M-60 machine guns on each side.

To insert a SAS patrol we would use five aircraft. The SAS patrol would be on one aircraft, there would be a command aircraft, there would be a spare aircraft and there would be a pair of gunships.

Holt McMinn

The troops boarding the helicopter and they would go on a helicopter called a slick ship.

The helicopter would just fall out of the sky to tree top level. You would fly at treetop level, sometimes just hitting the tops of the trees and ripping your greens if you were sitting in the door with your feet hanging out. It was the wildest ride of your life. The hair stood up on the back of your neck. It was better than anything that you would find at Wonderland or Disneyland or anywhere else -- what a ride! Just fantastic.

Ian Rasmussen

To move out onto those skids and just run into the bush and you were running into a barrier. Here we were, being dropped off in the middle of nowhere in enemy territory and running into a scrub line.

John Paule

Our relationship with the SAS was very close...if you pulled them out during a hot extraction, they wouldn't come on board the aircraft one at a time, sit down and roll a smoke and do up their seat belts. They would throw themselves on the floor of the aircraft, poke their guns at the side and add to the suppressive fire that the aircraft might be laying down itself.

Paddy Bacskai

So I jumped behind his twin M-60s and looking down I could still see my mates back to back by this time...I shot a nice arc of fire around them – very nice – I felt that it was good covering fire. Anyhow, the crew chief sort of came over me and he said to me, "Did you get any bastard?" And I said, "Well, I don't know because I mainly shot cover for my mates down below." And he says, "Because you used all my bullets!" [laughs]

John Coleman

But the 9 Squadron, they were a fantastic mob of people. When we prayed at night, we prayed to them first, then God, because we reckoned they did more good for us. [Laughs] Everyone was religious!

Chris Roberts

On one patrol in May 1969, south west of the Courtenay rubber, my patrol was surrounded. We had enemy that I could actually see to the north, south and to the west, and I was pretty sure that they were in the thick country to the east of us. We waited there for about three hours and finally, as the sun was going down, I got a call that the

Bushranger was on their way in – that was the Australian light fire team. I asked him to put rockets 20 m to the north and 20 m to the south of us...After the rockets came in a lone helicopter came across the top of the trees and dropped four ropes to us. Both door gunners were firing, we were firing. We hooked onto the ropes and we came out and there was tracer absolutely going everywhere. We could see the enemy firing at us as we were pulled up through the trees. And I've got to say that my patrol owes its life to that very gallant pilot in 9 Squadron.

9 Squadron and Lady Luck saved many SAS teams from certain death.



Prior to their PI awaiting start-up circa late 1970 is a SAS Patrol at a No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Huey'. Source: Peter Johnson.



Above: SAS Patrol at the 'Bus Stop' Kanga Pad, Nui Dat, pre Patrol Insertion (PI). Source: Graeme Chalmers.

Below: ALBATROSS 02 conducting a SAS Patrol Extraction by aircraft hoist in August 1970; Photographs taken from the LHS by the ALBATROSS 03 Co-pilot.





Above: In the hover adjacent the hoist aircraft ALBATROSS 02 is ALBATROSS 03 showing the RHS crewman covering the SAS Patrol hoist extraction with his 7.62 mm M60 door gun.

Below: Captured enemy VC female at Nui Dat. Source: unknown.



20 March 1971

PLTOFF Ronald William Betts was WIA when he suffered multiple enemy gun fire wounds while delivering gunship support for 3RAR soldiers who were in a serious contact with the enemy and had friendly wounded. He was co-pilot of a gunship, A2-383, when it was struck by 16 (or 20 rounds) of enemy ground fire. The aircraft captain FLTLT Dave Freedman, managed to force land the helicopter at a nearby Fire Support Base (FSB). Sadly, Ron died from his wounds later that day.

During the same combat operation, aircraft A2-110 incurred six bullet holes (windows, flooring and skin) and A2-379 was holed once.

31 March 1971

This action involved Iroquois A2-767, A2-110 and A2-773 when flying in support of Australian wounded troops north of Nui Dat. When operating the recue hoist during a Dustoff mission, A2-767 Iroquois crewman LAC Alan Bloom was wounded-in-action (WIA) from a burst of enemy ground fire. He subsequently died of his wounds in hospital. The pilot, Ken Phillips, force-landed the badly damaged helicopter at nearby FSB Beth whence it was recovered safely by a US Army Chinook helicopter. All three helicopters suffered damage (major to A2-110) and were recovered by different means.

March - April 1971

This period was considered the most difficult and challenging period for aircraft maintenance during the No. 9 Squadron commitment in Vietnam due to battle damage to many aircraft and the spate of tail boom failures.

March - Sep 1971

March - North Vietnamese Main Force Units re-enter Phuoc Tuy Province. 33rd Regiment extends its operations therein. June and July -1 ATF troops contact 33rd Regiment and 274th Regiment elements. August and September - 1 ATF continued operating in northern Phuoc Tuy. 21 September - 4RAR engages an enemy battalion in a bunker system, intense fighting, 6 Australian soldiers KIA.

17 April 1971

On 17 April 1971, Iroquois A2-767 (Dustoff 1) was shot-down by enemy when conducting a Medevac (from the hover with the stokes litter attached to the winch cable) in support of a Regional Forces Battalion (RF Bn) operation in the Long Hai Hills. The crew of A2-767 was FLGOFF Mick Castles Aircraft Captain, PLTOFF Simon Ford Co-pilot, CPL Bob Stephens Crewman, AC Roy Zegers Gunner and LCPL John Gillespie, Army Medic. PLTOFF Simon Ford suffered serious burns.

The South Vietnamese troops were being assisted by CAPT Albertson, US Army Special Forces Advisor, and CPL T. D. Blackhurst of the Australian Army Training Team (AATV).

Extract from the No. 9 SQN RAAF VIETNAM Unit History Sheet/Commanding Officer's Report of the 17April 1971 incident:

.. Dustoff 1 was called to 93B of 302 RF Coy at YS476507 to Medevac RF casualties from a land mine explosion the aircraft took ground fire, lost power and crashed over the winch site, busting into flames. Beneath the aircraft was an Australian MATT adviser, a US adviser (both killed) and one RF in the stokes litter with part of his low-

er legs missing, who managed to get clear. The four RAAF members escaped from the aircraft but the Army medic 3170244 LCPL Gillespie J. F. was killed. FLGOFF Castles then transmitted over "GUARD" frequency on his survival radio the condition and number of crew members, and headed for 9E's location to the SW. The area was still insecure and the possibility that it was mined, still existed. The surviving Dustoff crew then successfully joined ground call-sign 93E. The Bushrangers, led by PLTOFF Ron Bishop and who had been providing cover for the Dustoff, had problems ascertaining friendly positions, partly because of their spread and partly because 93B (English speaking) had been killed in the crash. The Bushrangers then suppressed while ALBATROSS 01 (Captained by WGCdr Pete Coy, Commanding Officer No. 9 SQN) went down to 93E's location and picked up the 4 RAAF members from Dustoff 1, plus 4 RF casualties from the original mine incident. Co-ordination between ALBATROSS 01 and the gunship team which was alternating 4 ships, particularly considering the communications problem with the people on the ground, was first class.

This was an horrific event ... the aircraft crash killed crew member TPR Gillespie, Medic Orderly (8th Field Ambulance), and those caught beneath, CAPT Albertson, CPL Blackhurst and four wounded South Vietnamese soldiers. Another RF soldier who had lost his legs managed to drag himself clear of the wreck. In hazardous circumstances, the four surviving Iroquois aircrew managed to vacate the burning wreck through mutual assistance and sheltered among nearby rocks. This happened while the

fire-fight between the Regional Forces soldiers and the enemy continued. The surviving crew members were winched out by another helicopter flown by the Commanding Officer, WGCdr Peter Coy, under suppressive fire from the No. 9 Squadron gunships. The CO flew his aircraft and crew back to the incident PZ and recovered the wounded Vietnamese soldiers. Aircraft A2-149 and A2-772 incurred minor battle damage when supporting the operation.



Above: CPL Bob Stephens No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN (above) the Crewman on A2-767, was subsequently awarded the British Empire Medal for Gallantry BEM(G) through his exceptional bravery when he attempted to recover the injured servicemen from the crashed and burning helicopter.

May 1971

WGCdr Peter Mahood was posted as Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron in Vietnam and continued as CO No. 9 Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley QLD until 1972. Several temporary COs (including Bruce Lane and Tom Ward)

were appointed until the new CO John Chesterfield arrived early in 1972.

June 1971

Iroquois A2-723 crashed on a resupply mission during Operation Overlord when reportedly receiving enemy and was 'written-off'. Regrettably, FLTLT Everitt 'Lofty' Lance, pilot, and CPL David Dubber, gunner, were killed while the co-pilot, Greg Forbes, and crewman, Peter Vidler, survived with relatively minor injuries.

4 June 1971

No. 2 Squadron RAAF (Canberra bombers) relocated from Vietnam to RAAF Base Amberley, QLD.

5 and 6 June 1971

The squadron flew all 15 Iroquois aircraft on-strength during these days supporting OPERATION OVERLORD. A forward servicing party operated at FSB Jane. A record aircraft serviceability rate of 90.4% was accomplished.

June 1971

Replacement Iroquois A2-455 was collected from Heli 3, Saigon, and A2-915 from Tuy Hoa. A2-455 had its tail boom severed by enemy ground fire and A2-772 received friendly fire that holed a fuel tank.

July 1971

The Payne gunship ammunition system became operational (an 'in-house' development). A2-383 was struck by one enemy round.

28 July 1971

The Squadron flew 16 aircraft on OPERATION IRON-FOX.

27 Sept 1971

Headquarters RAAF Forces Vietnam trans-

ferred from Saigon to Vung Tau, Phuoc Tuy Province, SVN.

Note. A relatively small number of Australian military advisers remained in Vietnam after the withdrawal of 1 ATF but this ended shortly after the election of the Whitlam government in December 1972.



Above: Flight Lieutenant Everitt 'Lofty' Lance in Vung Tau in early 1971; ever the gentleman.



Above: Cartoon by Mark Fielding, GDPLT No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, served from 28 April 1971 until 6 December 1971.



Left: Pilot Officer Ron Betts GDPLT, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, 'a great mate' and character, photographed at Nui Dat, SVN, in December 1970.

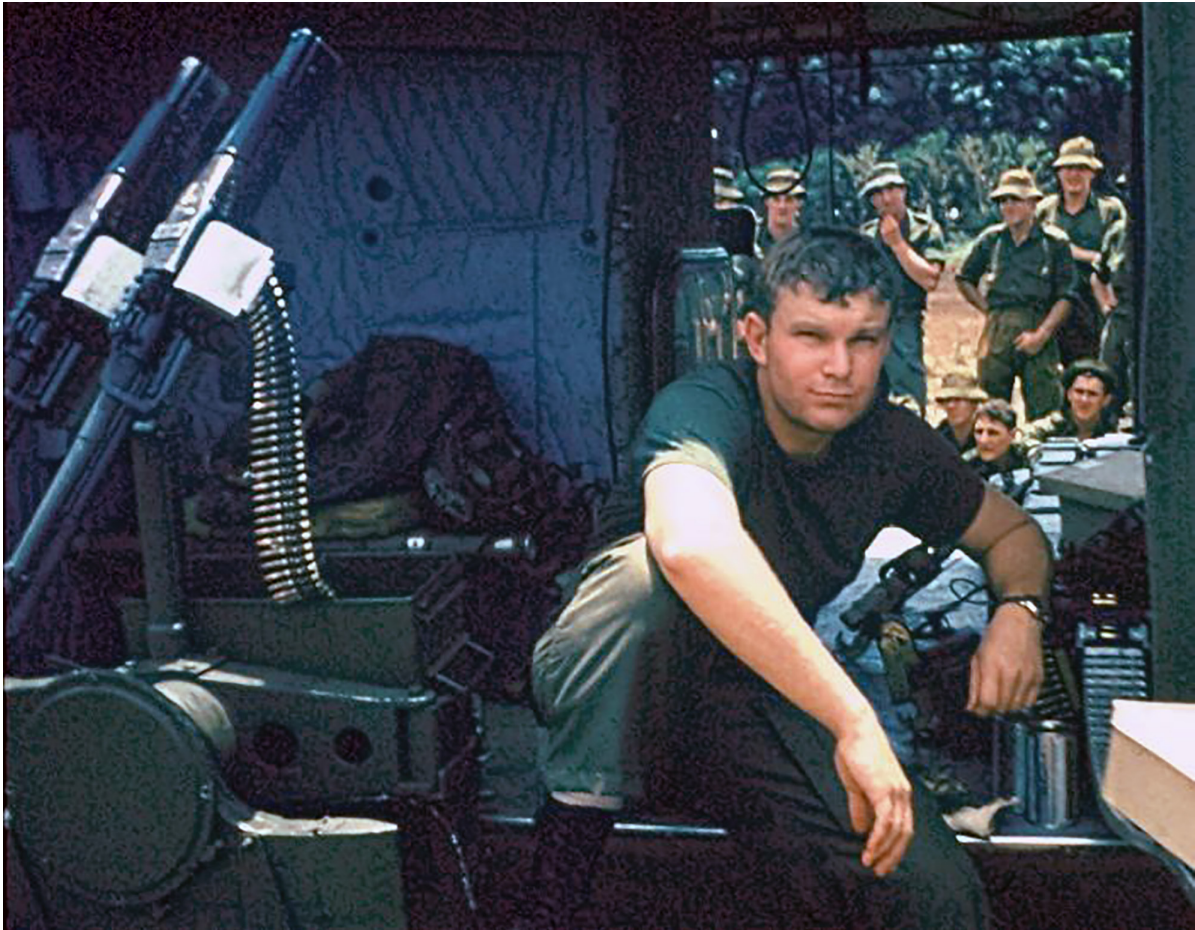
Right: Leading Aircraftman Alan Clarence Bloxsom, No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN was struck by enemy fire when operating the rescue hoist during a 'hot' Dust off. He was recovered to hospital but sadly died soon thereafter.

Below: Mid-1971, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois 'Dustoff' Standby crew at the 'Red Earth' 8th Field Ambulance Pad, Nui Dat. Crew members L/R: Trevor 'Boggie' Burgess, Guy Badgery, Steve Hicks, Army Medical Orderly and Fred Brown.





Mick McPhail, 'Huey' Gunner, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, June 1971.



Des Long, GDPLT No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN, in a No. 9 Squadron 'Bushranger' Gunship during a 'briefing' for 1 ATF soldiers. He served two 'tours of duty' with the squadron 20 August 1969 until 13 August 1970 and, 21 January 1971 until 21 July 1971. Highly capable pilot, calm in 'tough' situations and very determined, Des was a sound mentor for the lesser experienced pilots. He had a significant RAAF career and retired with the rank of Air Commodore.

No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Maintenance and Maintainers (5 1/2 years)

'Military Operations is only that which is logistically feasible'; Source: Army Staff College Directing Staff Member in 1985.

October 1971

No. 9SQN RAAF a record aircraft serviceability rate of 90.7% was achieved.

Maintenance Statistics

From No. 9 Squadron RAAF Vung Tau aircraft maintenance records:

- 7 aircraft were destroyed during No 9 Squadron's 5 1/2 years in Vietnam
- 23 recorded instances of aircraft taking enemy ground fire
- half of those 23 happened during the

Chopper Crews Commended

Vung Tau (South Vietnam).— The Commander of the United States Seventh Fleet has sent a message of appreciation to the RAAF Contingent in Vietnam for the quick help given when an accident occurred recently in the United States destroyer Lloyd Thomas.

The ship was on station off the coast of South Vietnam, supporting Australian troops operating against the enemy.

A premature explosion of a round in one of the ship's guns killed three men and wounded 10 others.

An Iroquois helicopter of No 9 Sqn was called to the area from Nui Dat, to support the American Army "Dustoff" Medevac helicopter, also from Nui Dat.

The 9 Sqn aircraft was crewed by Plt Off Graham Dutton, of Campbell, ACT, Plt Off Peter Armstrong, of Cessnock, NSW, LAC Ted

Maxwell, of Launceston, and AC John Tregilgas, of Port Pirie, SA.

Another 9 Sqn Iroquois left from the squadron's base at Vung Tau to fly support. Members of the crew were Flg Off John Millhouse, of Garran, ACT, Plt Off Michael Castles, of Ainslie, ACT, LAC Tony Wheeler, of Penrith, NSW, and LAC Alan Sewell, of Scullin, ACT.

It took off five wounded men from the Lloyd Thomas. The other wounded were evacuated by the American "Dustoff" and the other Iroquois removed the bodies of the men killed in action.

period November 1970 to November 1971

- 250 'D' servicing and 22 'E' servicing were performed 'in country'

Maintenance History

This document has been reproduced from information given to FSGT PE. Kelly when he was a member of 5SQN (1978 to 1983). The original author and compiler of the statistics was Mac Weller. We thank him for his forethought in recording these interesting facts with a maintenance point of view.

The advance party of 9SQN arrived at Vung Tau, South Vietnam on the 3 May 1966. A month later 8 UH-1B Iroquois aircraft, A2-1018, 1019, 1020, 1021, 1022, 1023, 1024 and 1025 arrived via HMAS SYDNEY on the 6 June 1966. The immediate problems facing the maintenance flight were the organization of suitable spares arrangements through the US Army and the preparation of temporary living and working

quarters. Initially there were no hangar facilities and maintenance was carried out in tents or out in the hot dusty airfield. The temporary maintenance area was located on the position of the later aircraft revetments; the aircraft were parked on the PSP taxiway. The SENGO of 9SQN in Vietnam was FLTLT K.J. Taylor.

Conditions were primitive and although moral was high members suffered numerous privations. Meals were served from a mobile kitchen, mail services were poor and PX facilities inadequate. Supply of spares from the US Army were poor and the RAAF CHRS system was difficult to relate to the US Army historical records. The arduous Vietnam climate soon had a noticeable effect on maintenance. Water and dust took a heavy toll on bearings, radios, and engines. In October 1966 the Squadron undertook aerial spray operations over Nui-Dat. These operations were to continue for over five years.

The first aircraft destroyed was A2-1018. This aircraft was accidentally lost on the 18 October 1966 some 12 miles North West of Vung Tau. The wreckage was destroyed by explosives. A UH-1D aircraft, A2-041 (later known as 085) was obtained as a replacement.

The Bellman hangar was completed in November 1966 by ACS. Also during November the first reported battle damage to an aircraft occurred to A2-1021 when a friendly anti-personal mine was detonated by rotor wash.

SQLDR C.F. Cotter assumed the duties of SENGO on the 27 March 1967. In April 1967 compressor failures of two L11 engines caused heavy damage to both aircraft. A2-1019 was written off in April 1967 and a replacement UH-1D A2-1166 (later known as 649) obtained. A2-

1019 was subsequently rebuilt.

In September 1967 A2-1023 and A2-1025 were badly damaged by ground fire. A2-1025 received 7 hits and required 100 man-hours of work.

Revetments for the aircraft were completed in October 1967. An aerial spray rig was manufactured by the squadron in November 1967 and the equipment was successfully used until July 1971.

The airframe and paint shop huts were constructed during June 1967. A2-1024 made a very heavy landing in June and was partially rebuilt using parts of A2-1019 before being shipped to 2AD for further repair. The Kanga Pad refuel facility became operational in June 1967.

During January, February and March 1968 RAAF maintenance personnel attended L13 engine courses at various US Army establishments in preparation for the receipt of UH-1H Iroquois. The first of these aircraft were received by the squadron in March 1968 and numbered 8 aircraft in serial numbers A2-376, A2-377, A2-378, A2-379, A2-380, A2-381, A2-382 and A2-383. The 'B' models were then progressively dispatched to 9SQN.

SQNLDR R.H. Tucker became SENGO on the 25 March 1968. On the 23 April 1968 Vung Tau Base was subjected to a heavy rocket attack and although squadron equipment and aircraft were not damaged, a US Caribou was destroyed some 50 yards from the 9SQN hangar. One aircraft suffered battle damage from ground fire in June 1968. During September 1968 a further 8 UH-1H Iroquois were accepted by 9SQN. The aircraft were numbered A2-766 through A2-773. In September 1968 A2-769 suffered Cat 4 damage

after engine failure. The aircraft was subsequently rebuilt at a local US Army maintenance facility. A2-149 was received as a replacement in December 1968.

In February 1969 a maintenance team supported the operation of three aircraft out of Long Binh. A2-772 was built up as the first 9SQN 'Gunship' during March 1969. SQNLDR D A Tidd became SENGO on the 18 March. Gunships became operational on the 21 April 1969. The Squadron lost two aircraft A2-769 and A2-381 on operations. Several hydraulic failures attributed to the irreversible valve seal failure, occurred during January 1970. Two aircraft A2-379 and A2-376 suffered battle damage as a result of mine detonation, A2-376 had 32 holes patched.

Squadron Leader K. J. Taylor took over as SENGO on 7 March 1970. A2-770 received two rounds of ground fire on 26 March 1970. 'E' servicings were deleted by HQSC for 9SQN Iroquois in April 1970. On 4 May 1970 A2-110, auto-rotated onto mudflats just north of the Vung Tau airfield after engine failure. The aircraft was almost completely immersed in salt water and fortunately extricated by Chinook before night fall. On 9 May 1970, 16 aircraft were flown in formation over Bung Tau and Nui Dat to celebrate 4 years in the country.

In June 1970 three aircraft suffered battle damage. A2-768 received 18 rounds and required 5 days of repair work. A2-377 was hit in a fuel tank and A2-382 forced-landed on the beach near the Long Hais after being hit. The aircraft could not be retrieved before night-fall and during the night, an incoming tide broke portions of the aircraft. The damage was finally categorized as Cat. 5 because of the corrosion

which developed after the salt water immersion and the aircraft returned to 5SQN as a training aid. The 40,000th hour in country was flown on the 28 June 1970. The Forward Servicing Party was established at Nui Dat in June 1970.

A2-768 crashed in July 1970 and was written off. LAC McNair subsequently died of injuries received in the incident. Replacement aircraft A2-703 and A2-723 were collected from Pleiku. A fourth gunship was put on line on the 31 July 1970. Tail boom cracking in 4 aircraft was a problem in July 1970. A 5 ½ foot snake defied ingenious attempts using air, hot water and finally CO2 to be forced from the Hell Hole of A2-110. (The Hell Hole was a space underneath the transmission, which was mounted on the ale centre of gravity. The space was covered by a panel, and was dark and dirty.) The snake escaped into the hangar and was killed with a shovel. The snake was delicious in Dau's (foreman laborer) words. Special ground handling wheels were manufactured to enable movement of gunships with rocket pods fitted.

Crewman Gary Jones suggested a modification and aircraft were fitted/modified in November 1970 to carry Stokes Litters on the underside of aircraft. Air transportable cabins were received in November 1970 for use with the FSP at Nui Dat. SQNLDR M. Weller took over as SENGO on the 30 November 1970.

In December 1970 A2-773 received ground fire whilst operating in support of 7RAR some 5 miles east of Xuyen Moc. Damage to fuel and instrument and electrical systems resulted in repairs to chin windows (near the pilots' feet for a view down and forward) and a main rotor change. (Should be "chin" - chin windows were those near the pilots' feet to allow visibil-

ity down and forward).

During a 'D' Servicing on A2-771 the laminated Honeycomb centre work deck was found to be badly deteriorated; the item is a structural member and in the US Army, is replaced at a Depot level facility. The deck was replaced within 9SQN. The replacement involved jiggling of the aircraft and Metalworkers, led by SGT Jim Vanderkyl, expended many man-hours on intricate, tedious repairs. The re-alignment of the engine is particularly noteworthy; 3 engine fitters, led by SGT Spike Bicker, worked continuously for over 20 hours. (This was a BIG job.)

February 1971 was a bad month for engine failures. 3 aircraft made forced landings. 2 aircraft, A2-773 and A2-110 (both gunships) made hovering autos on Kanga Pad after compressor failures of the L13 engines. Both aircraft were repaired on site and entailed a lot of hard work on hot dusty Kanga. For example A2-110 settled very heavily and a hard landing inspection revealed bent skids and a broken fifth mount in addition to an engine change. The working party, directed by SGT Bob Oliver and Spike Bicker, commenced work at 11 AM and the aircraft was test flown and returned to Yung Tau by nightfall. A2-376 made an auto onto a paddy field about a mile from Sanford after engine failure. The aircraft was recovered by Chinook to Vung Tau where the cause was finally diagnosed as FCU failure.

March - April 1971 was perhaps the most difficult period for the maintenance flight since 9SQN commenced operations in Vietnam. Battle damage, combined with a spate of tail boom failures led to some extraordinary efforts by maintenance personnel. Some people worked

on occasions all day, through the night and part of the next day. That these members were able to maintain such intensive work and high standards of maintenance reflects credibility on the individuals but also on the training and standards of the RAAF maintenance personnel generally. WOFF Bruce Harris was outstanding during this period in maintaining morale and directing hangar activities. At 1900 hours one particular evening 7 aircraft, with varying degrees of battle damage and tailboom failures, were being worked on in the hangar; 6 of those aircraft were serviceable by 0730 the following morning.

During this period 9 aircraft received battle damage. Gunship A2-383 received 16 rounds of ground fire and caused severe damage to skin, structural components, flooring and windows. PLTOFF Betts was killed in this occurrence. A2-110 was holed 6 times in the same action in windows, flooring and skin and brought forward into a 'D' Service. Both aircraft were recovered by Chinook. A2-379 also took one round. On the 31 March 1971 3 aircraft were severely damaged in an action some 8 miles east of Nui Dat. A2-767, whilst on a 'Dust-off' mission, received ground fire in main rotor, fuel tanks and engine combustion chamber; LAC Bloxom was killed in this incident. The aircraft was recovered by Chinook from FS Beth.

A2-110, just 2 days out of a 'D' Service, was again severely damaged when a round carried away more than half of the LH Fuselage Tail Boom attachment beam and required Chinook recovery from Nui Dat. The repair of this damage took many hours by metalworkers in designing and manufacturing a spliced structural repair, the team was led by SGT Stan Moss. A2-

773 was also hit in this action in the tailboom and support structure.

On the 17 April 1971 A2-767 crashed and was completely destroyed in a subsequent fire after being hit by ground fire whilst on a 'Dust-off' mission in the Long Hais. (The Long Hais were a mountain range visible from Nui Dat and within Phuoc Tuy province. They were a known VC stronghold) A2-149 and 772 received minor battle damage. The loss of A2-767 strained maintenance resources in meeting the daily on line requirements of 13 aircraft.

A notable feat for the maintenance flight was achieved during May 1971 when nil engine changes were carried out. On the 7th June A2-723 crashed whilst on Operation Overlord and FLTLT Lofty Lance and CPL Dubber were killed in this incident. During Operation Overlord the squadron flew all 15 aircraft on strength operationally on the 5th June. On the 6th June all 15 aircraft were again serviceable. A forward servicing party, led by SGT Kev O'Neill operated at FSB Jane. The squadron established a record serviceability of 90.4%. Replacement aircraft A2-455 was collected at Heli 3, Saigon.

In July 1971 A2-915 was collected as a replacement aircraft from Tuy Hoa. A2-455 had a tailboom severed by ground fire and A2-772 had a fuel tank holed by a friendly. On the 28 July the squadron flew 16 aircraft on operation Iron Fox. The Payne gunship ammunition system (named after Flight Lieutenant John Payne in charge of Avionics trade group) was developed and became operational in July. A2-383 was struck by one round in August.

In October the squadron achieved a record serviceability of 90.72%. Also the first scheduled engine change was made in country on A2-

766; The engine had run maximum TBO (time between overhauls, based on 1030 flying hours, not counting ground running). 16 aircraft were flown in formation on the 9th November to mark the departure of 9SQN from Vietnam.

The 50,000th hour was flown in country on the 8 March 1971 by Albatross 01; the crew were PLTOFF Christian (Pilot) and FLGOFF Redman (Co-pilot).

Generally the opportunity of serving with 9SQN in Vietnam has provided maintenance personnel with very worthwhile experience of activities in a wartime environment. Maintenance personnel have generally given outstanding performances in maintaining aircraft to a high standard in difficult and demanding conditions.

The working conditions for 9SQN were always difficult. In the early stages the conditions were most primitive with tents as living and working quarters. Through self help the squadron personnel gradually built up a reasonable level of living and working conditions. Airconditioners were essential for the servicing of airframe, instrument and radio components. 3 air transportable air conditioned cabins were of inestimable value in this regard.

9SQN was logistically supported for aircraft spares by the US Army. Generally the quantity of spares available was satisfactory; in fact during the period 1970 - 71 the supply was outstanding. (In Australia, a 'D' Servicing would commonly take a creditable 6 weeks. In Vung Tau, 'D's would take 4-5 days, the difference being partly due to the availability of spares, but more to the willingness of the troops to put the aircraft back on line.) The quality of spares was another story. They were consis-

tently of a poor standard, particularly radios, engine, airframe and armament components and led to many petty unserviceabilities, and, at times more serious failures of engine fuel systems. The effect was to force 9SQN to increase the personnel establishment and to obtain GSE and test equipment so that these items could be either checked or serviced to ensure freedom from fault. The underlying reason for the different standards of serviceability is simple; the US Army will perhaps put half aircraft strength on line daily whereas 9SQN had to get 88% serviceability to meet IATF tasks. 9SQN demanded therefore a far greater degree of aircraft and component reliability.

The location of the squadron in Vietnam was perfect in respect of maintenance. The squadron had the support of a US Army General Support Trans Co and 'Corpus Christie'. The latter was a floating aircraft maintenance facility; in fact an aircraft depot for helicopters and was anchored off Vung Tau. 9SQN was able to make very valuable use of the heat treatment, engine and airframe test rigs and general engineering facilities.

Morale was generally good amongst the troops. Certainly they consumed vast quantities of alcohol and some made frequent visits to the pleasure spots of Vung Tau, but generally no problems occurred. R&R and R&C leave was beneficial. Morale was not helped by the requirement for technical personnel to do guard duty; they already had duty crew, forward servicing party and stand-by duty.

Compiled by FSGT PE. Kelly

4/8/97



Air Vice-Marshal MAC WELLER AM, RAAF

Mac had an interesting and highly successful Air Force career as an Engineering Officer that spanned 40 years. He seemed to be attracted to RAAF Rotary Wing aircraft as he was Engineering Officer (ENGO) No. 5 SQN RAAF in 1970, SENGO No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN and then SENGO No. 5 SQN during 1974 and 1975. Subsequently, he had various postings and attained the rank of Air Vice-Marshal. Mac was always a pleasant and approachable officer and good friend; he was admired by all.

OFF-DUTY ACTIVITIES, NO. 9 SQUADRON RAAF SVN PERSONNEL



Introduction

Considering the hectic tempo and very high flying hour rate of the daily Iroquois helicopter (planned and un-planned) flying operations, all No. 9 Squadron people valued their off - duty time, even just the evenings, and had varying personal activities and pursuits. Generally, the aircrew received one day off in seven but rarely on the same weekday due to the rostering and other personnel management considerations of operating a flying squadron in wartime. The annual flying hours recorded by the aircrew were two to four times greater than their counterparts flying Iroquois helicopters at No. 5 Squadron in the ACT. For most trade, maintenance and support personnel who conducted their work at the No. 9 Squadron Vung Tau airfield and hangar location and with the aircraft operating away from Vung Tau flying for the day, many of the members had less hectic times as those who headed up to Nui Dat to support the flying from Kanga Pad. However, it was the high flying hour figures (ROE) that dictated the shorter periodicity of planned maintenance schedules. Also, more often than not, the later afternoon / evening returns of the aircraft meant that No. 9 Squadron maintenance personnel were required to conduct air-

craft post-flight maintenance and repair work (almost) every night. Each night, 'Dust off 02', the spare Iroquois for 'Dust off 01' positioned at 'RED EARTH' (8 Fd Amb pad), Nui Dat, flew aircrew night flight currency and continuation sorties at Vung Tau airfield. Consequently, the time for 'Off - Duty Activities' was valued very much by all personnel.

This aspect of 'the way of life' for No. 9 Squadron's RAAF SVN personnel is written in two relatively short parts and excludes individuals' Rest & Recreation (R&R) entitlement breaks away from Vung Tau. The parts are titled:

- a. Art, Written Items and Music including Concerts, and
- b. Sports, Local Sightseeing/Photography and Shopping.

Art, Written Items and Music including Concerts¹

Presented below are some of the available contributions from ex No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN people and affiliates:

1. The 9SA is grateful to those who have contributed drawings and written items.



Artist: Phillip Smith GDPLT RAAF, served with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 30 July 1970 until 21 July 1971. Phil was a talented portrait artist working with charcoals etc and after getting the approval from a Vietnamese girl's mother when in the Vung Tau town one day in 1970, he created this poignant portrait of that child. Source: Graeme Chalmers



NEW MEMORY FOR OLD BLOKES
(RAAF Vietnam Remembered)

*A memory is unveiled today – a reminder and so much more
A plaque to honour we who served – as airmen in a war
All volunteers who heard the call – we answered with our heart
And were sent to serve in Viet Nam – where each one did his part
On foreign soil we lived and toiled – in the air we made our stand
To support the quest for freedom – in a sad and ancient land*

*We who served recall the times – when sweat was mixed with tears
And regardless of the task at hand – we swallowed our worst fears
To ensure the job we had to do – in the air or on the ground
Was carried out with speed and care – and we revelled in the sound
Of aircraft engines and surging air – underscored with silent pride
In the knowledge that the job was done – all doubts were cast aside*

*Silently we returned back home – proud of what we'd done
Though soon we came to realise that – our youth had somehow gone
Replaced by hardened minds and hearts – we fought to find a peace
And over time we saw the light – and though they didn't cease
Nightmares waned and in our lives – that knowledge and our pain
Was relegated to the cargo hold – and the clouds held no more rain*

*Wallaby, Albatross, Magpie, Bushranger – call-signs of birds of war
Flown and tended, maintained, remembered – by all who ever saw
The red kangaroo and blue roundel – the sign of Australia's own
Squadrons that excelled in time of war – and rightly became renowned
And we, my friends, we served with pride – during a time that history shows
Was a pivotal point in a time of doubt – and in our hearts that honour flows*

*Sir Richard Williams in his plane – high up in heaven's skies
Looks down on us this morning and – in satisfaction, sighs*

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*Written to commemorate the unveiling of the RAAF Vietnam Plaque
at the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, Victoria on 18th August 2008*



LUCKY BASTARDS

By
John D. Thynne

Green hills, paddy fields
Red dirt and helipads,
Jungle cut by road and track.
Walk it out and chopper back.

Describes the Vietnamese countryside. A patrol plans to leave Nui Dat and walk to an area of operations but will be extracted by helicopter.

Arty fires sporadic shells,
Nuisance value, VC knows.
Patrol 31 takes sneaky-peek,
Ambush! "Contact!" Wounded shriek.

Harassing artillery fire at probable enemy positions is fired. SAS patrol, Callsign 31, is reconnoitring, and triggers an ambush inflicting casualties on the enemy.

"Beeper! Beeper! Come up voice."
"Zero One, we had no choice,
we're clear of Charlie, running west,"
"Roger that! We'll do our best"

Using an electronic beeper to call for assistance the patrol breaks contact, moving to the west and 9 Sqn Iroquois (callsign Albatross) set out to extract the patrol

"Albatross, we're near the pad!"
"Roger! Bushies, roll in east!
Best be set to give 'em heaps."
Smoke is thrown and my heart leaps.

The patrol nears a designated extraction point, the Bushranger gunships are directed to orient their passes so that they cover the area where enemy are most likely to appear. The patrol throws a smoke grenade to mark its position and tensions rise as the aircraft approaches to land.

Thump it on the waving grass,
Cammo faces from bushes pass,
Jump on board with yells of glee,
"Shit hot boys! We're home free."

Landings were not necessarily done with finesse, but the patrol leaves the safety of the bushes, boards the helicopter and expresses elation that they have got clean away

Put em out at SAS hill,
Refuel, park it, wander in.
"What's up next?" the skipper asks
"Nothing, mate." Grinning masks.

The patrol disembarks at SAS hill helipad, and the crew hot refuels their aircraft and parks it. They move to the crew-room to find out whether there are any more tasks and are happy that none are on right now.

The days all blur to one another,
Saigon, Vung Tau, up The Dat.
Hell yes it's war, but what the fuck?
Huey drivers have all the luck!

*Where, when and what happened become blurred, but it was a war, and some people thought they were lucky to experience it and come home.
Some didn't.*

John Thynne was a pilot with No. 9 Squadron RAAF in SVN and his tour was from 28 July 1971 until 20 December 1971; here is one of his poems complemented by elaboration.

The following tribute to No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN was written by Graham and Chris Brammer. Graham served two tours with 2 SQN, SASR:

SAS Ode to 9 Sqn RAAF

Nine-Squadron boys, you are the best
You're way up there, above the rest
So many times you've done us proud
By flying closely to the ground
To pick up or set us down.

We climb aboard your flying machine
Seated there, a fighting team
The time to go is finally here
In our eyes, a touch of fear
As toward the sky - we disappear

Approaching destination fast
Our insides knot so bad it hurts
The chopper banks and slips and turns
The jungle's near... the stomach churns
But you gently set us down - the team is on the ground

The jungle holds five phantom men
Who are outnumbered one to ten
With a blinding flash we show our hand
Then hail our helicopter friends
To pick us up when mission ends

You picked us up and you set us down
With your rotors spinning round and round
Any hour... day or night - guided by our signal light
Hot or cold - with sweaty palms
We owe you much... our Brothers in arms.

Graham and Chris Brammer June 1999

Revised by Graham Brammer October 2006

Lloyd Knight had a long and distinguished flying career and served with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN from 7 May 1969 until 19 November 1969. An extract of one his written works follows:

It had been a very long day. Dusk descended as we made our final approach to the helicopter landing area at Nui Dat. We terminated in the hover and taxied over to the fuelling area to gas up, preparatory to returning to our base at Vung Tau, about a half-hour flight to the south. A delay on our final mission for the day had made us late, so all the other squadron aircraft had returned to base.

I was riding left seat. This is normally the co-pilot's position in the Huey. Because I was the Squadron Training Officer, I often occupied this seat while the young pilot I was checking, flew from the command, right hand seat.

As the crewman was completing his hot re-fuel, a call came through from the Command and Control Centre, to which I answered, 'Albatross zero two, go ahead'.

The controller responded, 'A platoon has come under heavy fire, twenty minutes from your position. One soldier critically injured. Require immediate Dustoff. Both Medical Corps units (US Army) are presently deployed and cannot respond. Are you able to accept this task?'

I answered, 'Albatross zero two, affirmative, go ahead with location and details'.

The other pilot called to the crewman, 'Dustoff!' and told the door gunner to grab the spare stokes litter that was located near the fuelling plant for just such an exigency. I copied down the details, which were in code: the location grid reference, call sign and FM channel, and the nature of injuries. He had four gunshot wounds in the thorax. We were also instructed to take the casualty direct to the military hospital in Saigon.

I advised the crewman and door gunner to

wear their bulletproof plates under their flack jackets because we could come under attack. They often placed them under their seats, to protect their important parts from rounds fired from directly below the aircraft. I exchanged seats with the other pilot and he took over the co-pilot duties.

With all checks completed, we took off into the now black night, and headed west at a couple of thousand feet to our task site. The co-pilot established coms with the platoon. The officer in charge advised us that the potentially hot area was several hundred metres to their south. They were fairly sure that the enemy had either succumbed to the return fire, or had quit the area. He had called in the gunnies in case they went hot again.

Because they were located in tall timber, he warned that we would need to perform a hundred-foot winch lift. The casualty wasn't really stable. He had lost a lot of blood, and there was nothing more they could do for him, except get him to hospital. He was already strapped into a fold-up stretcher and ready to be lifted. I advised that we would terminate in the treetops using the landing light.

We would use no other lights so as to make the aircraft as inconspicuous as possible.

The patrol had floated a balloon light, which was attached to a string, up through the trees to mark their position. They also flashed a Morse code letter with a shielded torch, which we read back to confirm their identification. I made our approach to the balloon, heading west to place the left hand gunner facing the previously hot area. I turned the landing light on at the last minute and gave the crewman the con.

He gave me the last few corrections to our position, to place the aircraft over the casualty. I descended until the skids were at treetop level, having ensured that the tail rotor was in a clear area. The crewman started the cable on its way to the wounded man below.

When the hook was about half way down, all hell broke loose to our left. Heavy fire came up through the trees and, our door gunner started pounding away with his M60 machine gun. The Aussie troops below also returned heavy fire and another fight was on.

The man on the ground yelled over the radio, 'Get that chopper out of there!' I had already switched off the light and was pulling pitch, climbing vertically so that the hook wouldn't snag in the trees. I applied maximum transient power and we climbed at about four thousand feet per minute. The winch operator was madly reeling in the cable, and the gunner continued letting them have it to our left.

As we went through a one hundred foot increase in altitude, I nosed over and high-tailed it out of there, into the safety of the big black sky. As we climbed rapidly to the west, two gunnies rolled into an attack on a reciprocal course out to our left. We turned right to the east and set up an orbit at a couple of thousand feet and three clicks from the firefight.

After about twenty minutes I advised the Platoon that we would need to refuel if we were going to take the casualty to Saigon. He replied that they would need at least half an hour to subdue this new threat so we scurried back to Nui Dat to refuel.

Arriving back on station after another forty minutes, we could see that the fight was still going on. We commenced orbiting again and waited to be called back down there to make another attempt.

During this period of relative respite, the crew started to lighten up on the intercom. We discussed the pros and cons of risking being shot down.

I have never felt 'scared' during combat operations. That seems to come later when you are safe, and have time to ponder the 'what ifs'. However, I recall vividly that throughout that

half hour wait, I certainly felt apprehensive about returning to such a potentially dangerous situation.

Decisions, decisions! It would not be smart to place the aircraft and crew, and the troops underneath, in a position where we could all be wiped out by being shot down. On the other hand, our duty was to rescue the person down there, who was obviously in a life-threatening state.

On that occasion I didn't have to make the decision.

After about another twenty minutes, the shooting had ceased, and the gunnies said they were returning to base. The bloke on the radio called us saying, 'Thanks for your help Dustoff, the battle's over, come back in the morning.'

The young door gunner, who had just experienced his first fire-fight said, 'Thank Goodness, he must be alright now.'

There was a moment's silence before the older, experienced crewman said, 'Yeah, I suppose so. We don't recover body bags at night.'

The young man sobbed into his microphone, 'I didn't know that's what he meant - but I didn't want to go back down there again.'

Over the years I have often wondered what a difference another couple of minutes would have made.

If we'd managed to get him on the hook before they started shooting; maybe we could have towered out and saved him.

Then I think about the other possible outcomes. He may have been snagged in the trees and brought us all down. He may have been shot again! And of course, with such severe injuries his chances of surviving such an ordeal would have been extremely slim.

More can be found at [9sqn.com.au/lloydknight](https://www.9sqn.com.au/lloydknight)

Paul Rigby

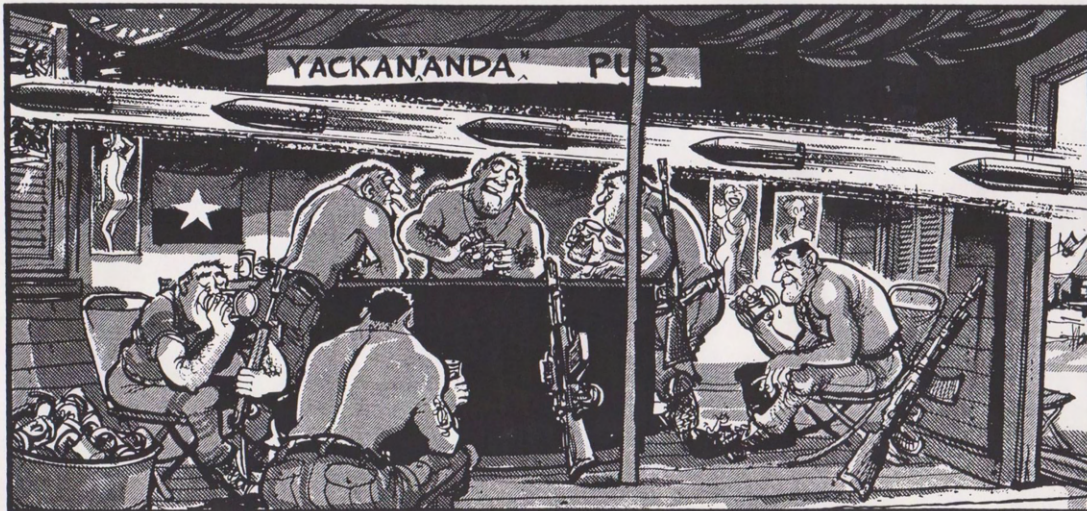
Paul was born in Hampton (Melbourne) on 25 October 1924. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on 30 November 1942 and during WW II serving as a Gunner-Armourer in North Africa and Europe. He was demobilised in 1946.

Paul was a valued friend and supporter of No. 9 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force and it is fitting that he is remembered in this publication. He and Peter Robinson established a friendship many years ago and Peter was entrusted with Paul's 'Vietnam Sketchbook' work. The No. 9 Squadron Association sincerely thanks the Rigby family for their permission to use Paul's cartoons within the publication, especially those from the 'Paul Rigby Vietnam

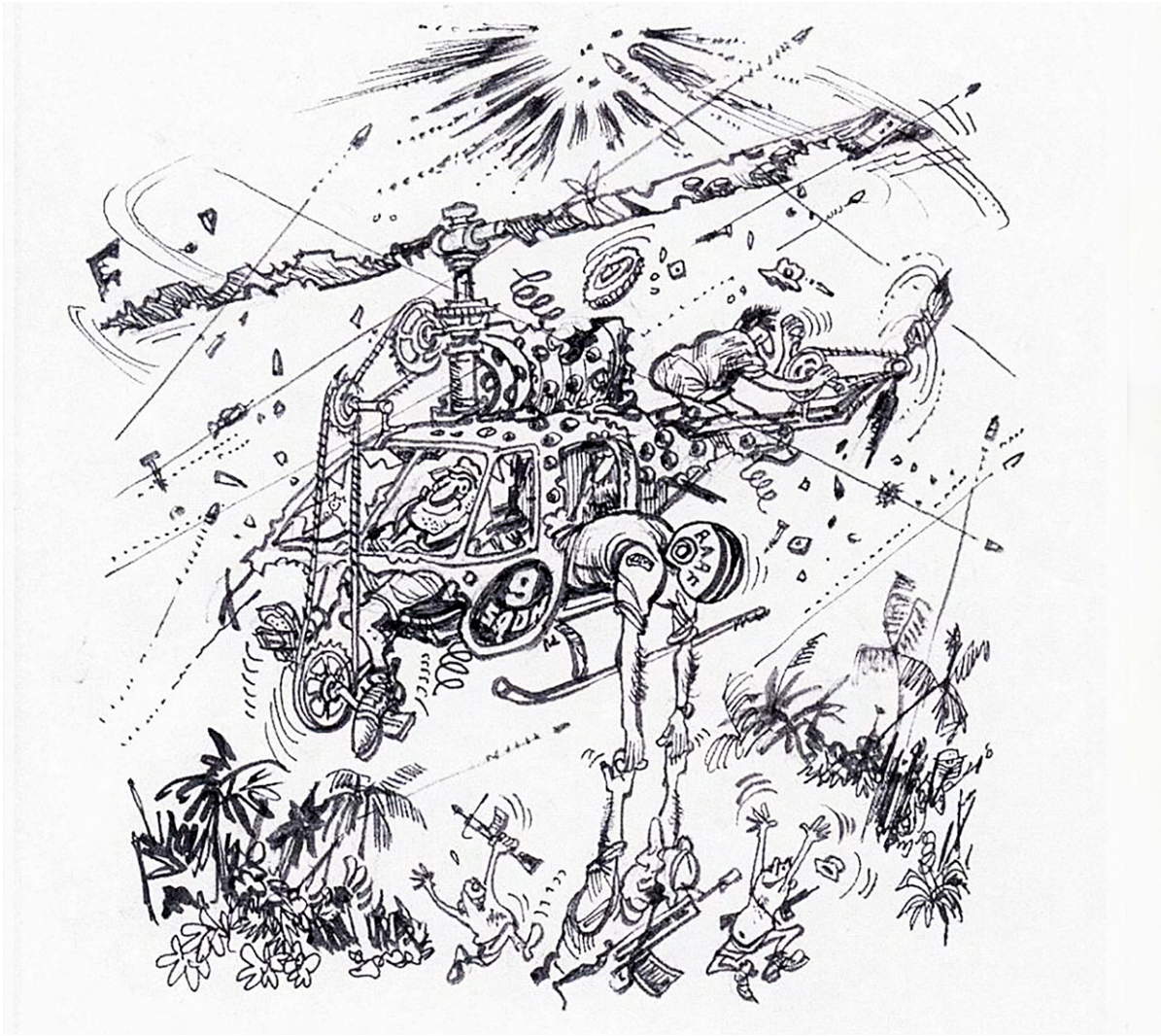
Sketchbook'. A selection is presented below and the full contribution from Paul to Peter Robinson can be found on the website <https://raafdocumentary.com/off-duty-activities-no-9-squadron-raaf-svn-personnel/>. Paul's exceptional No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'Huey' cartoon (next page) is pre-eminent among those presented below.



The Bien Hoa cocktail hour is held to the accompaniment of Aussie 105 m.m. shells screaming overhead on their way out to War Zone D . . .



"Open that window, willya, Blue? Our mob are droppin' 'em a bit short today . . ."



"I can't help feeling we've sprung a security leak somewhere . . .!"

"The Forgotten Heroes of Vietnam"

You were no "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel"
You were not even black
In 1945 they had done their job
They were the Heroes of the South Pacific
And legends of the Kokoda track

In 1965 you were a "New Breed of Men"
Just waiting to do your job
We could hear you coming
With fire power to stop an enemy attack,
Rations to keep us fit,
Mail & Christmas parcels to build up morale,
and a taxi to take us out.

Who were these new breed of men?
Who supplied the ambulance to get you to hospital
or the hearse to take you home
They were the men of the Helicopter Support
And Dust off crews
They are the Forgotten Heroes of Vietnam

With the sound of every helicopter
Brought fire power and hope.
They removed the fear of the unknown
For the infantry soldier in Vietnam

These were the men that built the morale
Of the men on the ground
To fight as a team, and to hold on to the last man
As history had taught us from the shores
Of Gallipoli to Vietnam.

We knew that sound, and
If you were hit, you were going home.
We knew that we would make it
When we heard that sound
of the Huey Helicopter
"The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel of Vietnam"

You may not wear the medals of the
Heroes of Vietnam
You may not be the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels
Or legends of the Kokoda Track
But to the Infantry Soldier
You will never be
The Forgotten Heroes of Vietnam.

oooooooo000oooooooo

Rick (Doc) Lindmark - Aug 03
Ex RA Inf

Dedicated to the memory of
111550 LAC Allan Clarence Bloxson
9 Sqn RAAF
Killed In Action on 31 March 1971
A member of the "Dust off" crew in support of
A Coy 2 RAR/NZ

Sat 13 Sep 03

Bob,

Thank you for listening to me on Saturday morning.
I have enclosed the copy of The Forgotten Heroes of Vietnam
It took about 9 men to keep 1 infantry soldier in the
field no matter what you did we would not have been able
to do our job with out you and your team

I never met Allan but I have never forgotten him and
what you blokes have done for us

Thanks for all your help.

Regards

5/90

Rick

Rick (Doc) Lindmark served in Vietnam with 2nd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (2RAR) from 28 May 1970 until 1 June 1971; his poem (with covering letter) that follows is dedicated to LAC Allan Bloxson, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN, KIA on 31 March 1971.

ALBATROSS

The Albatross takes to the air - with wings, yes,
But a far cry from the regular, quiet, strong beat of the seabird
of our name.

And yet, perhaps the beat is synonymous - of course it has sped up!
But Life itself beats with increasing speed as days go by; accept
this, perhaps we may.

Sea? Yes, sea! Our present nest is surrounded by the sea and even
though ^{our} ~~air~~ journeys lack the ~~greatness~~ distances of our predecessor,
perhaps we move a little quicker - not great difference, you agree?

And as the Albatross has been the omen to seamen for years gone
and come, many landlocked men have welcomed the sight of this great
bird - as outstanding in its own right.

So Albatross, the emblem and focal of esteem reaches a ^{similarity} ~~reality~~ which
snares the greatness of the voyager of the sea.
And curse the one who shoots her down!

8 September 1970

An Albatross related poem written by Graeme Chalmers when serving with No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN in 1970.

Letters To and From Home

As the Vietnam War era preceded the existence of e-mailing and mobile phones with texting, writing and receiving letters from family and loved ones was exceedingly important particularly for the No. 9 Squadron personnel who were married.

FLTLT Ian Clark, GDPLT, RNZAF served with No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN during 1970 - 1971 and wrote many letters to his family in New Zealand. The No. 9 SQN Association is indebted to Ian and his family for allowing the 9SA to incorporate the Clark's package of personal (amended) letters that were communicated during 1970 - 1971. The letters can be found at 9sqn.com.au/lettershome

The Clark family's contribution may well be unique (it is doubtful that a similar package with the same origins is in existence). Also, it is highly significant because the items cover the personal sentiments, observations and mention of specific events for a couple from another nation (NZ); he, a member of another Air Force (RNZAF) in a strange, remote country overseas (SVN) and flying with No. 9 SQN RAAF on combat helicopter operations during the Vietnam War.

Music and Concerts

No specific musical contributions from ex 9 SQN RAAF personnel became available for this project. However most people posted to No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN enjoyed listening to music and a few played the guitar.

Graham Hale's outstanding contribution reference to FLGOFF Graeme "Snoopy" Shields and that he played the guitar in the RAAF Pop

Band. So at some times, for example around 1968 - 1969, there was a local RAAF Pop Band.

Also, everyone absolutely loved attending the Australian Concert Groups' performances when they were staged.

The very 'big thing' at the time was the Open Reel Tape Deck and accessories e.g. tuners, amplifiers, speakers, and most No. 9 SQN personnel purchased such items when they went on Rest - in - Country (RC) for a couple of days to Penang, Malaysia, courtesy of the No. 35 SQN RAAF SVN Caribou (F/W SRT) operators who lived and worked beside No. 9 SQN RAAF personnel at Vung Tau. Additionally, portable cassette players were very popular.



Australian entertainer, Digger Revell, and a troupe of musicians and dancers, entertained members of the RAAF at Vung Tau, South Vietnam, recently.





Johnny O'Keefe during his Vung Tau hangar concert in 1969. Source: Huey Warner



Above: Hangar Concert Party, Vung Tau, 1967. Source: 'Huey' Warner.

Below: WA Show - Cantonment Theatre Audience, April 1968



9 November 1971

No. 9 Squadron flew a 16 Iroquois helicopter formation to mark the Squadron's performance in Vietnam and its impending departure.

Oct -Dec 1971

1 ATF withdrawal conducted and completed. The 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (4RAR) departed Vietnam on 8 December 1971.

December 1971

No. 9 Squadron departed Vung Tau, SVN. Again, HMAS SYDNEY embarked the No 9 Squadron helicopters, crew and maintenance

complement. She sailed via Townsville (short stop-over) to Caloundra (near Brisbane) whence the helicopters flew off HMAS SYDNEY in formation and later, arrived at their new home, RAAF Base Amberley. Most of the squadron left Vung Tau SVN on 17 December 1971 and flew to Townsville, joined with the HMAS SYDNEY complement and 4 RAR personnel, and marched through the city.

29 February 1972

10SU disbanded at Vung Tau; personnel returned to units in Australia.



No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN photograph, late 1971



HMAS SYDNEY at Vung Tau being loaded with the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois helicopters for return to Australia (RTA).

Photograph by Ray Townsend OAM, Engine Fitter, No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN period 11 February 1971 until 10 December 1971. Later, Ray worked with the RSL over many years as President at Club and District, and VP of the QLD State RSL for 7 years. Ray was a Director of Ipswich RSL Services Club (16 years) and was awarded a Life Membership.

PART 3

THE THIRD ERA, 1972 – 14 FEB 1989



THE THIRD ERA, 1972 – 14 FEB 1989

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| From 12 April 1966 | No. 5 SQN RAAF continued operating at RAAF Base Fairbairn, ACT, delivering training courses for Air Force and RAN helicopter aircrew including instructors, pilots, maintenance personnel, supervisors and other ADF people who needed helicopter familiarisations e.g. Medical Officers. |
| December 1971 to December 1988 | No. 9 Squadron RAAF conducted ARMY helicopter support operations locally, throughout Australia, and regionally and provided RAAF helicopter support in numerous Natural Disasters and Civil Community Support activities under DFACC (Defence Aid to Civilian Communities). |
| From December 1988 | No. 9 Squadron RAAF (progressively) re-located to RAAF Base Garbutt, Townsville, QLD (Iroquois and Black Hawk helicopter aircraft). |
| 14 February 1989 | No. 9 Squadron RAAF was disbanded at Townsville, QLD and all No. 9 Squadron assets, aircraft, personnel and equipment, were transferred to the 5th Aviation Regiment, ARMY, with effect 15 February 1989. |
| 9 December 1989 | No. 5 Squadron RAAF disbanded at RAAF Fairbairn, ACT. |



No. 9 Squadron's Return to Australia (RTA)

In late December 1971, No 9 Squadron departed Vung Tau, SVN. Yet again, HMAS SYDNEY embarked the No 9 Squadron helicopters, crew and maintenance complement. She sailed via Townsville (short stop-over) to Caloundra (near Brisbane) whence the helicopters flew off HMAS SYDNEY in formation and arrived at their new home, RAAF Base Amberley. Most of the squadron left Vung Tau on 17 December 1971 and flew to Townsville, joined with the HMAS SYDNEY complement and 4 RAR personnel and marched through the city.

No. 9 RAAF Squadron was now 'home' after 5 1/2 years of what was, in all aspects of a squadron's conduct and performance, an 'exceptional' period of overseas combat Helicopter Support Operations in South Vietnam.

Review, Trial and Introduction of RAAF Rotary Wing Operations

Significant work was undertaken to ensure the operational effectiveness of the RAAF Helicopter Capability post the SVN commitment period. For example, the 'Shifting Sands' Exercises throughout 1980 to 1982 played an important part in all of this and almost every aspect of No. 9 Squadron's methodology was impacted in some way; administration, maintenance, deployability, supply of fuels and spare parts, aircraft modifications and engineering, general support equipment (GSE) design and manufacture and aircrew and ground crew training. The following statement used by a staff college lecturer seemed particularly apt: '(successful) Military operations are only feasible with effective logistic support'. Many developments in

the RAAF Rotary Wing element followed the end of the commitment to the Vietnam War. The developments affected command, control, engineering, administration, logistics, training, and new capabilities. Military exercises helped test and practice these improvements.

The introduction of the Black Hawk helicopter into the ADF via No. 9 Squadron RAAF was obviously 'in this mix' as was the forthcoming increased use of night vision goggles/devices (NVG) by aircrew dictated by changing AS Army conduct.

1971

'Settling - in' at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland and the issues related to numerous and ongoing deployments away from 'home base' resulting in the No. 9 Squadron nickname, 'The Nomadic Ninth'.

1972

9SQN High Density Altitude training exercises continue in Papua New Guinea for 5SQN and start for 9SQN.

FLGOFF Bob Redman was posted to Air Movement Training and Development Unit (AMTDU) at Richmond NSW to help develop formal procedures for securing internal and external helicopter loads, and air transport of helicopters.

FLTLT Tony Lea (5SQN) replaced Redman at the end of 1973

1972-1974

Contingency Planning and Training.

Helicopter support to the mapping of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea - 'GADING' series. A number of RAAF Iroquois helicopter accidents/incidents in these HDA environments;

ARLU develops formal Take-off and Land-ing (TOLD) devices and procedures for Iroquois helicopters.

1972 -79

Training and posting of helicopter test pilots (all ex 5 and 9SQN) and flight test engineers to the Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARLU), first Bob Trease, then Brin Haylock, Frank Tait, Bob Redman, Rick Campbell, Derek Knights, Aivars Vilcins. ARLU developed more accurate and repeatable performance data and procedures for Iroquois take-off and landings, including performance calculators ('Prayer Wheel', specialised slide rules in circular form). No 12 SQN was reformed at Amberley QLD on 3 Sep 1973 equipped with Chinook CH-47C medium lift helicopters.

Late 1974

The instigation by AM C.F. Read CAS (1972 - 1975) to Court Martial an Air Force helicopter pilot (FLTLT G.P. Chalmers) after the crash in PNG of RAAF Iroquois A2-383 on 28 September 1974.

25 November 1978

While supporting an Army Exercise at El Al-amein Army Camp, NW of Port Augusta SA, Iroquois A2-770 hit a ridge line while returning to camp at night. All five 9 SQN crew were killed: Wing Commander Peter Mahood DSO, CO 9SQN, pilot; Pilot Officer Paul Mason, co-pilot; Sergeant Steve Milstead crewman; Sergeant Paul Gallagher, fitter; Corporal Barry Johns, fitter.



From July 1976, 9SQN contributed aircraft and aircrew to the Australian helicopter detachment (four Iroquois) which formed part of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

1980-1982

Exercise Shifting Sands series - Woomera, SA

1979-1989

Significant development of helicopter air-mobile tactics and field deployment capability including Exercise Diamond Dollar 1987.

A robust relationship of No. 9 Squadron RAAF with Army 6th Brigade located at Enoggera Barracks develops. (Horrie Howard's Ninth!)

RAAF Headquarters Operational Command (HQOC) established the Helicopter Operations element of its Air Operations Centre. The aim was to provide improve operational effective-

ness through centralised, resource management, tasking and higher quality support for ADF single service, Joint and Combined activities and training and, for RAAF rotary-wing support under Defence Aid to the Civil Power (DEFACP) - support during national and state emergencies - and Defence Aid to the Civil Community (DEFACC) auspices to respond effectively to support requests during times of national and state emergencies and contingencies.

ADF Joint Operations given renewed emphasis and numerous RAAF helicopter aircrew and support personnel attend the raft of Australian Joint Warfare Establishment (AJWE) courses (as a requirement) at RAAF Williamtown.



9SQN Iroquois being unloaded from the Tobruk at Ashdod, Israel, in 1982 as part of the ten-nation Multi-national Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai Peninsula.

For all aircrew and maintenance support personnel of the RAAF Iroquois helicopter capability (No. 5 SQN at Fairbairn, No. 9 SQN at Amberley and later, No. 35 SQN at Townsville), Standardised (helicopter type) Operational Procedures (SOP) and External Load Rigging and Lashing Manuals were introduced. Many successful operational and asset management benefits were derived from this especially when mounting Iroquois helicopter operations to support the large scale ADF and Combined exercises.

Sikorsky Black Hawk. Air and ground crew training and aircraft arrival at RAAF Amberley.

1987

A government/Joint Chiefs of Staff decision initiated a transfer of 'Battlefield' Helicopters to Army. Air Marshal J.W. (Jake) Newham AO was Chief of Air Staff, RAAF at this time.

October 1987

Exercise Diamond Dollar 1987 in FNQ - Single service activity (Army 6th Brigade) supported by RAAF and US Army Aviation. RAAF successfully validates aspects of its Tactical Doctrine and capability of supporting Army in remote locations through demonstrating comprehensive Air Support Planning and Execution, RF-111 reconnaissance support to Army ex Amberley, paradrop of 3RAR elements by large formation of RAAF Hercules C-130 ex Amberley, 1 OSU deployment and establishment of FOBs at remote civilian airfields to accommodate 24 hour combat-loaded RAAF C-130 and helicopter operations, RAAF airfield engineering analysis and landing, turning and parking mechanisms put in place to sustain and conserve activities, RAAF single service logistics management (SSLM) and, 24 hour aero-medical evacuation at the forward, tactical and strategic levels (ne-

cessitated in part by serious injury to personnel after a wire strike accident by an Army helicopter).

'Winding - down' RAAF No. 9 Squadron and some issues post - the decision to transfer 'Battlefield' Helicopters to Army. Air Marshal R.G. (Ray) Funnell AO, Chief of Air Staff, RAAF, 3 July 1987 - 2 October 1992.

17 November 1988

Ceremonial Review to Mark the Disbandment of No. 9 Squadron, conducted at RAAF Base Amberley (Sadly that night, there was suicide by an ex No. 9 Squadron Vietnam helicopter gunner).

December 1988

Progressively throughout 1988, No. 9 Squadron re-located to Townsville to be incorporated in the 5th Army Aviation Regiment as part of the Transfer of 'Battlefield' Helicopters to Army.

Note. No. 5 Squadron provided helicopter-related air and ground training and contributed to the RAAF Iroquois Rotary Wing Capability until squadron disbandment at RAAF Base Fairbairn on 9 December 1989. WGCDR Geoff Farrell was Commanding Officer No 5 Squadron at disbandment.

14 February 1989

No. 9 Squadron disbanded and the transfer of its aircraft, personnel and equipment to the 5th Aviation Regiment (5AVNREGT) at Townsville, FNQ took place.

1991

Chief of the Air Staff, AM Ray Funnell AO, redeployed the ex No. 9 Squadron personnel from 5AVNREGT to Air Force units.



Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal R. G. Funnell, AO.



Air Marshal J.W. (Jake) Newham AO



'Hosing Down'

WGCDR Peter Hales was CO No. 9 Squadron RAAF from December 1982 until December 1984 and as shown here, the airmen gave him their 'traditional departure gift', a 'hosing down'.

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Appendix A: George Moore Mason

George Moore Mason¹ was born in Sydney on 10 March 1918. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) at Mascot, NSW, on 8 January 1940; his service number was 260691².

He served as a Pilot for some 6 ½ years through most of the WW II years and discharged from the RAAF with the rank of Squadron Leader on 31 July 1946.

His posting location at discharge was 114 Air Sea Rescue Flight.

Interview, 1st August 2008

George started his working life as an office boy with the Melbourne Steamship Company in Barrack St Sydney. He joined the Militia in 1938, 17th Battalion 'I don't know why'. He played football and rowing and the Militia '... was something else to do. I didn't mind it'.

He had a pilot licence and applied for the RAAF as he had had enough of the Army. George and two mates bought a small aircraft and tried some barnstorming. They operated from Rose Hill racecourse area. They had a big sign which stated 10/- a ride.

The RAAF was slow to recruit and it was January 1940 before he enlisted. He was on the first course (before EPTS was introduced). He had to buy his own uniform.

He thought of it as an adventure; they all wanted to be fighter pilots. He gave no thought to where he might be sent. Initial pilot training

1. The 9SA acknowledges Al Bridges in his work with George Mason which has produced an important document related to No. 9 Squadron RAAF during WW II.

2. Source: DVA World War Two Nominal Roll

was at Newcastle show ground on Tiger Moths.

'Not the best, but nobody got killed so it must have been alright. Newcastle show ground was surrounded by a big storm water drain, two brick works chimneys. Had to come in between chimneys and stop before the drain. If you could survive that course you could survive anything.'

George graduated as a Pilot Officer and was posted to Richmond NSW for '... further training on Hawker Demons. They were a bit heavy'. He was then posted to Rathmines which pleased him as '...I'd been sailing all my life'.

At Rathmines NSW he converted to the Seagull. This is the Australian version of the Walrus and had a bigger motor for flying off ships. He was at Rathmines for about a year.

'Very boring. All I did was tow a drogue, instruct people, there wasn't much else to do.'

He was also involved in Air Sea Rescue work.

'We did do a rescue once. I saw a ship hit a mine off Newcastle. We went down to land to pick them up and they were in the water and we were taxiing along and suddenly telegraph poles came shooting out of the water followed by railway sleepers. So we turned around and had to taxi back to Bird Island.'

The timber was cargo from the ship. George described the ship hitting the mine: 'Explosion was just a big cloud of smoke and the ship was gone'. He does not recall the name of the ship but thought there were no fatalities.

He hoped for a posting overseas. That meant

to 10 Squadron RAAF operating Sunderlands out of Britain. However, George's next posting: 'Believe it or not, I was posted on the Sydney (HMAS Sydney). Fortunately for me about three days before it sailed I got transferred to the Westralia'. (Sydney was sunk on 19 November 1941 off Geraldton with the loss of all hands).

George was posted to HMAS Westralia but did little flying as it was not fitted with a catapult. This meant the aircraft had to be lowered to and recovered from the water by ships crane. They operated '... up around Java and Koepang (Timor), those places. We took some troops from Moresby to Koepang. Would you believe we went right down the bottom of Tasmania from Moresby. Some smart Alec decided they were going to get torpedoed and we went all the way down to the roaring forties and everyone was sick, we couldn't stand up let alone fight anyone'.

He flew patrols of Sydney, out to Nauru, and to the Indian Ocean..

Pilots operating off Navy ships were '... terrified. Never knew what they were going to do.' There was no training for RAAF personnel in Navy operations. It was 'Heath Robinson business, crane business, swinging from side to side. Quite hazardous. We could never tell the Navy what to do. We had our own mechanics, including photographer and wireless operator'. The 9 Squadron RAAF detachment messed with the Navy crew and 'got along all right'.

The RAAF detachment was commanded by the ship's captain. The main mission was search.

When Japan entered the war, 'People got such a great shock, nothing happened for

awhile. Once Singapore fell and those two big ships were sunk (HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse) things didn't look too good. When Japanese arrived in New Guinea we decided we should do something about it. We certainly felt the Japanese would invade.'

George was with Westralia in Sydney when Sydney came under Japanese attack. When asked, he said: 'Oh yes. I did fly the Walrus under the bridge. Why? I don't know. Spur of the moment'.

All the pilots knew each other as they were all together at Rathmines at various times. When asked about the loss of HMAS Sydney he said he believes: 'The commander was foolish. The Navy had this thing, always rush into a fight and he just got too close'.

George also flew a Catalina on one occasion.

'The first Catalina that came out here. We went to stop a revolution in New Caledonia. Pretty serious. There was the Free French and the Vichy French. If the Vichy had taken over they could have let the Japanese in. So we were sent up there to stop this revolution. The Chief Pilot and I, he was working with Qantas but they put him in uniform. It was a very long flight. We had a French speaking airman but no one could understand what he was saying. We flew low over the place to make out there was a lot of aeroplanes.

When we went ashore, we sent a signal to send a battalion as it was hopeless. Answer was no cruiser or marines. Fortunately, there was a troopship of Tongans in harbour - you know the size of Tongans - and French wouldn't let them ashore. They'd been there 10 days or more. French wouldn't

refuel them. We helped them get ashore. They all got drunk and started to fight and the Free and Vichy French joined forces; that was the end of that. And we came home.'

George and the crew received no official recognition for this exploit: 'Powers that be were in trouble and the government was about to fall'.

The Dutch had abandoned Dorniers, so the RAAF took them over knowing little about them and with all wording in Dutch. He then went to Rathmines for conversion to the Martin Mariner. The conversion was 'just a few circuits'.

On Martin Mariners, he flew Cairns to Madang via Milne Bay due to weather over the Owen Stanleys. He supported 30th Battalion at Madang (probably about May 1944). The Army said they would need to walk for two days, so he agreed to fly 20 or 30 of them in one flight.

'We landed on the Sepik River and they came out in dugouts. How they didn't capsize I'll never know with all their gear. I had a remarkable escape. The river was flowing fast at 7 to 8 knots. We dropped the anchor. The cable broke. I started the motors up and kept it going. It was getting dark. I couldn't see around the bend and I asked a native if there was plenty of water there. He said: "Plenty of water, boss". We took off, around the bend and there was plenty of water. The only trouble was they were all rapids. We actually went through the palm trees. It was dark when we got back to Madang and we didn't have a flare path.'

George was posted to 41 Squadron RAAF Townsville to fly Sunderlands. The Sunderlands were ex-civilian aircraft. They were used for carrying supplies, particularly to Port Moresby

and Milne Bay.

Morale? 'Not good as everyone was bored stiff. Well, that's it, they were just bored.'

George was in Cairns when the war ended. 'We knew it was going to happen once the bomb fell. We had a little celebration then. It wasn't that exciting'.

'We got on very well with Americans. They had all the money. They were very cooperative, very good. They had the right idea. They didn't try and fix it, they just threw it away, wouldn't fiddle around for two days trying to fix something. We went to Manus because we had no parts. We had rescued these Americans. Fellow said "We're pushing them into the water, come and take what you want".'

He married on VP day and they have a daughter and son. George stayed on for about six months after the war ended and was discharged as a Squadron Leader. At the time, he had no idea what had happened to the prisoners of the Japanese. He helped bring some back after the war.

After 1945, 41 Squadron became an Air Sea Rescue unit. George did quite a bit of flying bringing people back from New Guinea. His main plan was waiting to be discharged.

'A couple of us were going to start up an airline down here (Sydney) with the Catalinas. About ready to go and Mr Chifley took over the airlines, so that was the end of that.'

George '... had a few Catalinas. One of these blown up in Rose Bay. That was part of it all'.

George returned to his pre-war job for awhile. 'Then I left. I went into the fruit and vegetable business, purely by chance.'

'I think the Australian effort in the last part of the war was a complete and utter wasted effort. All that Borneo business was for nothing. All they had to do was leave it there. I think it was purely political and there was something about the Australians couldn't go past the equator. I often thought the whole business

was a waste of time. If the Army had gone with the Yanks to the Philippines it would have been worthwhile, but they didn't do anything except get themselves killed. General Macarthur probably said "bugger you and I'm going" and we're fooling around and not making any decisions.'



Port Moresby, Dutch New Guinea. 1944-09-21. A Papuan native (right) assists to refuel a Martin PBM Mariner flying boat aircraft of No. 41 (Transport Sea) Squadron RAAF based at Cairns, from a refuelling barge.

Appendix B: HMS Sydney II

As mentioned earlier, the sinking of HMAS SYDNEY II by the German Raider 'Kormoran' near Shark Bay, WA occurred on 20 November 1941. 645 lives were lost including the eight members of the detachment who operated the aircraft L2177.

The Finding Sydney Foundation (FSF)

This group of exceptional Australians came together to try to discover the wreck of HMAS SYDNEY II and they succeeded.

The FSF Directors who formed the Board were: Glenys McDonald, Keith Rowe, Don Pridmore, Bob Trotter and Ted Graham.

In 2009, the FSF produced a historically significant DVD of imagery of the submerged pieces of the wreck including aircraft parts and their message contained therein was:

MESSAGE FROM THE FINDING SYDNEY FOUNDATION

The discovery of the wreck of HMAS Sydney was an achievement that brought immense personal satisfaction and pride to the past and present members of the Finding Syd-

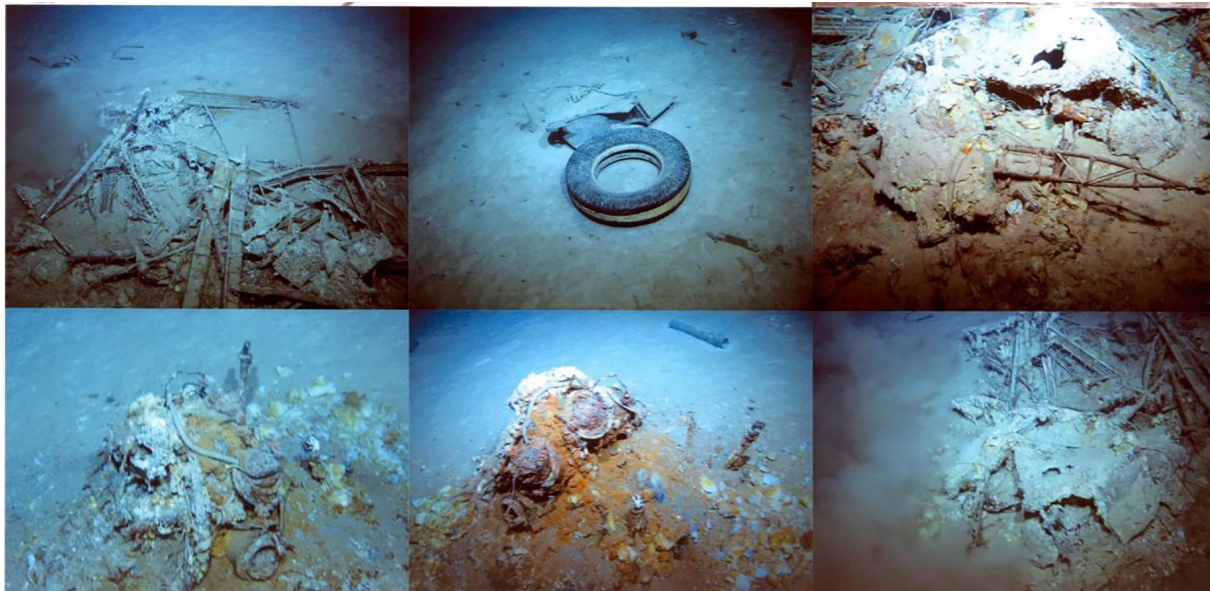
ney Foundation and to each member of the search and support teams. But, we are sure it meant much more to all of the families of the brave young men who were lost on that fateful day, 19 November 1941 in giving the sense of knowing and closure that the discovery of their ship brought. This is why the Foundation was so determined that HMAS Sydney could and should be found in the lifetimes of as many of the close families as possible. It is with great pleasure but with some sadness that we give you this photographic record of your ship as she now lies on the sea floor off Western Australia.

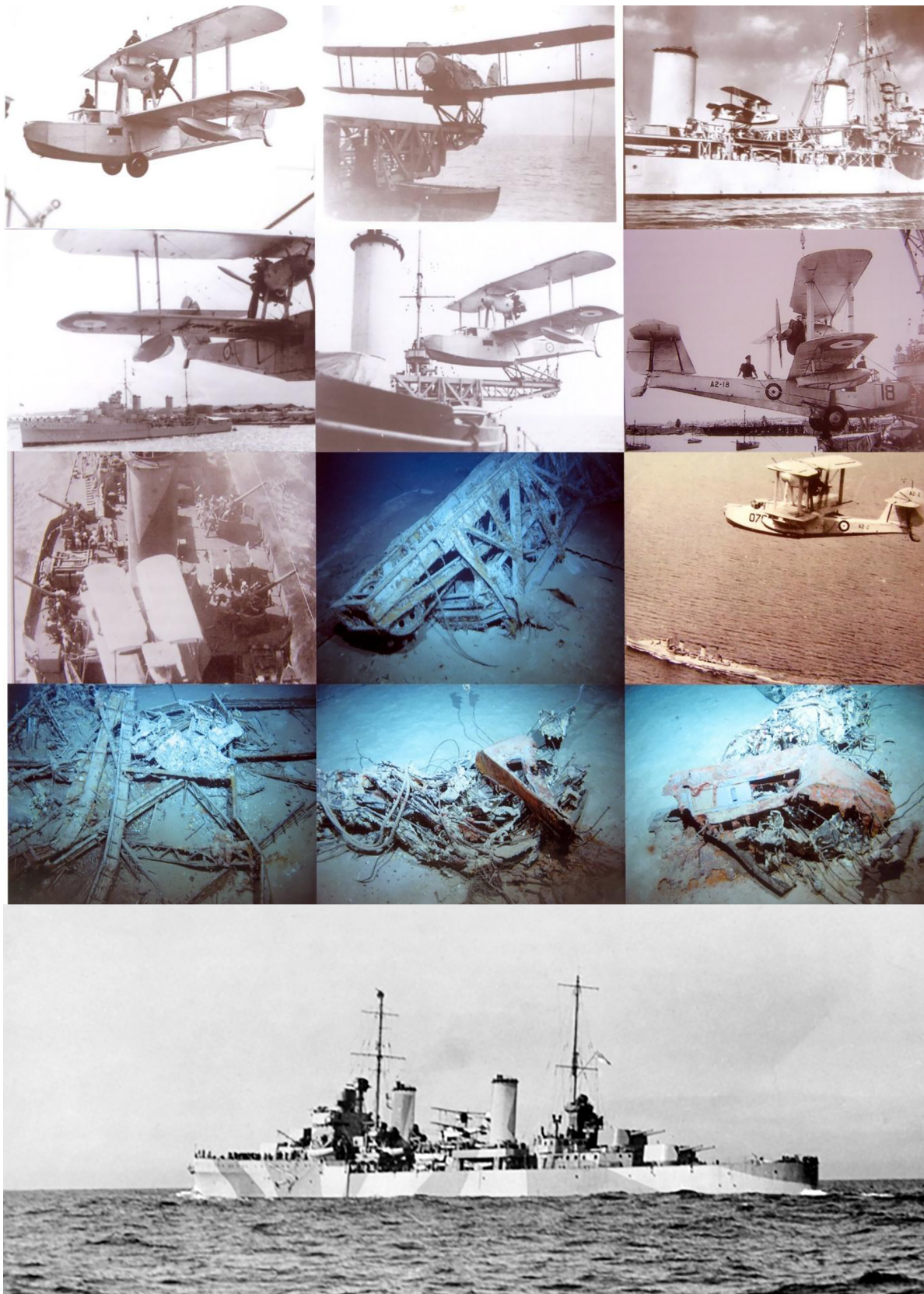
The Board

Finding Sydney Foundation

Many like-minded people from the FSF and No. 9 Squadron Association got to know each other through the various activities and pursuits and this was a wonderful outcome too.

The following contribution related to the sunken HMAS SYDNEY II comes from our FSF colleagues:





Albatross to Black Hawk: A History of the RAAF 9 Squadron

LIST 1 - RAAF No 9 FLEET COOPERATION SQUADRON DETCHMENT AIRMEN ABOARD HMAS SYDNEY II AT HER SINKING ON 19 NOVEMBER 1941 OFF SHARK BAY, WA.

Department of Defence Media Mail List -----

CPA 067/08 Tuesday, 18 March 2008

AIR FORCE DETACHMENT ON HMAS SYDNEY II

The discovery of the wreck of HMAS Sydney II helps close a chapter of Royal Australian Air Force history.

Six RAAF members were among the ship's 645 crew when it went down with all hands in 1941. This small party was a detachment from RAAF's No. 9 Squadron based at Rathmines, New South Wales. The detachment was embarked to operate and maintain the Seagull V Walrus amphibious aircraft which the light cruiser normally carried for reconnaissance, gunnery spotting, and search and rescue work.

Reports from German eyewitnesses (the only survivors of the action) later described how, during the opening salvos of the engagement, Kormoran hit HMAS Sydney II in the area between the ship's funnels, where the Walrus A2-L2177 was sitting on its catapult.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, both acknowledged the sacrifices of the Air Force detachment when they addressed Parliament yesterday on the loss of HMAS Sydney II.

"I add my congratulations to The Finding Sydney Foundation and the Royal Australian Navy in locating HMAS Sydney II. This discovery is also a significant and emotional event for Air Force," Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd said.

"I hope that tracing the ship's resting place provides a degree of comfort to the families of the six RAAF members and the Royal Australian Navy crew who served their nation with courage and died in this fierce battle." AIRMSHL Shepherd said.

The Air Force members lost with HMAS Sydney II were:

Flying Officer Raymond Barker Barrey (pilot), 25, from Welland, SA

Flight Sergeant Sidney Marley (fitter 2E), 29, from Hamilton, NSW

Corporal Arthur John Clarke (fitter armourer), 34, English-born, from Edithvale, Vic

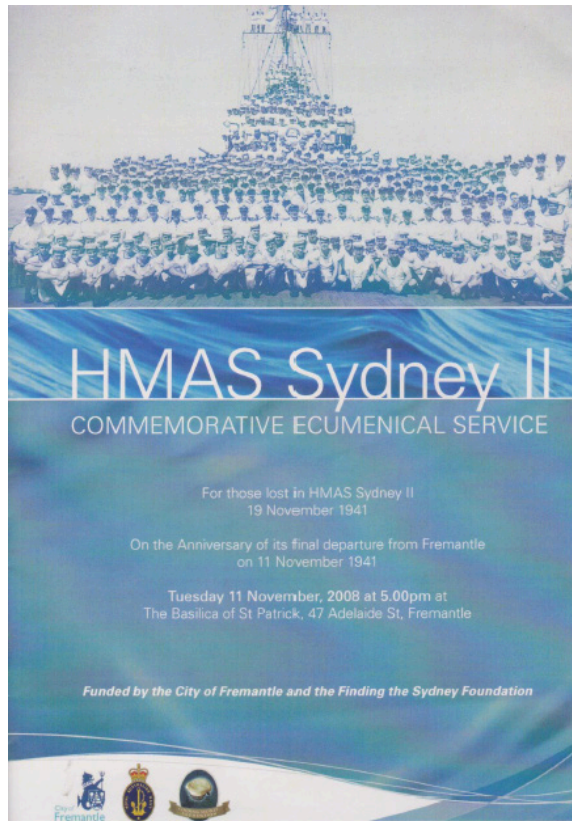
Corporal Roy Ebenezer Foster (fitter 2A), 36, from Petrie, QLD

Leading Aircraftman Richard Dodds (fitter 2A), 26, English-born, from Sydney, NSW

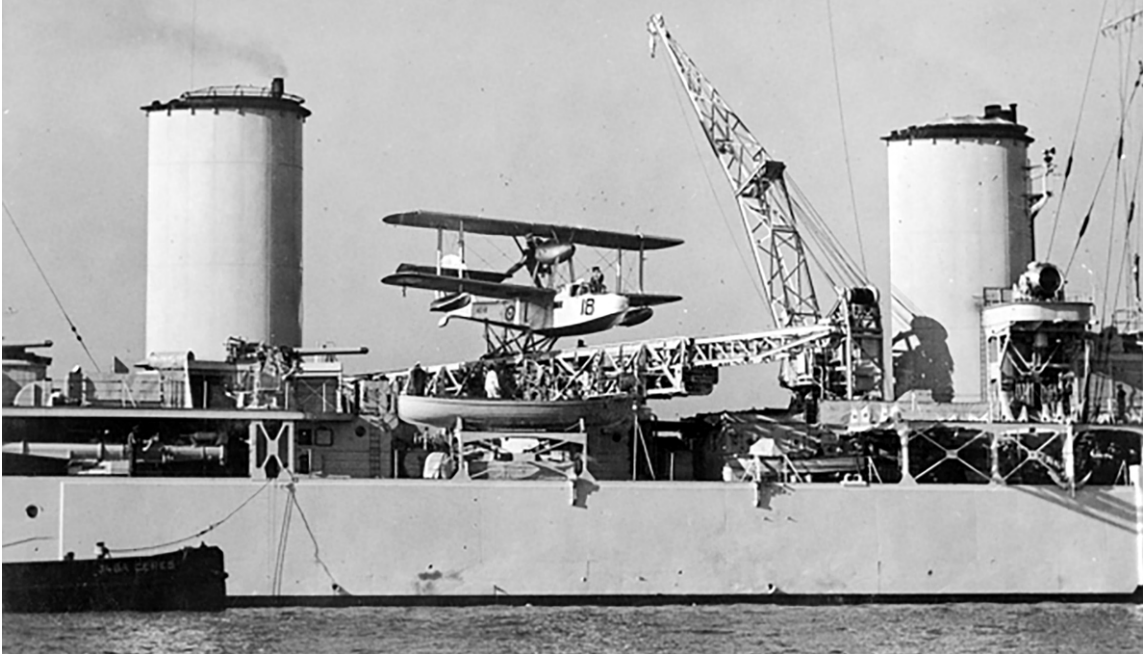
Leading Aircraftman Keith Homard (photographer), 27, from Maitland, NSW



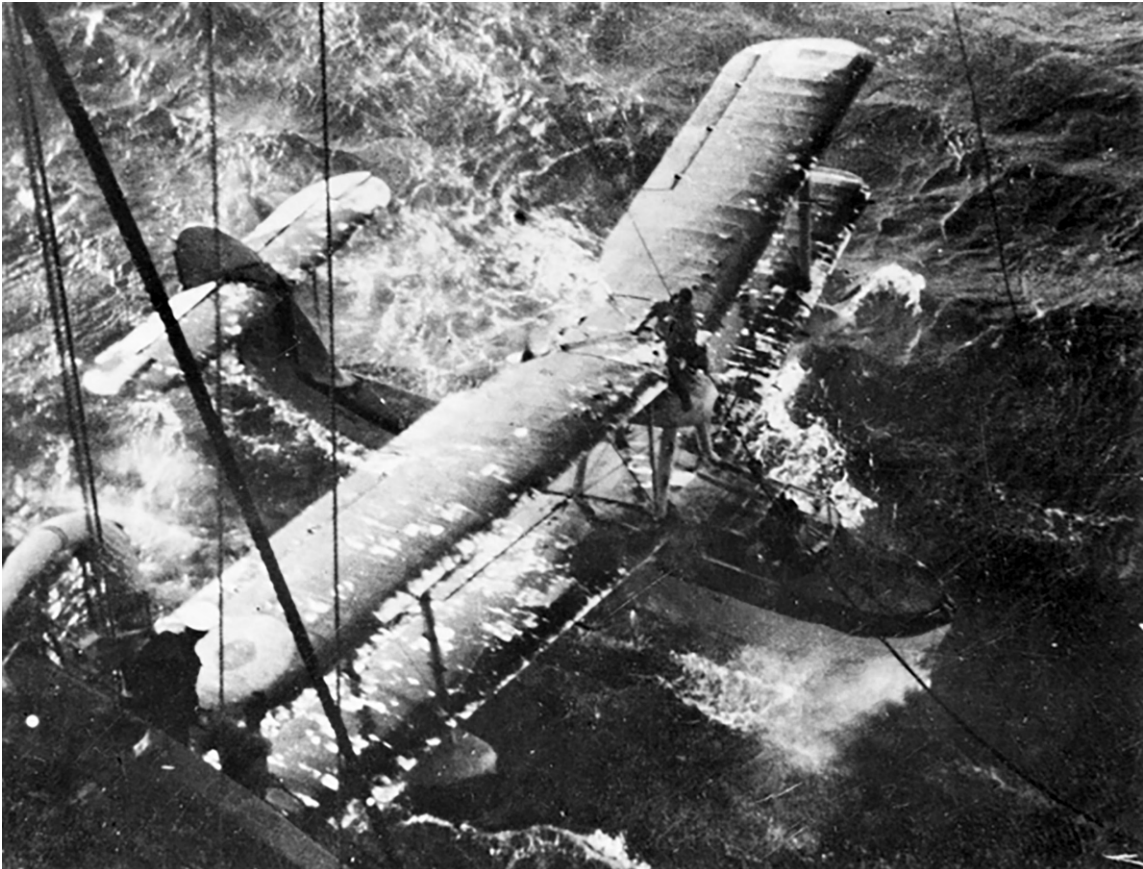
Peter Robinson, 9SA, at the HMAS SYDNEY II Memorial, Geraldton WA



Reflections from the exceptional HMAS SYDNEY II Memorial, Geraldton, WA



RAAF Seagull V aircraft, serial A2-18, on HMAS Sydney (II). This aircraft was used by the ship at various times from 29 September 1938 through 1940. As the aircraft is not camouflaged, the photograph was taken prior to Sydney's return to Australia in 1941.



Walrus drawing alongside HMAS Sydney II c. 1941

Appendix C: Iroquois helicopters A2-384 to A2-510, & A2-714 to A2-721

Other Early Events

The first RAAF crew to fly a Bell UH-1B Iroquois helicopter in Australia occurred during November 1962.

In December 1962 a second order of Iroquois UH-1B aircraft was made and delivered twelve months later (A2-714 to A2-721 inclusive). Then in late 1964, a third delivery of eight aircraft eventuated with the arrival of A2-1018 to A2-1025 fitted with the Lycoming 1100 shp T53-L-11 engine (the upgraded T53-L-9).

A2-385 crashed at RAAF Base Fairbairn in January 1970.

A2-386 crashed at Captain's Flat, ACT, in April 1969.

A2-387 crashed near Fairbairn, ACT, in November 1968.

A2-390 was disposed of in the USA in 1990.

A2-391 was also disposed of in the USA in 1990.

A2-455 transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990 and, in about January 2012 was allocated to the RAAF School of Technical Training (RSTT) as a training aid.



A2-384



Above: A2-384 conducting hoist trials at the Bell Plant Fort Worth, Texas, USA, 1962.

Below: A2-384 deplaning troops, during Army Training Exercise Casino, NSW, May 1965 In 1987, A2-384 was allocated to the RAAF Museum, Point Cook, VIC, for display purposes.



A2-484 transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990.

A2-485 last served with the RAAF at the Aeronautical Research and Development Unit

(ARDU) in South Australia.

A2-486 crashed at Port Macquarie NSW, during October 1986.



Above: A2-388 releasing a field gun during an Army Training Exercise Casino, NSW, May 1965. A2-388 was disposed of in the USA in 1990.

Below: A2-389 Goroka area, PNG, March 1963, written-off January 1985.



A2-487 transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990.

A2-488 transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990.

A2-489 transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989.

A2-490 transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989.

A2-505 provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement in August 1989.

A2-506 provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement in August 1989.

A2-507 transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990 and in about January 2012 was allocated to No. 36 Squadron RAAF at Amberley, QLD for use as a training aid.

A2-508 transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989 (image following page).

A2-486 transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989; provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement.

A2-649 transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989; provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement.

A2-509 provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement in August 1989.

A2-510 provided to PNGDF under a DCP arrangement in August 1989.

Second Purchase of Iroquois UH-1B helicopters (A2-714 to A2-721)

During December 1962, a second order for eight Iroquois UH-1B aircraft was placed and these were delivered twelve months later (A2-714 to A2-721 inclusive). A photograph of one of the aircraft appears below.

A2-714 B A2-715 B A2-716 B

A2-717 B A2-718 B A2-719 B

A2-720 B A2-721 B

A2-703 H – delivered July 1970; to Army Aviation January 1990 thence ~ January 2012 went to the RAAF Museum Point Cook, VIC for display purposes.

A2-766 H A2-767 H

A 'mock-up' of ex RAAF Iroquois helicopter A2-767 is on external display at the Woolgoolga Diggers Club in New South Wales with an exceptional plaque about the Iroquois Helicopter. A2-767 is a 'very special' RAAF 'Huey' as it was shot down by enemy in South Vietnam on 17 April 1971 and the memories of those horrific circumstances remain with many veterans and families. A brief summary follows, then A2-767's current photo and a picture of the plaque.



A2-719 terminating to the hover in the No. 5 SQN RAAF training area, ACT



A2-508 on the No. 5 SQN RAAF tarmac at RAAF Base Fairbairn.

At 17 April 1971 of the Chronology, the comprehensive Report from the No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Unit History Sheet for 17 April 1971 is presented.

Summary of 17 April 1971 Events. On 17 April 1971, Iroquois A2-767 (Dustoff 1) was shot-down by enemy when conducting a Medevac (from the hover with the stokes litter attached to the winch cable), in support of a Regional Forces Battalion (RF Bn) operation in the Long Hai Hills. The crew of A2-767 was FLGOFF Mick Castles, Aircraft Captain, PLTOFF Simon Ford, Co-pilot, CPL Bob Stephens, Crewman, AC Roy Zegers, Gunner and LCPL John Gillespie, Army Medic. PLTOFF Simon Ford suffered serious burns.

The South Vietnamese troops were being assisted by CAPT Albertson, US Army Special Forces Advisor, and CPL T. D. Blackhurst, Australian Army Training Team (AATV).

A2-768 H

A2-769 H

A2-770 H

A2-771 H

A2-772 H

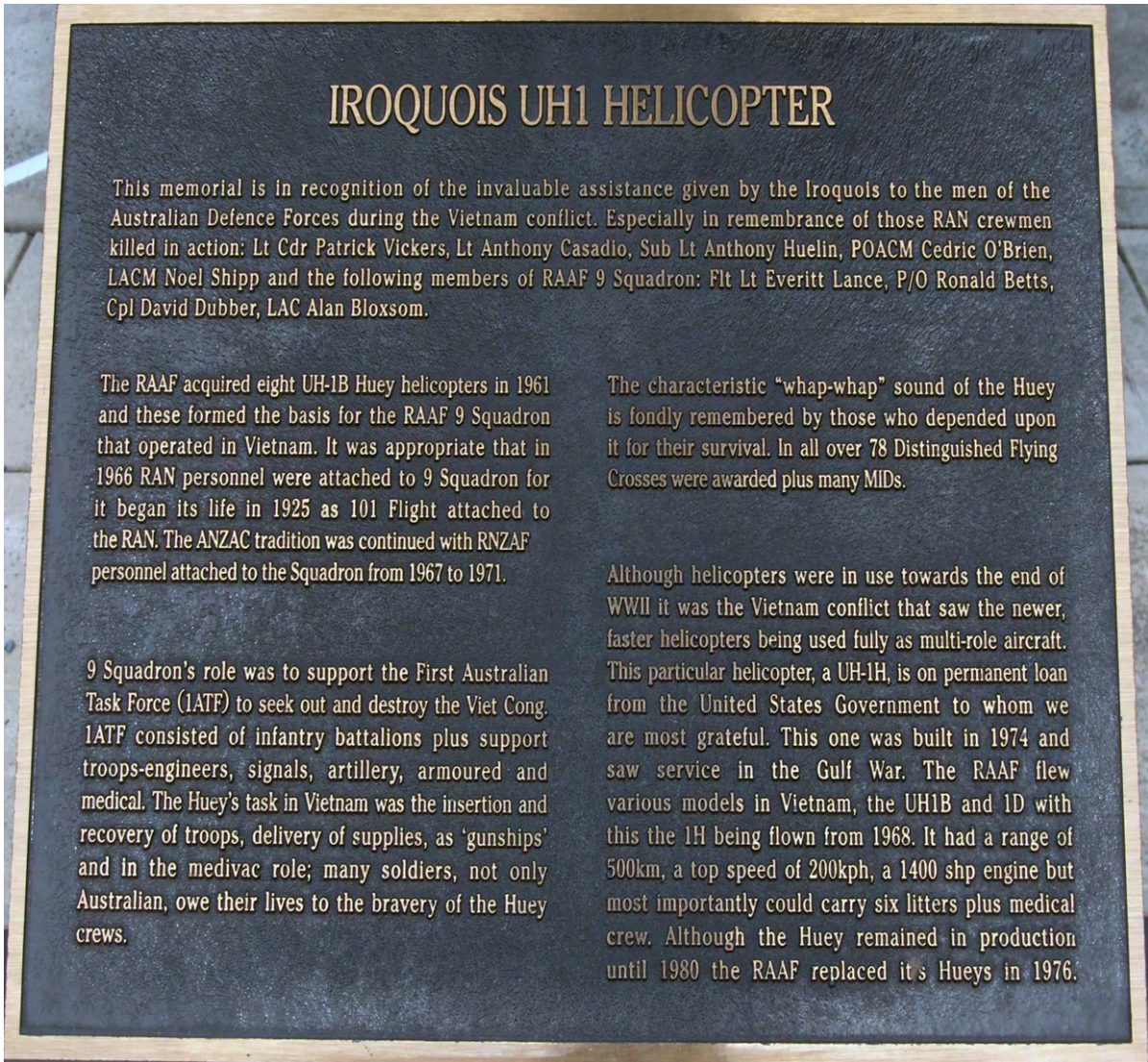
A2-773 H

A2-766 H

A2-915 H



The 'mock up' of No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN Iroquois A2-767 at Woolgoolga, NSW



Appendix D: Iroquois helicopters (A2) allotted to and flown by No. 9 Squadron RAAF during the South Vietnam Commitment, 1966 – 1971

Acknowledgement and Source. WOFF Dennis Roles OAM RAAF (Ret'd) is a special and highly valued contributor to the 9SA Operational History Project.

This precise and unambiguous contribution relates specifically to incidents and the dispositions of each Iroquois helicopter allocated to No. 9 SQN RAAF. WOFF Roles' research and detail, based upon maintenance observations and records, highlights the numerous and varied situations, many critical, that the helicopters and their crews were exposed to in times of peace and war. Being a No. 9 SQN RAAF member at any time from whatever role, category or mustering, could never be described as 'dull'.

The various models of the USA manufactured Bell Iroquois Utility Helicopters employed by 9 SQN were titled: B or 'BRAVO', D or 'DELTA' and H or 'HOTEL' i.e. UH-1B, UH-1D and UH-1H Model. The RAAF classification number assigned to the Iroquois family of aircraft was A2 followed by the unique fuselage/aircraft number.

A2- 1018 (UH-1B)

Crashed and burned during an overshoot from a pad 12 miles NW of Vung Tau, SVN on 18 October 1966. The wreckage was destroyed by explosives. The aircraft was crewed by FLT LT's Cliff Dohle and Peter Middleton, SGT Gordon Buttriss and LAC Thomas Farr.

SGT Buttriss was awarded the George Medal

for his exceptional bravery during this incident.

A2-041 (RAAF number 085) was obtained as the replacement aircraft.

A2- 1019 (UH-1B)

Written-off in South Vietnam, April 1967 following an in-flight engine compressor failure and subsequent heavy landing. The aircraft was subsequently rebuilt within No. 9 SQN at Vung Tau airfield. It was returned to Australia from SVN in October 1968 and was later allocated to the Australian War Memorial (AWM) for display within the post-WW II Gallery.

A2-1166 (RAAF number 649) was obtained as the replacement aircraft.

A2-1020 (UH-1B)

This helicopter was returned to Australia from SVN during February 1968. At one stage, was a training aid at the RAAF Radio School, Laverton, VIC, along with A2-1024.

A2-1021 (UH-1B)

Aircraft was returned to Australia from SVN in March 1968.

A2-1022 (UH-1B)

This aircraft was returned to Australia during October 1968. It crashed near Hornsby (NSW) after engine failure on 10 November 1977. In 1990, was given to the town of Nyn-gan, NSW, by the Government of the day for display (related to flood rescue work conducted by No. 9 SQN around that time). This aircraft

was one of the two resupply aircraft at the Battle of Long Tan, SVN on 18 August 1966; the other was A2-1024.

A2-1023 (UH-1B)

The aircraft was damaged significantly by enemy ground fire in SVN in September 1967 and returned to Australia from SVN in February 1968.

A2-1024 (UH-1B)

The aircraft was written – off following a heavy landing in South Vietnam in June 1967 and was returned to Australia from SVN during January 1968. However, it was partially rebuilt ‘in-country’ at 2AD prior to its return using parts from A2-1019. At one stage 1024 was a training aid at the RAAF Radio School, Laver-ton, VIC, along with A2-1020.

A2-1024 was one of the two resupply aircraft at the battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966 and was later allocated to the Australian Special Air Service Museum in WA for display purposes.

A2-1025 (UH-1B)

1025 received significant battle damage from ground fire in Sep 1967 (7 hits requiring over 100 man-hours of engineer repair work). It was returned to Australia from SVN during January 1969 and had the distinction of being the last No. 9 SQN Iroquois UH-1B model to be returned to Australia from Vietnam.

Initial RAAF UH-1B Model Replacements – ‘Deltas’

One of the larger UH-1D Iroquois version (airframe and engine) helicopters was delivered to No. 9 SQN in 1966 and a second one delivered in 1967.

A2-085 (UH-1D) (A2-041) (c/n 5085)

Delivered to No. 9 SQN as UH-1D during November 1966 and was returned to Australia from SVN in March 1968.

A further six were delivered to No. 5 SQN RAAF (A2-505 to A2-510), the UH-1D model was superseded by the UH-1H; same fuselage but was powered with the 1300shp Lycoming T53-L-13 engine. Later, RAAF retrofitted the UH-1D Deltas to Hotel standard (MIRAD program).

A2-649 (UH-1D) (A2-1166) (c/n 5649)

Also delivered to No. 9 SQN as a UH-1D during November 1967 and was returned to Australia from SVN in March 1968.

Later RAAF UH-1B Model Replacements – ‘Hotel Model’

The following information is extracted from a RAAF News item (November 1991) researched and written by FLTLT John Bennett.

‘ Sixteen UH-1H were ordered to replace the UH-1B in 9 SQN and were delivered direct from the US Army to Vung Tau, SVN. Aircraft A2-376 to A2-383 were received in February 1968 and followed in July of that year with A2-766 to A2-773.’

A2-110 (UH-1H)

The aircraft was delivered during December 1969. In February 1970, a compressor failure during gunship operations resulted in a very heavy landing (hovering autorotation) on Kanga Pad at Nui Dat but an engineer work –party from Vung Tau managed to get it ser-

viceable and flown back before dark. Another Engine failure resulted in a crash landing on the mud flats behind the beach at Vung Tau on 04 May 1970 whence it was almost completely immersed in salt water before being extracted by US Army Chinook MLH helicopter prior to nightfall. It was subsequently rebuilt in the maintenance hangar. It was brought down by enemy ground fire again in early March 1971 and had to be extracted by Chinook MLH. On 31 March 1971 she was again severely damaged by ground fire and required extraction from Nui Dat by Chinook MLH yet again. A2-110 was returned to Australia from SVN during December 1971.

On 27 February 1980, during an attempted rescue mission she hit the sea surface whilst flying in severe weather conditions caused by a nearby cyclone. Control was regained and the aircraft flown to a nearby beach on Fraser Island, QLD. There, it was later blown over by winds in excess of 75 knots. It was again rebuilt.

Along with some other 'hueys', 110 was selected as an airframe to contribute to ADF Aviation Heritage as a display aircraft. In 2013 - 14, Iroquois A2-110 was allocated to the Vietnam Veterans' National Museum at Phillip Island, VIC and is proudly located there as a 'resident on display'.

A2-149 (UH-1H)

This aircraft was delivered in December 1969 and returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971. A2-149 also has the distinction of being the first Air Force Iroquois to be handed over to the Army in 1987.

A2-376 (UH-1H)

A2-376 was received by No. 9 SQN in February 1968. 376 received 32 holes as a result of an enemy mine detonation in early 1970 and prior, in February 1970, suffered an in-flight engine failure dictating entry to autorotation and forced landing into a paddy field about a mile from Sanford Airfield and thus required extraction by Chinook. She was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971.

A2-377 (UH-1H)

A2-377 was delivered during February 1968. In June 1970, she received hits from enemy ground fire, which pierced a fuel tank. A2-377 was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971.

A2-378 (UH-1H)

A2-378 was delivered February 1968 and was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971. On 11 January 1974, following a short shaft failure and when attempting a fast 'running autorotational landing' in an area with scattered trees on sloping ground 15 miles NW of Stanthorpe, QLD, the aircraft crashed. Aircraft Captain Reg Van Leuvan was fatally injured, Crewman Peter Vidler was killed and Crewman Monty Jesinowski and tradesmen Earl Murray and Jerry Riches were seriously injured.

A2-379 (UH-1H)

This helicopter was delivered February 1968. She was modified within No. 9 SQN at Vung Tau, SVN to accommodate aerial spray equipment and was the only 9 SQN Iroquois so modified; returned to Australia from SVN in October 1971. Later, on 29 July 1977, while tasked to support mapping work for the Australian Army Survey Corps (under the DCP for INDON and PNG), the aircraft crashed near Wamena, Baliem Valley,

Irian Jaya. The Aircraft Captain, FLTLT Ralph Taylor was killed in the impact. The site was at high altitude in thick jungle with trees up to 60 ft high and very rugged terrain and remoteness made rescue of the aircraft very difficult; she was never recovered.

A2-380 (UH-1H)

A2-380 was delivered in February 1968 and was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971. Crashed and destroyed in October 1981 on 'Exercise Kangaroo 81' in SWBTA, QLD, after tail rotor drive failure. An Australian Army soldier was killed and the squadron was grounded immediately. The No. 9 SQN 'hueys' were external loaded to the bush airstrip by No. 12 SQN RAAF Chinook MLH helicopters and subsequently transported to RAAF Base Amberley by RAAF C-130 aircraft.

A2-381 (UH-1H)

A2-381 was delivered during February 1968. On 21Aug 1969, when captained by PLT OFF R. B. (Bob) Treloar, she was damaged by ground fire and shrapnel while evacuating 14 wounded members of 5RAR after a heavy contact. Previously an American medevac ('Dust-Off') helicopter had managed to winch several casualties before being driven off by enemy fire. Treloar moved his helicopter into position to take others on board. As a second man was being winched up, an enemy RPG exploded at treetop level killing one of the casualties waiting on the ground to be rescued. By the time a third man was being hoisted, the VC enemy were only 30 metres away and firing RPGs and small arms directly at the helicopter.

Shrapnel peppered the aircraft, with the perspex windscreen being holed barely an inch

from the head of the Co-pilot, FLT LT I.F. (Jim) Satrapa, and along the top window and the left door. As soon as the wounded soldier being winched was on board, Treloar began pulling away. Before he could get the aircraft to a safe distance, it was hit by six rounds of AK47 fire. Both crewmen were struck by bullets but were saved by their body armour protection. One of the soldiers on board the aircraft undergoing medevac was further wounded in the head and groin adding to the initial neck wound he suffered in the original contact on the ground.

After return to Nui Dat and the transfer of the wounded to another aircraft, an engineering inspection of A2-381 revealed eleven bullet holes along with shrapnel damage including a holed fuel tank. One round was found to have passed up between Treloar's feet, smashed thru the instrument panel and lodged itself in the aircraft structure. Battle casualties in the action were 1 KIA and 37 WIA with a total of 8 RAAF and 6 US ARMY helicopters involved in that action.

On a rope extraction task in support of 3 SQN SASR in Long Kahn Province SVN on 15 October 1969, A2-381 experienced a flight controls hydraulic failure, crashed and was subsequently destroyed; the No. 9 Squadron RAAF SVN incident report extract is on the following page.

A2-382 (UH-1H)

This aircraft was delivered in February 1968. During gunship operations and piloted by FLT LT Bruce Townsend she was struck in a fuel tank and engine by enemy ground fire. It crash-landed below the high water line on a beach near the Long Hai Mountains; the incoming tide covered the fuselage and broke its

back. It was recovered by US ARMY CH-47 and subsequently returned to Australia from SVN on about 30 June 1970 for use by No. 5 SQN RAAF as a training aid.

The two images that follow are of Iroquois A2-382 at the Vung Tau Airfield squadron maintenance area following the crash and its external load recovery by a US ARMY Chinook helicopter:



A2-382 Vung Tau Airfield

15 October 1969, A2-381 SVN incident report extract:

Albatross 02, Wg Cdr [Wing Commander] R W Hibben (O37568) GDPLT [General duties pilot] started a rope extraction of SAS Patrol 32. Whilst the patrol was still on the ropes the CO [Commanding Officer - Hibben] experienced a hydraulic failure. The patrol were dragged a few yards before release. The aircraft, A2-381, crashed at YS694979 [tactical map grid reference] and was classed Cat 5 damage [unrepairable] and later destroyed by a SAS demolition team. The crew and patrol were flown to Vampire [pad at 1st Australian Field Hospital, Back Beach, Vung Tau] for examination. The CO was released but FLTLT [Flight Lieutenant] M K Woolf (O55160) GDPLT the co-pilot was detained and had stitches put into head cuts. A46554 AC [Aircraftman] May T A ADG4 [Air Field Defence Guard class 4] Gunner was detained with a back injury and A216972 Sgt [Sergeant] Pinkerton T J ENGFITT [engine fitter] (Crewman) who was unmarked was detained for 24 hours for observation. A changeover of 6 RAR [Sixth Battalion Royal Australian Regiment] to FSB [Fire Support Base] Discovery and 5 RAR return to Nui Dat was completed without incident. Some companies of 6RAR were inserted into the 'Light Green' [Australian name for a prominent local geographical feature] and Xuyen Moc.



A2-382 Vung Tau Airfield

A2-383 (UH-1H)

A2-383 was delivered in February 1968. On 20 March 1971 and not long after participating in a Sniffer Mission that produced few readings, the Bushranger gunships, led by FLGOFF Dave Freedman as BR 71 and Aircraft Captain of A2-383, were called to GR YS465539 to support 302 RF Company who were in contact with an unknown number of enemy. Later, during the early afternoon, the Bushrangers deployed to support 2 Platoon C Company 3RAR near Xuyen Moc (loc GR YS648786) when that Unit was under heavy contact with their Platoon Commander and Signaller wounded and separated from the main column. Confusion was rife as the main column had expended their smoke grenade markers and was unable to indicate to the Bushrangers any demarcation line between

the enemy and themselves. Obviously appreciating the life or death situation for the soldiers without smoke markers and the inherent danger for the aircraft and crew from flying low and slow over a contact situation, they went ahead. Bushranger 71 (crewed by Freedman, Betts, Moran and Morgan) was hit by 16 or more rounds of enemy ground fire which caused extensive systems damage and seriously wounded the Co-pilot PLT OFF Ron Betts.

FLGOFF Freedman managed to recover the aircraft to a Fire Support Base (FSB Beth) where it was later extracted by US ARMY Chinook MLH helicopter; Bushrangers 73 and 74 were called forward. PLTOFF Ron Betts was medically evacuated by helicopter to RED EARTH, the 8th Field Ambulance pad at Nui Dat, and then to the US 24th EVAC Hospital at Long Binh

where unfortunately he subsequently died from his wounds.

Additionally, Dustoff 1 (Armstrong, Buchanan, Bloxson, Munson), flew three Australian battle casualties (1 KIA, 2 WIA) from the contact

area to VAMPIRE Pad (1st Australian Field Hospital – 1AFH) at Vung Tau.

A2-383 was returned to Australia from SVN during December 1971.



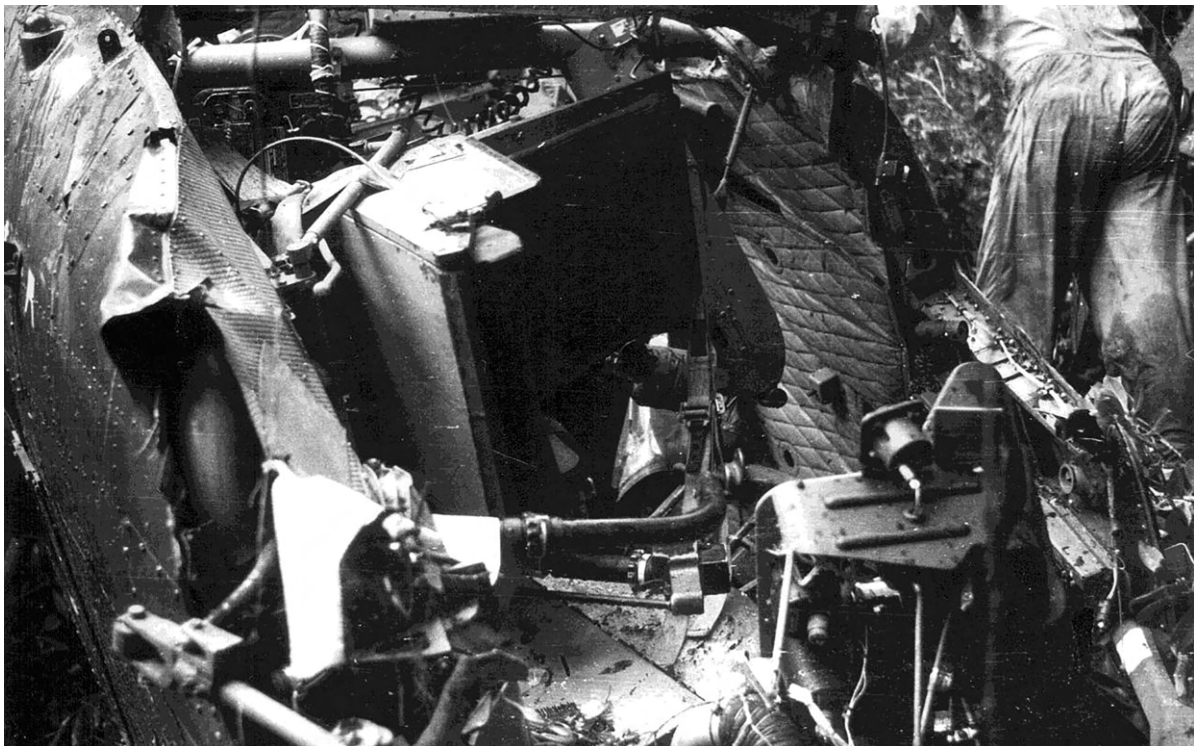
A2-383 configured as a 'BUSHRANGER' GUNSHIP in SVN



A2-383 at Tapini Airstrip, PNG in early 1974

When a No. 9 SQN RAAF Detachment was supporting Australian Army Survey Corps personnel (mapping) on 28 September 1974, A2-383 crashed on Mt. Bosavi, PNG at 8,500 feet AMSL. Although thought to be repairable,

it was destroyed in situ; two images of the crashed A2-383 are below showing remnants of the right front fuselage section including pilot's seat/station.



Following the RAAF crash investigation and Board of Inquiry (BOI), the Aircraft Captain was charged with Negligent Conduct in operation of the aircraft. He elected a Summary Hearing by a RAAF Member of Air Rank, declined a Courts Martial, and was awarded a 'Severe Reprimand'.

A2-455 (UH-1H)

Replacement Iroquois A2-455 was collected from Heli 3, (then) Saigon, in June 1971. Later that same month she had her tail boom severed by ground fire. This helicopter was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971.

A2-703 (UH-1H)

A2-703 was delivered in July 1970 and was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971. Transferred to Army Aviation January 1990 and in about January 2012 the helicopter went to the RAAF Museum Point Cook, VIC as a display aircraft.

A2-723 (UH-1H)

A2-723 was also delivered to No. 9 SQN in July 1970. During OPERATION OVERLORD, at 1104 hours on 7 June 1971 when conducting a resupply of ammunition from the hover for B Coy 3RAR at GR YS06936, the aircraft (call-sign Albatross 06) was hit by enemy .50 calibre machine gun fire and crashed into the trees. Sadly, the Aircraft Captain FLTLT Everitt 'Lofty' Lance and Gunner CPL Dave Dubber MID, were killed. Co-pilot PLTOFF Greg Forbes, Crewman CPL Peter Vidler and the 3RAR pad master SGT Jimmy Griffith were injured.

A2-766 (UH-1H)

This aircraft was delivered during July 1968. From Maintenance Records, A2-766 had the distinction of having the first engine to run to

maximum overhaul hours in the same aircraft (1030 hours) with the scheduled engine change taking place in October 1971. The aircraft was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971.

A2-767 (UH-1H)

A2-767 was delivered during July 1968. The aircraft was on a medical evacuation task (Dustoff) on 31 March 1971 some 8 miles east of Nui Dat near the Song Rai River and crewed by PLTOFFs Ken Phillips and Reg Van Leuven and LACs Alan Bloxom and Ken Thompson, when it was hit by enemy ground fire in the fuel tanks, main rotor and engine combustion chamber. The enemy had thrown identical smoke to the friendly troops on the ground and the aircraft crew identified the enemy smoke as the 'friendly' marker. The aircraft carried out a forced landing at FSB Beth, Sadly, LAC Alan Bloxom was killed during the incident. Alan was on his second tour with No. 9 SQN in SVN having completed a previous tour of duty during September 1966 to September 1967. A2-767 was extracted by US Army Chinook MLH and was repaired.

A2-768 (UH-1H)

During July of 1968, A2-768 was delivered to the squadron. On 14 June 1970, the aircraft received 18 rounds of ground fire which required 5 days repair work: Paterson, Mitchell, Jones A. and Scheer were the crew.

On ground impact during a patrol insertion (PI) 6 miles north of Nui Dat, 768 rolled and caught fire. The crew was FLTLT Chris Ellis, Captain, PLTOFF Dick Marlin, Co-pilot, LAC Duncan McNair, Crewman and AC Wayne Scheer, Gunner. Sadly, on 20 July 1970, LAC

Duncan McNair died from the injuries. A2-768 was destroyed in-situ on 3 July 1970.

A2-769 (UH-1H)

Was delivered during July 1968 and crashed after an engine failure in September 1968. It was rebuilt by the US Army at a local maintenance facility and returned to No. 9 SQN. On 26 October 1969 during a Dustoff, it was destroyed after crashing 15 miles NW of task force headquarters Bien Hoa Province, SVN. The crew was, FLTLT Max Woolf, PLTOFF Derek Knights, SGT Felix Parker and LAC Ray Price. A2- 149 was received as the replacement airframe in December 1969.

A2-770 (UH-1H)

This 'huey' was received by the Squadron in SVN during July 1968 and was returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971.

NOTE. Iroquois A2-770 was destroyed with all on board when it flew into the side of a hill at night near Port Augusta (SA) on 25 November 1978. The CO, WGCDR Peter Mahood DSO, pilot, crewman Steve Milsted, flight fitter Paul Gallagher, PLTOFF Paul Mason, co pilot and Barry Johns, flight fitter A, were killed. A memorial plaque is at the site, which is inside El Alamein Range on the hillside about 2 km SW of the actual El Alamein army camp.

A2-771 (UH-1H)

A2-771 was delivered in July 1968. The exceptional attitude and skill of No. 9 SQN RAAF maintenance personnel was again demonstrated in December 1970 when the laminated center work deck of the aircraft was replaced in the hangar (an Aircraft Depot level repair task). Returned to Australia from SVN in December

1971.

A2-772 (UH-1H)

Delivered in July of 1968 and was built up as the first Bushranger gunship in March 1969. The aircraft was the focus of a very sad accident when on 31 July 1970 on a resupply task and when landed at a FSB helipad with rotors turning (throttle rolled back to ground idle). Whilst the crew members were doing their external load hook electrical and manual release checks prior to an external load sortie, the driver of an APC who had (as normal) positioned his APC outside the rotor disk with the ramp down for the load to be transferred to the helicopter, apparently climbed from the hatch, walked rearwards on top of the APC and jumped to ground. As he did, he jumped into the turning main rotor and was killed instantly. 772 was crewed by FLGOFF Ron Mitchell, Aircraft captain, PLTOFF Graeme Chalmers, Co-pilot, and LAC's Lance Harris and Neville Sinkinson, Crewmen.

On 6 November 1971 during some of the last SVN Bushranger operations, she also had the distinction of firing the two millionth M134 (minigun system) round in-country. Returned to Australia from SVN in December 1971 and crashed and was destroyed near Hiran Nandan, PNG on 11 June 1973.

A2-773 (UH-1H)

Another of the helicopters delivered in July 1968. During December 1970, 773 took enemy ground fire when supporting AS 7RAR soldiers about 5 miles east of Xuyen Moc, Phuoc Tuy Province. The aircraft sustained extensive systems damage (fuel, instrument and electrical), was landed nearby and thence recovered successfully by US Army Chinook MLH helicopter.



Mick 'Hax' Haxell DFC and 'old mate' 'Huey 771', RAAF Amberley, 21 July 2012.



AIRMSHL Geoff Brown AO, CAF delivering the keynote address at the 'Welcome Home Huey 771' Ceremony on 21 July 2012. Pictured also are Graeme Chalmers, President of the No. 9 Squadron Association and Chaplain Paul Goodland, RAAF Base Amberley.

A2-377 was on the same mission as 773 and took one enemy round that caused damage necessitating skin repair and a main rotor change.

A2-773 was the prototype airframe for the 'in-house' development of the BUSHRANGER GUNSHIP; she was returned to Australia in December 1971.

A2-915 (UH-1H)

Delivered in July 1971 from Tuy Hoa as a replacement; returned to AS in December 1971.

A2-771 in 2012

After a superb restoration, ex RAAF Iroquois A2-771 or 'Huey 771' proudly took up residence at the Air Force Aviation Heritage Centre, RAAF Base Amberley in SE Queensland. Previous pages show photographs from the 'Welcome Home Huey 771' Ceremony conducted on 21 July 2012.

Disposal – Iroquois Helicopter Asset

After the Iroquois aircraft were retired by Army Aviation, the helicopters were stored in the Brisbane area to await the Defence Material Organisation (DMO) disposal plan. Many were subsequently allotted to Australian Defence Force related organizations throughout the nation for display purposes.

Disposition of Bell Iroquois Helicopters (A2) operated by the RAAF during 1962 until 14 February 1989, courtesy of RAAF News

A November 1991 Iroquois helicopter article written by FLT LT John Bennett in the RAAF News, appears here on the right and a further document from RAAF News on the following page (date uncertain).

Aircraft of the RAAF A2 - Bell UH-1H Iroquois



A2-389, a UH-1B of 9SQN. Just as the Bell Sioux (AI) was identified by its US use in the Korean War, the Iroquois, or 'Huey', became synonymous with the Vietnam War.

By FLTLT John Bennett.

The RAAF had operated Dragonfly and Sycamore helicopters in the 1950s and had been involved with the introduction of the Sioux to Army service.

But it was not until 1962, as the Iroquois was introduced, that the full capability and flexibility of the helicopter was realised in the RAAF.

The prototype Bell XH-40 flew in October, 1956, and entered service as the HU-1 (nicknamed 'Huey') with the US Army in 1959. The later model, redesignated UH-1B, flew in 1961 and in April that year, the RAAF showed great foresight in ordering eight of this version for search and rescue. No 9 Squadron, under SQNLDR R.A. Scott, received the first aircraft on October 29, 1962. These aircraft were serialised A2-384 to A2-391 (derived from Bell constructor's numbers 384 to 391) and had been allotted US Army serials 62-4606 to 62-4613.

The Iroquois began exercising in troop support for the Army, and this was to become a major role for 9SQN. In December, 1962, a second batch of eight UH-1B was ordered and delivered 12 months later as A2-714 to A2-721 (c/n 714 to 721, ex 63-9784 to 63-9791).

In May, 1964, 5SQN was formed at RAAF Fairbairn with four aircraft and deployed to Malaysia to provide support during confrontation with Indonesia. A third batch delivered in late 1964, A2-1018 to A2-1025 (c/n 1018/1035, 63-13586/63-13593), incorporated the Lycoming 1100shp T53-L-11 engine replacing the previous T53-L-9.

In April, 1966, 5SQN reformed at RAAF Fairbairn, and 9SQN then deployed with the third batch of aircraft to Vietnam. Arriving at Vung Tau in June, 9SQN began immediate operations in support of Australian ground forces. Army roles included airlift and resupply, aeromedical 'dust-off' evacuation and insertion and extraction of SAS troops. Two of an enlarged version of the Iroquois, the UH-1D, were delivered over 1966-67 as replacements. 65-10041 (c/n 5085) became A2-041 (later changed to A2-085) and 66-1166 (c/n 5649) became A2-166 (later changed to A2-649).

The larger cabin of the 'Delta' enabled carriage of an additional four passengers.

A further six were delivered to 5SQN (A2-505 to A2-510 c/n 9505 to 9510), but the UH-1D was soon superseded in production by the UH-1H, which had the same enlarged fuselage powered by the 1300shp T53-L-13. RAAF Deltas were later retrofitted to this Hotel standard.

Sixteen UH-1H were ordered to replace the UH-1B in 9SQN and were delivered direct from the US Army to Vung Tau. A2-376 to A2-383 (c/n

9376/9383, ex 67-17178/67-17185) were received in February, 1968, followed in July by A2-766 to -773 (c/n 9766/9773, 67-17568/67-17575).

This enabled the withdrawal of the Bravo from Vietnam to Australia, where these aircraft were able to reinforce SAR flights at RAAF's Darwin, Williamtown, Pearce and Butterworth, and the type was also flown by ARDU.

As 5SQN was the training unit for 9SQN, the SAR flights, and the RAN, in addition to providing Army support throughout Australia, a further seven UH-1H were ordered for 1970 delivery: A2-484 to A2-490 (c/n 11772/11778) were ex 69-15484/15490.

During 1969 gunship modifications were carried out on some aircraft by 9SQN. These aircraft could be converted from the 'Slick' transport configuration to 'Bushranger' gunships.

No 9 Squadron returned from Vietnam to RAAF Amberley in December, 1971. Five more UH-1H were delivered in 1973 and these later equipped 35SQN at RAAF Townsville: A2-278, 279, 295, 296 and 310 (c/n 13278/13310).

A major role for Iroquois detachments has been survey operations. Much work has been carried out over the past 25 years in mapping the remote areas of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. A different peacetime task has been providing support to United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Middle East. All-white RAAF UH-1H with UN markings served with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in Egypt at Ismailia (from 1976 to 1979) and with UN Multi-national Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai (1982-1985).

In December, 1984, the Bravos were replaced in service by the Squirrel in the training and SAR roles. Surviving aircraft were stored and offered for disposal in December, 1985. Seven have been sold to US buyers. In 1989 four UH-1H were supplied to the PNG Defence Force and with the loss of the RAAF rotary wing capability, the remaining 25 Iroquois have been transferred to the Army 171SQN and Aviation School at Oakey, and 5 Aviation Regiment at Townsville.

In August, 1991, A2-376, of 171SQN, achieved 10,000 flying hours. However, some aircraft remain in RAAF markings. A2-1019 is restored at RAAF Fairbairn, earmarked for display at the Australian War Memorial. The Radio School at Laverton has A2-1020 and A2-1024 as training aids and the RAAF Museum at Point Cook has A2-384 and A2-1022.

Rarely has an aircraft type seen such diverse operation with the RAAF and given such long and sterling service.

RAAF and RAN BELL IROQUOIS

Abbreviations: RAAF - Royal Australian Air Force; RAN - Royal Australian Navy; AAAC - Australian Army Aviation Corps; AWM - Australian War Memorial; del - delivered; PNGDF - Papua-New Guinea Defence Force; ARDU - Aircraft Research and Development Unit; Con/No - Constructor's Number; NAM - Naval Air Museum; cvtd - converted; dbr - damaged beyond repair; w/o - written off; wfu - withdrawn from use; cr - crashed.

Notes: RAAF serial number suffixes (with some exceptions) reflect the constructor's number (or the last three digits of it) and are presented in numerical order, thus the wide variations in delivery dates for aircraft with apparently close serials. The exceptions (A2-484 to 490) repeat the last three numbers of the US Army serial. Several batches were delivered direct to the RAAF in Vietnam: these aircraft were A2-085, 110, 149, 376-383, 455, 649, 703, 723, 766-773, and 915.

Note that A2-085 and -649 were originally allocated the serial numbers A2-041 and A2-166, respectively.

The UH-1Ds were upgraded to UH-1H specifications.

RAN serial numbers also reflect the aircraft's constructor's number, albeit with the Navy's 'N9' prefix.

RAAF IROQUOIS

| RAAF No | US Serial | Con/No | Model | Deliv | Disposal/Remarks |
|---------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|---|
| A2-085 | 65-10041 | 5085 | UH-1D | 11/66 | ex A2-041, cvtd UH-1H, to AAAC 1/90 |
| A2-110 | 68-16451 | 10110 | UH-1H | /69 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-149 | 68-15219 | 10149 | UH-1H | 01/69 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-278 | 72-21579 | 13278 | UH-1H | 11/73 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-279 | 72-21580 | 13279 | UH-1H | 11/73 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-295 | 72-21596 | 13295 | UH-1H | 11/73 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-296 | 72-21597 | 12296 | UH-1H | 11/73 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-310 | 72-21611 | 13310 | UH-1H | 11/73 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-376 | 67-17178 | 9376 | UH-1H | 02/68 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-377 | 67-17179 | 9377 | UH-1H | 02/68 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-378 | 67-17180 | 9378 | UH-1H | 02/68 | crashed Stanthorpe Qld 01/74 |
| A2-379 | 67-17181 | 9379 | UH-1H | 02/68 | cr Biak, Iryan Jaya 07/77 |
| A2-380 | 67-17182 | 9380 | UH-1H | 02/68 | cr Shoalwater Bay Qld 10/81 |
| A2-381 | 67-17183 | 9381 | UH-1H | 02/68 | crashed Vietnam 10/69, hydraulic failure |
| A2-382 | 67-17184 | 9382 | UH-1H | 02/68 | battle damage, force landed in sea, Vietnam 06/70, cabin displayed RAAF Museum Point Cook Vic |
| A2-383 | 67-17185 | 9382 | UH-1H | 02/68 | damaged PNG 09/74 and w/o |
| A2-384 | 62-4606 | 384 | UH-1B | 10/62 | wfu 03/85, last UH-1B in service; to RAAF Museum Pt Cook Vic 1987 |
| A2-385 | 62-6407 | 385 | UH-1B | 11/62 | crashed Fairbairn ACT 01/70 |
| A2-386 | 62-4608 | 386 | UH-1B | 01/63 | cr Captain's Flat ACT 04/69 |
| A2-387 | 62-4609 | 387 | UH-1B | 01/63 | cr near Fairbairn ACT 11/68 |
| A2-388 | 62-4610 | 388 | UH-1B | 11/62 | wfu 07/84, sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-389 | 62-4611 | 389 | UH-1B | 02/63 | wfu 01/85 |
| A2-390 | 62-4612 | 390 | UH-1B | 02/63 | wfu 07/84, sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-391 | 62-4613 | 391 | UH-1B | 02/63 | wfu 07/84, sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-455 | 70-15845 | 12455 | UH-1H | 06/71 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-484 | 69-15484 | 11772 | UH-1H | 06/70 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-485 | 69-15485 | 11773 | UH-1H | 06/70 | last in RAAF service with ARDU |
| A2-486 | 69-15486 | 11774 | UH-1H | 06/70 | crashed Port Macquarie NSW 10/86 |
| A2-487 | 69-15487 | 11775 | UH-1H | 06/70 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-488 | 69-15488 | 11776 | UH-1H | 06/70 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-489 | 69-15489 | 11777 | UH-1H | 06/70 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-490 | 69-15490 | 11778 | UH-1H | 06/70 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-505 | 67-17307 | 9505 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to PNGDF 08/89 |
| A2-506 | 67-17308 | 9506 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to PNGDF 08/89 |
| A2-507 | 67-17309 | 9507 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-508 | 67-17310 | 9508 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-509 | 67-17311 | 9509 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to PNGDF 08/89 |
| A2-510 | 67-17312 | 9510 | UH-1D | 02/68 | cvtd UH-1H, to PNGDF 08/89 |
| A2-649 | 66-1166 | 5649 | UH-1D | 11/67 | ex A2-166, cvtd UH-1H, to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-703 | 69-15415 | 11703 | UH-1H | 07/70 | to AAAC 01/90 |
| A2-714 | 63-9784 | 714 | UH-1B | 12/63 | cr Williamtown NSW 12/63 |
| A2-715 | 63-9785 | 715 | UH-1B | 12/63 | dbr Pearce WA 11/70 |
| A2-716 | 63-9786 | 716 | UH-1B | 12/63 | sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-717 | 63-9787 | 717 | UH-1B | 01/64 | damaged 03/71, inst airframe |
| A2-718 | 63-9788 | 718 | UH-1B | 01/64 | cr near Fairbairn ACT 03/72 |
| A2-719 | 63-9789 | 719 | UH-1B | 01/64 | cr near Fairbairn ACT 01/69 |
| A2-720 | 63-9790 | 720 | UH-1B | 03/64 | wfu 05/84, sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-721 | 63-9791 | 721 | UH-1B | 03/64 | damaged Darwin NT Cyclone Tracy 12/74 |
| A2-723 | 69-15435 | 11723 | UH-1H | 07/70 | crashed Vietnam 06/71 |
| A2-766 | 67-17568 | 9766 | UH-1H | 07/68 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-767 | 67-17569 | 9767 | UH-1H | 07/68 | shot down Vietnam 04/71 |
| A2-768 | 67-17570 | 9768 | UH-1H | 07/68 | crashed Vietnam 07/70 |
| A2-769 | 67-17571 | 9769 | UH-1H | 07/68 | crashed Vietnam 10/69 |
| A2-770 | 67-17572 | 9770 | UH-1H | 07/68 | crashed El Alamein 11/78 |
| A2-771 | 67-17573 | 9771 | UH-1H | 07/68 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-772 | 67-17574 | 9772 | UH-1H | 07/68 | cr near Rabaul PNG 06/73 |
| A2-773 | 67-17575 | 9773 | UH-1H | 07/68 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-915 | 70-15915 | 12487 | UH-1H | 07/71 | to AAAC 12/89 |
| A2-1018 | 63-13586 | 1018 | UH-1B | 10/64 | cr Nui Dat Vietnam 10/66 |
| A2-1019 | 63-13587 | 1019 | UH-1B | 10/64 | to AWM, Canberra ACT 05/90 |
| A2-1020 | 63-13588 | 1020 | UH-1B | 12/64 | on display Nyngan NSW |
| A2-1021 | 63-13589 | 1021 | UH-1B | 12/64 | sold in USA 1990 |
| A2-1022 | 63-13590 | 1022 | UH-1B | 12/64 | dbr WA 05/84, on display Nyngan NSW |
| A2-1023 | 63-13591 | 1023 | UH-1B | 12/64 | cr Williamtown NSW 08/81 |
| A2-1024 | 63-13592 | 1024 | UH-1B | 01/65 | training aid 12/85 |
| A2-1025 | 63-13593 | 1025 | UH-1B | 01/65 | sold in USA 1990 |

RAN IROQUOIS

| | | | | | |
|---------|----------|------|-------|-------|------------------------------|
| N9-881 | 63-12953 | 881 | UH-1B | 03/64 | crashed Beecroft NSW 06/68 |
| N9-882 | 63-12954 | 882 | UH-1B | 04/64 | to NAM, Nowra NSW 09/87 |
| N9-883 | 63-12955 | 883 | UH-1B | 04/64 | crashed Nowra NSW 11/64 |
| N9-3101 | 64-17621 | 3101 | UH-1C | 05/65 | to NAM Nowra NSW 09/87 |
| N9-3102 | 64-17622 | 3102 | UH-1C | 03/65 | ditched Jervis Bay NSW 11/70 |
| N9-3103 | 64-17623 | 3103 | UH-1C | 04/65 | crashed Nowra NSW 03/81 |
| N9-3104 | 64-12846 | 3104 | UH-1C | 10/66 | airworthy with NAM |



Appendix E: Assorted Rare Photographs



No.5 SQN RAAF UH-1B A2-385 inserting troops in Malaysia. Image: Bob Stephens



Iroquois A2-110 'Hotel Model' gunship configuration in-flight; transferred to Army Aviation in December 1989.



No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN 'heavy left formation four' in 1970 wet season. Source: PLT OFF Graeme Chalmers, co-pilot, ALBATROSS 04.



RAAF Iroquois A2-085 in UN Sinai livery. Initially a 'Delta', upgraded to 'Hotel' Model and transferred to Army Aviation in January 1990. Source: Trevor Moxham



RAAF Iroquois A2-279 in New Zealand. Source: Trevor Moxham



A2-110 on display : Following the 'retirement' of the ARMY Iroquois helicopters and their disposal through the Defence Material Organisation (DMO) from the Brisbane storage facility, Iroquois A2-110 was allocated to the Vietnam Veterans National Museum (VVNM) at Phillip Island, Victoria.

Appendix F: Recollections of Early Days by Ray Scott

In early 1961, when I was a squadron leader flight commander of No 34 Squadron at RAAF Base Fairbairn, rumours circulated that a helicopter squadron was to be formed, and that I was a possible commanding officer. These rumours increased until June 1961 when a signals sergeant asked me did I look forward to going to the USA in August. Obviously he had sighted some sort of signals traffic, and that was sufficient to trigger a phone call to Sqn Ldr Geoff Michael, the Maritime staff officer in the Department of Air Operational Requirements Branch, whom I believed was working on the helicopter project. I told him I had heard I would be off to the USA in August and requested confirmation. I could hear Geoff talking to someone in the background, and very quickly he said “come in”.

On walking into Geoff’s office I was confronted by Air Commodore Charles Read who held the position of Director General Operational Requirements (and later advanced to be Chief of the Air Staff). In his usual blunt style Read said “you’ve heard?”. I confirmed I had heard rumours. He then said “you no longer belong to 34 Squadron - you belong to me. Sit down next to Michael and help him with the helicopter project”. Later, he gave me a lecture about the Army’s appalling record of helicopter crashes, and said “your squadron is not to have a major accident for two years. If you fail you’re finished”. After the Squadron had operated for two years without a major accident I confronted Read in the Department of Air bar



AIRCDRE Ray Scott, DFC AFC, RAAF

where he had a daily session with his cronies. I informed him my two years were up. He was silent for a few seconds, then thrust his face close to mine and said “yes, and you’ve been bloody lucky”. My moment of triumph had lasted about ten seconds.

Geoff Michael revealed that the Bell HU-1B (nomenclature later changed by the US Army to UH -1B) helicopter had been selected to fulfil the RAAF’s requirement for a search and rescue role purely by a paper evaluation. No one in

the Department had helicopter experience, so it was extraordinary that such a good selection eventuated. I never did sight the paper evaluation

When I received a list of the other five pilots selected for the Squadron I was horrified. Don White I knew quite well and he had some limited helicopter experience. Ken Clark I did not know. However, the other three names rang alarm bells - I believed they had poor accident records. I presented the three names to Wing Commander Herb Plenty, who was Director of Flying Safety, for confirmation of their accident records. Herb read the names and then said " they have the worst accident history in the RAAF. God help you - I can't". A young flight lieutenant working in a corner of Herb's office spoke up and said "I'll go" - meaning he was willing to go to the USA for helicopter training.

I cornered Squadron Leader Roy Frost, who was responsible for aircrew postings, and told him the three with accident records were unacceptable to me. Frost refused to budge, so I told him of Read's edict regarding accidents, and invited him to accompany me to Read's office to sort it out. Frost immediately relented and gave me a limited list of names from which I could select replacements. I picked Laddie Hindley from the list but rejected the others. I insisted I wanted Jim Cox, as I had previously converted him to Sycamore helicopters at Woomera , and regarded him as an excellent prospect. Having previously checked with Herb Plenty, I also selected the flight lieutenant who had said "I'll go" - Bob MacIntosh. Frost was not happy, but wasn't up to facing Read, so I got the three replacements I had selected - all of whom turned out to be first class.

For the next three years the RAAF Personnel Branch made repeated attempts to post the three accident prone pilots to the Squadron. These attempts were strongly rejected.. The Squadron received many excellent pilots, but it also became a dumping ground for pilots who were not wanted by other units. The majority were fighter pilots who were getting a little old to withstand the "G" forces and rigors of flying modern jet fighters. Most had a lot of experience and good air sense, and became steady and reliable Squadron pilots.

Read informed me that he had planned that I would depart for the USA in August 1961 as head of a Procurement Team. Some historians interpret it as an aircraft evaluation team. It was not, as the aircraft had already been selected. It was a spares assessing team. The Air Members for Technical Services and Equipment both objected to a General Duties officer leading a spares assessing team, and Read had to capitulate. However, he said that to guard my own interests he was attaching me to the team as an adviser. Later I had cause to be very grateful for that decision.

I departed for the USA with the team in August 1961. The team (all of whom were from Headquarters Support Command Melbourne) consisted of a squadron leader equipment officer as leader of the team, a flight lieutenant equipment officer, squadron leader radio officer, a sergeant engine fitter, and a sergeant airframe fitter. Note the glaring omission of an aeronautical engineer. The radio officer was an ex-World War 2 NCO who appeared to know little about modern radio equipment. He was old beyond his age, and had medical problems. The engine fitter's expertise was in assessing

carburettors, but he turned out to be a reasonably quick learner. The airframe fitter had been employed solely on assessing aircraft brakes for about 5 years, and he was solid bone between the ears.

The team's first visit in the USA was to the Lycoming factory at Hartford - the engine manufacturer. We were placed in the hands of a Dr Haber who had played a major part in the design of the T53 engine series. Haber was a German who probably was snapped up by the Americans immediately after the defeat of Germany in 1945. He looked like the typical Prussian aristocrat. He seated us in a very elegant lecture room; from a recess in a wall he pulled out a board on which was a large, sectionised drawing of the Lycoming T53-L11 engine; and proceeded to describe in technical language the design features of the engine. From the blank expressions on the faces of the Team members it became obvious that I was the only one who knew how a turbine engine worked. I had to interrupt the good doctor and inform him that his explanations were a little above the member's knowledge. For a moment he looked as though I had challenged him to a duel, then thrust the board back into its recess, and drew out another showing a balloon with the air escaping from it. That was the start of the rot as far as the Assessing Team was concerned. I later learned that the technical members of the Procurement Team had been selected because "it was their turn", and not on their ability.

The Sergeant engine fitter was a quick learner and coped reasonably well with his duties, but the airframe fitter and the radio officer were quite hopeless. Eventually, at the request of the Team leader and at the direction of the

Head of Defence Staff Washington, I took over supervision of the initial spares assessing, and instead of staying in the USA for two months, as originally planned, I had to extend my stay to six months.

During a discussion with Dr Haber I became aware that the T53 engine would only operate on JP4 type fuel. At that time JP4 was only available in Australia at a few major airports, and this would limit Squadron operations. When I voiced concern Haber said Lycoming had designed a new combustion chamber (known as the "scoopless combustor") which was under evaluation by the USAF at Wright Patterson AFB, and he had high hopes that this would extend the types of fuel on which the engine could operate. I very hastily visited Wright Patterson AFB for discussions with the USAF project engineer who informed me that the scoopless combustor had not completed all evaluation tests. When asked for his opinion he said he was fairly confident it would pass, and from its performance so far on various fuels "it probably would run on anything volatile, including bay rum".

Later Lycoming advised that there was a long lead time for engine production, and they required a decision as to whether the RAAF would accept the limits of the normal combustor or whether we would take a gamble on the potential wider fuel compatibility of the scoopless combustor. I sent a signal off to Department of Air explaining the situation - and got no reply. Ultimately, Lycoming gave me 30 days to get a decision. I sent another signal to that effect and added that if I did not get a reply within the time frame set by Lycoming I would have to make a decision. Silence from Department of

Air, so I took the gamble on the still incomplete evaluated scoopless combustor. As the USAF officer had predicted, it turned out to be a winner. When I eventually returned to Australia I took Geoff Michael to task for not replying to my signals. He said Read had decided that "as he is prepared to make a decision let him wear the can". A great way to run a railroad.

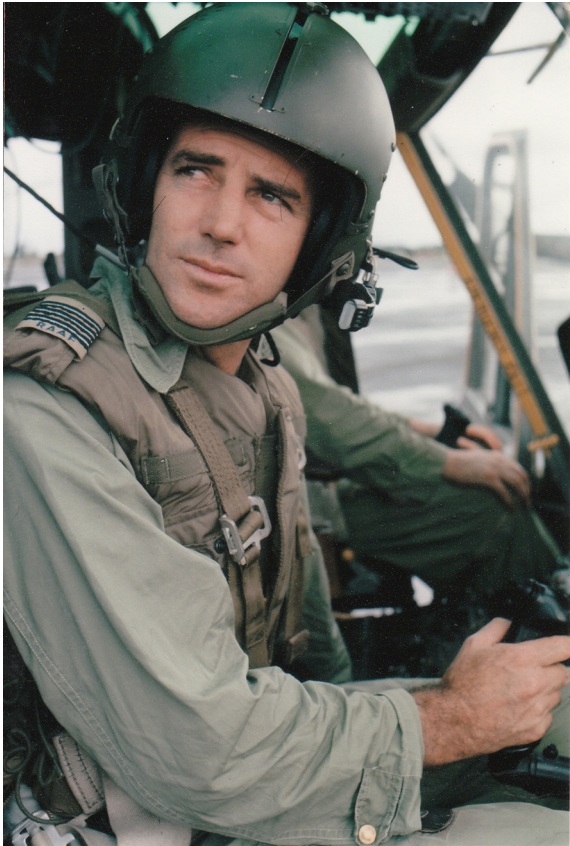
Having learned my lesson from that episode, at a later stage the Bell Helicopter Company wanted decisions on the rescue hoist and an emergency floatation system. On visiting Bell I found that the RAAF would be the first to have a hoist fitted to an UH-1 aircraft, and they had selected an electric hoist as an hydraulic hoist would have required major changes to the aircraft's hydraulic system. In the contract the RAAF had not stipulated the type of hoist required. so I had to accept the Bell selection. Unfortunately, we later found it had a tendency to overheat with prolonged use. In testing the hoist fit Bell discovered they had to strengthen the cabin roof with honeycomb foil, similar to that in the rotor blades. In doing so they also found that the strengthened roof reduced the cabin vibration. Consequently, they incorporated the strengthened roof into the basic design of all UH-1 helicopters.

The contract stipulated an emergency floatation system that would keep the aircraft afloat "indefinitely". Bell, quite rightly, asked for a definition of "indefinitely", and also in what sea state. They had designed a preliminary system and aircraft A2-384, which was in production at that stage, already had appropriate plumbing lines incorporated (and probably does to this day if it is still flying). In discussing their design, Bell engineers didn't

fill me with confidence, and said the floats could not be popped at speeds above 20 knots as their predictions were that above that speed the aircraft would assume an abrupt and uncontrollable nose down attitude and cause severe mast bumping, with consequent disastrous mast separation. Additionally, all flight testing would be carried out on A2-384 at our risk. I cancelled the requirement and advised Department of Air accordingly. As usual, I am still awaiting a reply and endorsement of my decision.

Through a Pentagon liaison officer I arranged a meeting with a U.S Army colonel to discuss training for Squadron pilots. I was quite surprised to be ushered into the office of a very large female colonel. We settled on H34 Choctaw training for the three pilots with no helicopter experience (Hindley, MacIntosh and Clark) followed by a special instrument course on the UH-1 for all six pilots, plus an "Instructor Pilot" course for the four QFIs - Scott, Hindley, White and MacIntosh.

The RAAF had allocated limited project funds for some US training. I requested the colonel supply me with an approximate cost figure.. She replied that the US trained hundreds of "free loaders" such as South Americans, Koreans, Vietnamese, National Chinese etc for no recompense and she could see no good reason to charge a good ally like Australia. Furthermore, if we insisted on paying, under US law she would have to seek Congressional approval, and that could take months. I doubted the latter, and believe she had already been well briefed to treat the RAAF kindly - for whatever reason. I pointed out that we had no desire to impose on US generosity like a third world



Wing Commander Ray Scott in a Huey

country, and Australia would be embarrassed by such an event. Her reply was that if she and I could stand the embarrassment, who else was likely to know that she would not be sending any bills. On thinking of the extra spares we probably could buy, I accepted the embarrassment of joining the freeloader's club.

Having returned to Australia and the Operational Requirements (Helicopter) desk in January 1962, with Jim Cox and Don White I returned to the US in June 1962 . We joined Laddie Hindley, Bob MacIntosh and Ken Clark who had just completed a flying course on the H34 Choctaw helicopter at the US Army base at Fort Rucker Alabama, to commence the UH-1

special instrument flying course.

Instrument flying in the US Army was in its infancy at that time. However, the instructors pilots were surprisingly good. Initially, we were supposed to train on link trainers to learn the basics of instrument flying. We convinced them that we were all fixed wing green card holders and were a little beyond link trainers. We did about four hours familiarisation flying in the clear, covering all aspects of a normal UH-1 aircraft conversion course. Having completed that phase the instrument flying blinkers were produced and we never saw beyond the instrument panel for the next forty hours.

The blinkers came down immediately after start up, and the instructor air taxied the aircraft to the launching pad and set it down. The student had to request an airways clearance on the intercom, which the instructor, acting as an airways controller, gave. Clearances were long and complex and each student developed his own brand of shorthand to write them down for repetition back to the "controller". An instrument take-off from the ground was then initiated, and the flight then followed the "airways clearance", mostly using omni beacons and low powered NDBs. As we gained experience "clearances" became more complex, and having reached a height of about twenty feet from take-off the instructor would change the "clearance" to a new and more complex one. Subsequent clearance changes occurred throughout the flight. We had a very busy time coping.

Holding patterns, diversions, and many other complications were fed in by the instructor. Having reached a non -controlled "destination" airfield, either an ILS or GCA approach

was made. During the latter the instructor acted as the GCA controller in a most convincing manner. Ultimately, both types of approaches were continued on instruments right to touch-down. I found the course tough but very rewarding. At the end of the course the four QFIs (Self, Hindley, MacIntosh and White) did an "Instructor Pilot" course of about five hours. A waste of time as far as instructing goes, but after forty hours not seeing out of the aircraft, it helped our visual flying.

One technical NCO, Sergeant Keith Wadling received basic rescue crewman training in the USA.

The six pilots returned from the USA in late August 1962. During our absence No 9 Squadron had been formed at RAAF Base Williamtown by FltLt Brian Sullivan. Brian was a pilot with no administrative experience, but had been posted to the unit as the administrative officer. Considering the difficulties of forming a new unit, but particularly one with a totally new type of aircraft, this was another instant of the RAAF Personnel Branch being completely out of touch with reality. Moreover, despite my protests, when Sullivan was posted to a new unit his replacement was a pilot officer fresh out of flying training school. Sullivan did the best he could against tremendous odds. Through no fault of his own, the pilot officer was virtually useless but, fortunately, we had an excellent orderly room sergeant (Sgt Stone).

The buildings allocated to the Squadron at Williamtown were a Bellman hangar, a prefabricated hut for office space, and a one hole toilet. The hangar was in a state of disrepair, and the office space and toilet totally inadequate. There was no separate space for individ-

ual technical sections, aircrew, or lecture room. Airman accommodation was poor, and married quarters and rental properties in the area virtually non-existent. Moreover, in discussions with the Base hierarchy, it became very obvious that the Squadron would be the poor man of the Base, highly restricted in operations, and would be subjected to suffocating and ridiculous control by the higher powers.

I took two days leave, drove to Canberra, sought out the Director of Operational Requirements Group Captain "Spike" Marsh and Geoff Michael, and acquainted them with my views on the situation at Williamtown. I pointed out that RAAF Base Fairbairn would be a better base for the Squadron for the following reasons:-

- it had only one small flying squadron (No 34 VIP Squadron) on base;
- the National Capital Development Commission, which had responsibility for future planning of Canberra, had published a map showing the airfield as a future housing area. - a plan which the RAAF opposed. Committing another squadron on the base might forestall that plan (it did).
- Fairbairn had two excellent, large, well constructed hangars that were empty;
- it had relatively few aircraft movements for most of the day;
- it had a large fresh water lake (Lake George) nearby for water rescue training, and nearby mountains for high altitude and snow training;
- it was close to midway between the two bases nominated by Army (Holdsworth and Puckapunyal) where most heli-

copter training for the Army would be a requirement (this eventuated as a gross miscalculation by the Army);

- there was a nearby area suitable for basic flying training;
- the Federal government provided public servants in Canberra with government owned housing at reasonable rentals, and ultimately the tenants could purchase the dwelling at residual value on a deposit of 5 %. I believed it would be discrimination if RAAF personnel were denied similar conditions;
- the Squadron had a much better chance of non-interference by the base hierarchy at Fairbairn;
- there were two negatives - airman accommodation was adequate but needed upgrading, and the Squadron would have to form a permanent SAR detachment at Williamstown.

Spike Marsh indicated that he favoured the suggestion, but consultation with more senior officers was necessary. Shortly after I returned to Williamstown a signal arrived directing No 9 Squadron to move to Fairbairn. The move began immediately as the first of the Squadron aircraft were due to arrive within a few days. Squadron personnel were delighted with the move and, after protracted argument, we overcame public servant opposition to the equal housing concessions. Many Squadron members eventually purchased their government allocated houses, and it set up many financially.

Whilst awaiting the arrival of the aircraft Squadron maintenance personnel had been busy learning about the UH-1B aircraft under

the tutelage of the Engineer Officer, Flt Lt Keith Taylor. Keith was experienced in helicopter maintenance, had excellent rapport and control of his troops, was full of fresh ideas, and was not afraid to speak up when he believed I had made a bad decision. I cannot speak too highly of the man. The future success of the Squadron owes a tremendous amount to his efforts. The maintenance section, under his guidance, achieved outstanding results.

The US Army UH-1 aircrew training course was designed for direct entry recruits who received initial training on Sioux or equivalent light helicopters followed by further training on an intermediate type before converting to the UH-1. I was convinced that converting experienced fixed wing pilots directly to the UH-1B was quite feasible. Consequently, Squadron aircrew were kept busy on tasks such as devising pilot and crewman courses, writing an instructor's briefing manual, designing aircraft test procedures, and designing a simple aircraft weight and balance computer.

Aircraft began to arrive by both sea and air (C130) transport, and under the guidance of a Bell Technical Representative assembly of the aircraft was completed. We had a race with the Navy to get the first turbine powered helicopter airborne in Australia. We would have lost except for the Navy making a vital mistake. They assembled the engine and main gearbox into their new Wessex and then found that to get the connecting shaft installed either the gearbox or engine had to be removed. It cost them a vital day, so we won that race. I might add that the Bell representative very quickly became most impressed with the technical knowledge and skill of Squadron NCOs and within a

month stated he was no longer required as their knowledge now exceeded his. Nevertheless, he managed to enjoy the delights of Canberra for about six months.

The first arrival of an aircraft by C130 indicated that the air transport system employed by the Bell company was very primitive and required redesign. For instance, the main rotor blades had been stored, uncrated, under the UH-1 fuselage and tail boom. The C130 loadmaster and passengers had found them to be a nice footpath to and from the rear end of the C130. The result was that one set of very expensive rotor blades was ruined. Additionally, there were no wheels for assisting in getting the UH-1 into, and out of, the C130. Ultimately, the maintenance section redesigned the whole system, including modification of ground handling wheels to assist loading/unloading. Unfortunately, the C130 loadmasters never conquered the operation of their aircraft's winch, nor appreciated that too much tension on tie down chains/straps could distort the UH-1s structure such as tail booms, skids etc. Education frequently fell on deaf ears, and although we devoted much time to briefing the Air Movements Training and Development Unit at Richmond and C130 loadmasters the problem remained with us for years.

Keith Taylor and his men also set about designing and producing ground support equipment for both base and field operations. Items such as a mobile crane for removal of engines and rotor heads, and a windproof blade balancing box had to be manufactured. Additionally, items such as manual and powered refuelling rigs, and auxiliary power units which could be carried within the UH-1 aircraft were required.

Our first effort to produce a powered refuelling rig ended up as a 1300 pound monster, as the RAAF technical branch hierarchy insisted that a standard refuelling tanker filter must be used. Eventually, Keith Taylor convinced them that small commercial filters would meet the requirements, and we ended up with a small, lightweight rig. Mobile workshops for field operations, based on long wheelbase Land Rovers, also were built.

For the next few months the Squadron concentrated on further training of both aircrew and maintenance staff. Crewman training mainly consisted of dry and wet hoist operation, simple navigation and map reading, and rescue beacon homing. At that stage the homing system was called SARAH (search and rescue aid to homing). It was a fairly primitive system in which the crewman scanned a hooded oscilloscope screen attempting to locate responses from a transponder. Ultimately, we carried out extensive tests for Department of Air on two rescue beacons that could be detected by the aircraft's UHF homer - the British SARBE and the US URC-10. We found the latter to be the far superior device and recommended accordingly. Unfortunately, the powers that be ignored the many advantages of the URC -10 and selected the SARBE. When the Squadron began SAS operations in Vietnam, initially we gave most of our SARBE beacons to the SAS to aid in their location, and very rapidly acquired URC-10s for both units.

High altitude training was carried out in the vicinity of Mt Kosciusko in February 1963 in preparation for training in the Lae, Bulolo, and Goroka areas of Papua /New Guinea in March. Two aircraft were transported by C130

from Townsville to Lae. On return, one aircraft was returned to Fairbairn, whilst the second aircraft, captained by Bob McIntosh, returned to Townsville to carry out some training for the Army. At about 0215 hrs the following morning Bob was awakened and told to fly his aircraft to Adavale in the Queensland "channel country" for flood rescue work. Arriving at Adavale with minimum fuel remaining he winched 11 men from the roof of the local hotel. Before being winched into the aircraft the last man insisted on diving down into the hotel bar to collect a few bottles of beer.

A second aircraft, plus air and maintenance crews, was airlifted by C130 aircraft to Quilpie. During the next two days the two aircraft crews rescued about one hundred men, women and children from rooftops and trees in the Quilpie, Blackall, Isisford areas. Many airfields were flooded, and a supporting Dakota had difficulty keeping up a supply of AVTUR fuel. On several occasions the Squadron aircraft had to land beside an auto service station and refuel with normal motor fuel. It was the first time non AVTUR fuel had been used, and the scoopless combustor passed the test - at the cost of some minor lead fouling of the turbine blades. The RAAF received great press coverage for the rescue effort, and the Squadron's reputation within the RAAF began to climb - particularly as the Squadron was not due to become operational until June 63.

There were several humorous occurrences during these rescue efforts. Perhaps the best was when one of the crewmen (Sergeant Gordon Buttriss) was hoisting up a rather large woman. Unbeknown to Gordon, the woman had thrust her pet cockatoo up the front of

her jumper. When she got to the aircraft door Gordon, in accordance with SOPs, turned her to face outwards, put his arm around her midriff, then let out winch cable as he pulled her into the aircraft. Having done so, and being a plain speaking man, he remarked over the intercom

"this woman has a mobile tit - and what's more it just bit me".

The Squadron Engineer Officer (Keith Taylor) and I visited and operated with US Army units in Vietnam for a short period in April/May 1964. At that time Vung Tau airfield contained a junk yard of crashed aircraft. On his own initiative Keith filched all the major components of a UH-1B from the junk yard, and obtained a Dakota from Butterworth to transport them to that base, for on-forwarding to Fairbairn by C130 aircraft. On arrival they were cleaned, painstakingly sectionised and appropriately highlight painted. Department of Air and Headquarters Operational Command Technical staff officers were amazed at the results, and the Squadron training section became the model for all other units. Ultimately, the training section became part of No 5 Squadron in 1966.

We also had talks with several two and three star US Army generals. One such discussion was with General Stilwell and some of his staff officers. I understand he was the son of "Vinegar" Joe Stilwell of World War 2 fame. He was a tall, no nonsense "hands on" man who, when he got bored of the office, participated as a door gunner on helicopter operations in the Bien Hoa and Delta regions. Early in the discussions he asked us how many UH-1Bs we operated and what problems we had. We informed him we had twenty four aircraft and, inter alia, that we could not obtain the new up-rated main gear-

box bearing for the UH-1B because of US Army Vietnam priority. Two of the staff officers left the room and about ten minutes later returned with twenty four of the new bearing, which the General presented to us - they were worth about A\$20,000 - a lot of money in those days.

During further discussions the General outlined their main problems - one of which was a very high crash rate due to overloading of aircraft and C of G problems. I advised him that we had found many of the performance figures in the flight manual were incorrect, and outlined a power check that we had obtained from the Bell senior test pilot that gave a better indication of performance. I had a simple weight and balance computer, designed by the Squadron and manufactured by W and G, in my bag. After demonstrating it to the General he was like a kid with a new toy, and immediately wanted to buy it. Having just received A\$20,000 worth of bearings as a gift I believed I had no alternative than to present the A\$18.00 computer to him. On return to Australia, to account for the loss of the computer I raised a Stores Adjustment Voucher citing all the circumstances of the bearing gift and the General's attempt to purchase the computer. The transaction was to haunt me for about the next twelve months. Questions followed questions. Ultimately, a request was received from the US Army for permission to manufacture the computer. That apparently frustrated further nonsense from the civilian bean counters. I received a letter reluctantly writing off the cost of the computer, but very bluntly advising me that only the Treasurer is authorised to give gifts to foreigners, and we were to produce proof that the bearings had been correctly brought on charge in the RAAF stores inventory.

Support of the Army became the major role of the Squadron during 1963. With its small number of aircrew and maintenance personnel the Squadron was fully extended coping with an increasing Army requirement. Moreover, Army frequently requested that our supporting forces live in the field with them. We pointed out that:

- operationally, it was not a practical proposition to base aircraft overnight with small forces in the field due to the vulnerability of the aircraft and fuel to mortar and small arms attack. At that time mortar range was about 8,000 metres;
- servicing of aircraft could not be carried out at night due to the Army SOP of no noise or lights after last light. Consequently, this would have an adverse effect on aircraft availability;
- the Squadron was not manned and equipped for extensive field operations.

When Army advised us of their increasing long term support requirements and a shift towards Queensland locations we calculated that Squadron aircrew and maintenance personnel would spend, on average, somewhere in the vicinity of 120 days per year living in the field. I arranged to fly to Headquarters Operational Command to discuss this aspect with the senior staff officer responsible for helicopter operations. On arrival he greeted me in plus fours, informed me it was his "golf" day, and attempted to pass me over to his assistant. We exchanged some very heated words and I then stomped off to present my case directly to the AOC. I repeated the objections we had pointed out to Army. Additionally, I added the following:-

- the Squadron would require a large increase in establishment, including aircrew, maintenance personnel, and a “base support element” to cater for domestic requirements spread over several widely dispersed and concurrent field detachments.;
- on most Army commitments we were self supporting as far as air transport was concerned. However, with the added personnel and logistics required for field operations we would require fixed wing transport support;
- we could not expect personnel to take kindly to living in the field more often than the average Army personnel. They would look for posting to another unit or quit the RAAF for a more stable domestic life;
- contrary to the provisions of the CGS/CAS Agreement which made Army responsible for area defence and RAAF only responsible for their own point defence, Army frequently planned exercises with Squadron personnel manning part of the defensive perimeter;
- we did not have to spend most of our lives living in the field to learn how to erect a tent, make a shell scrape, or live like a boy scout on a school holiday exercise;
- I suggested that the Squadron live in the field on a maximum of two occasions per year on major exercises only.

The AOC agreed, and life for Squadron personnel became a little less frantic.

For the first couple of years no senior staff

officers visited the Squadron field operations. However, that did not prevent any senior officer at Headquarters Operational Command from constantly voicing ridiculous criticism. His criticisms were disowned and nullified by both AOCs, under whom we served during my tour. After about two years of nitpicking without once observing Squadron operations, he (or perhaps the AOC) decided he would accompany a Squadron training mission to Papua New Guinea., as he did not believe such training was justified. He came back white faced and a chastened man. From thereon his criticisms were greatly modified.

Shortly thereafter, during a two week Army exercise in the Budawang ranges west of Nowra we received an surprise visit from about a dozen very senior staff officers accompanying the Minister for Air (the Hon. Peter Howsen). It was a very unpleasant day with low cloud, a 60 knot wind at treetop level and moderate to severe turbulence. All other aircraft had ceased to fly because of the conditions, but when the Minister and party arrived the Squadron was in the midst of an external load resupply mission. They watched in awe as the aircraft at short intervals hitched up to loads and headed off with loads swinging wildly as they hit the 60 knot gale and turbulence. The Minister and staff officers also were most impressed with all the ground support equipment in use that had been designed and manufactured by the Squadron. They were less impressed by the lunch we eventually had to serve them - the “base support” cooks had yet to learn how to produce a respectable meal from Army rations. The visit did much to enhance the Squadron’s already high reputation. The exercise report heaped outstanding praise on the Squadron.

Water was rationed during the exercise based on one gallon per man per day. This had to cover all personal water use - drinking, shaving, cooking, and ablutions etc. At the end of a week each individual was allocated one gallon of water for a shower. The shower was the usual field canvass bag within a rough hessian enclosure next to our pit latrine. Unfortunately, I happened to be having my weekly shower when the reservist medical officer decided that it was time to burn out the pit latrine with a volatile mixture of AVTUR, kerosene, or whatever. I was just using the last of my water when there was a terrific whoosh accompanying a fireball, followed by a rain of the contents of the latrine pit. I cheated. I grabbed the filthiest of my flying suits, leaped into a spare aircraft and flew to the RAN base at Nowra which was only a few miles away, and had a long glorious hot shower and washed my flying suit in the first ablutions hut I came to.

When I returned from Vietnam at the end of 1966 I reverted to my previous appointment in Department of Air of Operational Requirements (Helicopter). In 1967, when the Government approved an increase in the Squadron's aircraft strength to 16 aircraft, a meeting was held in Department of Air to formalise the purchase of 16 new aircraft. During the meeting I had a lively battle with the senior Technical Branch representative (Acting Air Commodore Harvey Smith) as he insisted that to retain compatibility with our present fleet we should purchase either UH-1B or D models with the T53-L1100 rather than the UH-1H with the uprated L1300 engine. He also wanted to eliminate some of the radio equipment (such as the UHF homer) that was essential for operations in Vietnam. Ultimately, Smith's total ignorance of both

technical and operational requirements and capabilities in Vietnam became glaringly exposed, and the meeting approved the purchase of UH-1H models.

Unfortunately (I believe) at the meeting I lost another battle. From my experience of UH-1B gunship operations with the US Army in 1964, I was not a great supporter of converting some of the Squadron's B model aircraft to the gunship role. I believed we could do better - particularly for the long term. The US Army gunships I flew were grossly overloaded, tended to wallow and vibrate excessively which made accurate rocket and gun fire difficult, and being very limited in speed and manoeuvrability made them (and any slicks being escorted) more vulnerable to enemy ground fire. I favoured substituting the much more capable Bell AH-1G Cobra for four of the proposed UH-1H purchases. Harvey Smith again objected on the grounds of proliferation of types. Eventually, the chairman of the meeting (AVM Bill Townsend) vetoed the AH-1G on the basis of additional costs. Ultimately, four of the UH-1H aircraft were converted to the gunship role. With its up-rated power the H model was more capable than the B model. Brian Dirou probably would argue that the UH-1H was a better gunship for 9 Squadron's purposes in Vietnam than the AH-1G, and perhaps he is correct. However, although I never flew either aircraft in the gunship role, I remain to be convinced.

Although members of the Squadron were not all angels, one of the most enduring memories I have is their outstanding work ethic, morale and discipline. In many ways, life frequently was tough in the early days. Yet members retained a good sense of humour, were always

willing to do that little bit extra, and retained a “can do” attitude. During my four and a half years as commanding officer I only heard one disciplinary charge against a Squadron member, and that was raised by a non-Squadron member. I dismissed the charge. Keith Taylor also had some, perhaps, unorthodox methods to

keep his troops in line. However, we had a new and unique role within the RAAF, for its time an excellent aircraft and, virtually, all members closely participated in and felt part of the unit’s operations. They were immensely proud of the Squadron, as I was of them.

Ray Scott, Sept 2009



This well known photograph is of No. 9 Squadron RAAF Iroquois A2-773 working as a gunship in Vietnam. A2-773 is featured at the AWM in Canberra, ACT.

Appendix G: Recollections of a 'Boggie Pilot' flying with No. 9 Squadron RAAF in South Vietnam by Mick Haxell (HAX)

I have been asked to provide some personal recollections of my time flying helicopters with No 9 Squadron in South Vietnam. These recollections are very much those of a junior officer and pilot of the period.

As background, following graduation from Pilot Course in April 1966, along with three other course members (Peter Davidson, Bob Trease and Al Bridges) I was posted to helicopters. For all of us this came as a surprise as up until this time only experienced pilots, with at least one other operational tour were flying helicopters. The reason given for the posting of "boggies" directly from pilots' course, was partly a trial in anticipation of the need for more pilots for Australia's increasing involvement in Vietnam. Of course, within a relatively short period of time, the demographics of all of the helicopter squadrons and particularly 9 Squadron in Vietnam, changed very much to younger pilots and other aircrew generally.

Following completion of helicopter conversion course with 5 Squadron at RAAF Fairbairn and while on an exercise at Shoalwater Bay, I was posted at short notice to 9 Squadron Vietnam in November 1966. The reason for the short notice was as an urgent replacement for one of two pilots who had been severely injured in a Huey crash in Vietnam. As seemed to be the general case, there was at best, only sketchy information forthcoming from the RAAF on Vietnam and Australia's increasing involvement. I recall purchasing a book which provided a reasonable insight into the historical and cultural

background on the country and its people.

Because of the short notice posting, I travelled to Vietnam by scheduled civil flights rather than on one of the usual Qantas charter flights. Those were the days when officers, even pilot officers, travelled first class and I took every opportunity to avail myself of the fine food and wines of Qantas to Singapore, an overnight in Raffles Hotel then onto Saigon early next morning with Pan Am. After arriving in Saigon, I was taken to a US Officers Club for a few hours before boarding an RAAF Caribou for the flight to Vung Tau. Enroute from the Club to Air Movements, there was considerable military police activity near one of the temples and around what I observed and assumed to be a smoking pile of rubbish. In fact, to my astonishment the Vietnamese driver informed me that a Buddhist monk had a matter of only minutes before our drive by, self immolated in opposition to the increasing expansion of the war. All very thought provoking and before even arriving at Vung Tau!

While I was the first "boggie" pilot to arrive in 9 Squadron, my fellow pilots course colleagues and others arrived in increasing numbers in rapid succession in 1967. On my arrival, 9 Squadron had only been in Vietnam since June 1966 and in some ways was still in the process of finalising operational procedures and tactics. The squadron involvement with the Battle of Long Tan (August 1966) was still topical and I recall the reasonably fresh shell and bomb craters as well as shredded rubber trees, although



'HAX' was 24 years of age, the squadron's youngest pilot and DFC recipient when this No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN photo was taken. Source: AWM

these faded quickly with the onset of the wet season. It was obvious that Long Tan had been a turning point for improved relationships between 9 Squadron and the Army, although some tensions were still apparent. Frankly even to a junior pilot, I thought the demands placed on the squadron were not matched with any reasonable appreciation of the capabilities of the squadron, by the then Task Force commander and some other senior Army people. This was an early insight for me into the gulf that existed in joint operations at the time, and the lack of appreciation of expectations against ca-

pabilities as well as the misunderstandings between Army and Air Force. However, over time and with transfer of personnel this changed to a more harmonious, close relationship and often friendly with the various Army units, not least of course with the SAS. The relationship between 9 Squadron and the various SAS squadrons over the years can be best described as close and unique, with not only a working relationship based on mutual respect, but one where close personal friendships were forged and continue to this day. During this early period, I developed the highest respect for the

squadron Commanding Officer (Ray Scott), for both the manner in which he encouraged and ensured the operational development of myself and other junior pilots, as well as how he worked to build the squadron operational efficiency and working relationship with Army despite considerable difficulties, including some from within Air Force.

Soon after my arrival, I was thrown into the deep end and flying a few days after arrival on a large operation in conjunction with US Army helicopters, which was certainly an eye opener. While the most junior pilot in the squadron, all of the other pilots with one exception, were very generous in passing on their experiences and mentoring me during the early stages with the crewmen being similarly great to work with. I learnt a lot about flying generally from these people and particularly the operations of the squadron as the tempo of operations gradually increased with the Task Force pursuing a more aggressive role in taking the fight to the enemy. Certainly by early 1967 the tempo of operations was high which continued throughout my tour.

While social activities were somewhat limited, I recall that some of us managed to socialise with the nurses from the US Army 36th Evacuation Hospital on occasions both in our mess and at their club. Also as many of you know, Bill Sheperd was a great character who had been an instructor at Point Cook during my pilot course time, and he insisted on taking me under his wing and was always trying to sell me off to the bar girls in downtown Vung Tau as a "cherry boy". Suffice to say it was great fun but the success rate was at best low.

Initially, both 9 and 35 Squadron officers living accommodation was located in Villa Anna

and I shared a room with seven other pilots. Later as more junior officers arrived, I moved to a room with three others (John Byrnes, Pete Davidson and Mike Harness the squadron admin officer) for the remainder of our time at Villa Anna. As Villa Anna was rather insecure and overcrowded, well into my tour we moved to the RAAF containment area on the airfield which certainly provided a more comfortable level of accommodation although the area remained a sand pit for the remainder of my tour.

As many of you will recall, the squadron standardisation process was rigorous and I managed to progress through the various phases successfully. Many of the original pilots were being replaced on a staggered basis, and often I was in the position of introducing some of the more recent arrivals to the province and operations, many who were very experienced pilots and had been instructing me previously. At no stage did I feel intimidated by this arrangement and I was impressed with the mature and professional approach displayed by all concerned.

As mentioned, the operational tempo and flying rate for the squadron was very high throughout most of my tour and could not have been sustained without the excellent teamwork from all the support areas of the squadron and Base Support Flight generally. In particular, the maintenance personnel often worked long hours to maintain high airworthiness standards. Often aircraft were serviced or repaired overnight and on line the next morning.

Initially, the squadron operated eight UH-1B helicopters, although with aircraft losses there was a gradual replacement with D model Huey's. When I was posted out of the squadron

in December 1967, there was a mix of B and D model Huey's, and if I recall correctly a couple of H models had just been acquired as part of the eventual increase in overall aircraft numbers to 16 to support the expansion of the Task Force.

As to flying operations, overall I enjoyed my tour in Vietnam with the general comradeship and found the demanding flying in a tactical environment in support of Australian Army operations to be extremely interesting and satisfying. This also includes working with the South Vietnamese, US Army and other US forces, and particularly the highly professional USAF and RAAF Forward Air Controllers. As others will recall, many of the squadron operations could be termed routine "hash and trash" in nature in support of the Task Force and at times could be relentless although essential to the support of Army. However, the more exciting operations with the insertion and extraction of SAS patrols, Dustoff's, combat assaults and emergency ammunition resupply of Army units, certainly tended to focus everyone's attention. Operations were further complicated by the weather conditions, particularly during the monsoon season as well as the sheer number of aircraft operating in a relatively confined airspace leading to a number of near mid air collisions.

Like many of you, I have vivid memories of the more memorable flights involving SAS patrol hot extractions and Dustoff's, both day and night, which remain with me and occasionally resurface. I have no intention of going into the detail of specific flights but suffice to say that I certainly experienced my fair share and some were included in the citation to my DFC.

My only posting with 9 Squadron was during the squadron deployment to Vietnam and I am proud of the outstanding accomplishments of the squadron during its Vietnam involvement. While I did not serve on another posting in the squadron, I was occasionally attached to and worked closely with the squadron after its return to Australia. In this regard, I feel that the history of 9 Squadron is closely linked to and interrelated with 5 Squadron, both during Vietnam and later. Indeed, most will have served in 5 Squadron, at least for their training, before posting onto 9 Squadron while others served on more extensive postings in both squadrons. Consequently, it is appropriate to include 5 Squadron in these recollections.

During the Vietnam era, and indeed later 5 Squadron was the primary training squadron for both technical and aircrew personnel into the helicopter force generally. In particular, during the Vietnam period the squadron was heavily committed with its training roles and I experienced this as a QFI with the high throughput of pilots. Further, the squadron provided the helicopter support for Army at various levels of training and exercises, throughout Australia and overseas, prior to the redeployment of 9 Squadron to Amberley with the wind down of Australia's involvement in Vietnam. At one stage at 5 Squadron there was some 70 junior officers, either undergoing training, waiting to proceed to Vietnam or having just returned. My recollection is of "party central" at Fairbairn and one can only speculate what this may have posed for squadron executives at times. Post Vietnam, 5 Squadron continued with its various training roles, albeit at a much less hectic tempo, as well as general operational involvement as part of the RAAF rotary wing force.

Mick Haxell

June 2015

Appendix H: Wing Commander Brian Dirou DFC, RAAF

The 'Dirou' family name emerged in France pre-15th century and a reef named 'Les Dirouilles' is located near Jersey in The Channel Islands. A forebear emigrated from near Brest in France to Australia in the mid-1800s and family heritage then became an intermingling of French, Irish and British genealogy.

3 family perished in WW1 combat with another decorated although badly gassed. An uncle was captured at the fall of Singapore spending 3.5 years as a POW on the Burma railway; a brother of Brian Dirou served with the Australian Army during the Malayan Emergency and 2 nephews served at Swanbourne. Brian's wife, Diane, was formerly an RAAF Nursing Sister.

Brian joined the RAAF early 1957 as a trainee aircrew signaller graduating as NCO aircrew and serving on crashboats, Lincoln and Dakota aircraft before undergoing pilot training after being commissioned. Further service on Dakotas followed then a tour on Sabre fighter aircraft before Iroquois helicopter training in 1967.

He served in Vietnam during 1968, 1969 and 1971 accumulating 4,360 sorties and was involved in 211 insertions/extractions of Australian and New Zealand Special Air Service patrols. He was mission leader for 2 of only 4 night extractions of SAS patrols in contact with enemy forces during Australian involvement in that war, earning an 'in-the-field' award of the Distinguished Flying Cross invested personally by Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II.

Paralleling his very active operational roles

in 1968/69, he was Project Officer for development and operational introduction of the RAAF 'Bushranger' gunship, a version of the UH-1H model Iroquois unique in the world. During his overall Vietnam service, he participated in 50 engagements with enemy forces including 15 flying Bushranger gunships in May 1969.

He is regarded by all as the 'driving force' that gave No. 9 Squadron in Vietnam a gunship capability to overcome significant operational deficiencies in supporting Army elements in a timely manner. An exceptional CD titled THE BUSHRANGER STORY - '...and so, a Gunship was born' was produced and is commercially available.

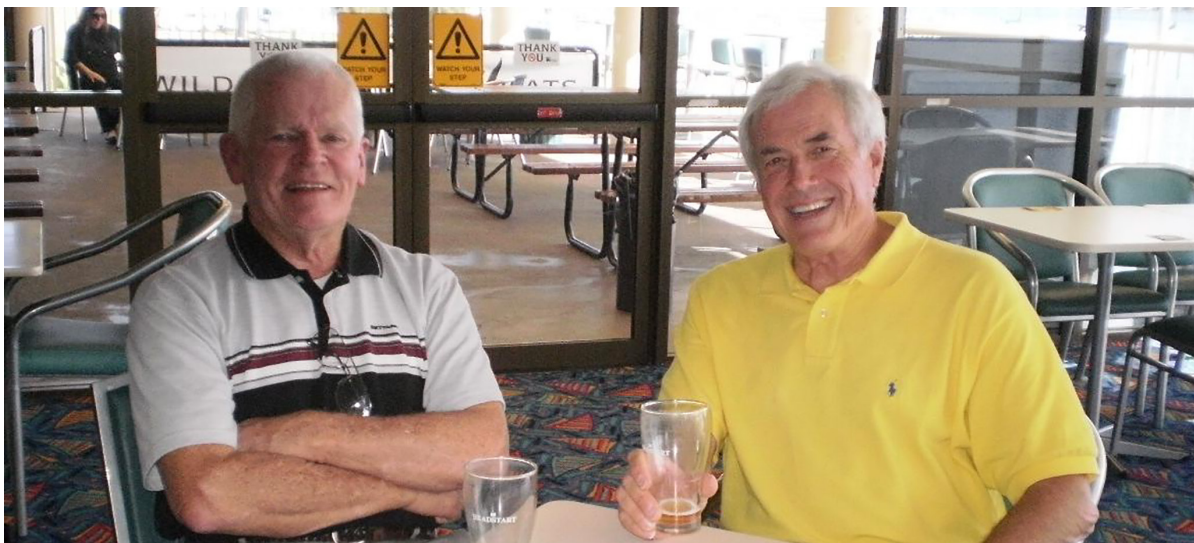
Following completion of Royal Australian Air Force Staff College training in 1975, he commanded No. 9 Squadron at RAAF Base Amberley Queensland during 1976/77 and retired early from the Air Force in 1978 at age 41, after 4 years at Wing Commander rank.

Brian later spent 10 years involved in flight operations training with international airlines in Australia, Austria, Kuwait (post-Gulf War 1) and Brunei preceding retirement in 1999.

Author's Note. Most people have never seen a formal Air Force citation (the description of reasons for a specific award). Therefore, the No. 9 Squadron Association is most appreciative that Brian has generously allowed us to include his Commanding Officer's full citation that recommended his deserved award of the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).



Squadron Leader Brian Dirou, DFC post-Vietnam service 1971



Brian Dirou and Lee Nelson, formerly the US Army Warrant Officer gunship captain of 'Copperhead 44', whose crew was recovered after force landing following engine failure on 5 Jun 68. Lee came out to Australia from the US and met with Brian again on 2 Apr 13, about 45 years later.

STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HONOURS AND AWARDS

Christian Names: Brian Leslie John Surname: DIROU

Rank: Squadron Leader Official Number: 0314174

1. Squadron Leader DIROU joined No 9 Squadron in March this year. Since then he has been employed continuously on operational flying in support of 1ATF. His flying has been of the highest professional standard and his leadership in the air has been outstanding. The four undermentioned instances highlight the circumstances in which his professional handling of a most dangerous situation has "saved the day".

2. Two of these instances were night extractions under enemy fire, of long range reconnaissance patrols. On both occasions the patrols had contact with an unknown size force late in the day. Since they only had a small quantity of ammunition left and the chance of completely breaking contact was remote, they called for extraction by helicopter. Although reaction was prompt in both cases, darkness had fallen before the complete extraction group could be organized. Having assembled his extraction group, Squadron Leader DIROU was then responsible for contact with the patrol, direction of the flareship and artillery flares, control of the light fire team and suppression by the team, leadership of the extraction team and arranging for back up of artillery. He methodically completed these many tasks with special emphasis on accurate suppressive fire from the gunships while the patrols were being extracted to safety. The successful completion of these extractions under most hazardous conditions and the fact that there were no casualties amongst all concerned reflects directly on his professional handling of these dangerous situations.

3. The third instance also concerned the safe extraction of another long range reconnaissance patrol from "under the nose of the enemy". In this case a large, heavily armed enemy force was seen moving in the extraction area just prior to the planned withdrawal of the patrol. Squadron Leader DIROU held off the extraction and immediately called in artillery and air strikes on the enemy position. His timely actions not only resulted in a serious set back to the enemy but also prevented the patrol from being detected and outnumbered by a much larger and more heavily armed group.

4. The fourth instance of his outstanding leadership was in the role he played in the recovery of a gunship which had forced landed in enemy held territory. Here it was a race against the dark in order to recover the aircraft in time.

/DIROU

STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE

- 2 -

DIROU was the first aircraft to respond to the downed aircraft's distress calls. He landed next to the gunship and after taking on board the crew, he made certain no weapons were left on the downed gunship. He then proceeded to organise the lift out of the gunship and this was completed just prior to nightfall.

5. For such professionalism, dedication, valour and outstanding leadership I recommend Squadron Leader DIROU be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Date of Unit Commander's Recommendation: 23rd November 1968

Date of Birth: 27th September 1937

Date of Enlistment: 4th March 1957

Decorations and Honours already held: Nil

Award Recommended: Distinguished Flying Cross

Private Address: 7 Anderson Street, DIMBOOLA VIC

Date: 23rd November 1968

Signed
(J.A. PAULE)
Wing Commander
Commanding Officer

Appendix I: Warrant Officer OWEN COOKE MID, RAAF 'The Airmen's Airman'

Introduction

At the outbreak of WW 2, Owen Cooke was in Warwick, Queensland, working as an apprentice motor mechanic. He joined the Royal Australian Air Force on 6 November 1939, given the RAAF Service Number 6043 and thus started a quite exceptional Air Force period of service which included WW 2, the Malayan Emergency and the South Vietnam Conflict.

WW 2 Service

During rookies training at RAAF Base Richmond, Owen had first contact with No 9 SQN as the Squadron headquarters was stationed there prior to its move to Rathmines; Owen did piquet and other duty with the No 9 SQN personnel.

Owen was posted to No 8 SQN RAAF near Canberra. No 8 SQN operated DC-2 aircraft that had been seconded from Australian National Airways (ANA) and later he conducted basic engineering training on the first course of its type at the School of Technical Training in Canberra.

In April 1940, he was posted to Victoria for further aircraft related training (Fitter 2E) at the Engineering School for the Air Force where aircraft-specific electrical, instrument and engines training was conducted. The location was the Melbourne Showgrounds, Ascot Vale and he recalls being accommodated in one of the cattle pavilions and all the blokes using the public toilet blocks for their ablutions.

During July 1940, he was posted to Central Flying School (CFS), Camden, NSW. The grass airstrips were on the McArthur Onslow property and CFS operated Oxford, Tiger Moth and Avro trainer aircraft.

He recalled the time when the Air Traffic Control staff advised that a hurricane was coming so everybody rapidly sheltered aircraft and equipment to prepare – the hurricane that arrived was a Hurricane aircraft that had turned up to do a flying display!

He also recalled the arrival of a formation of five Fairey Battle Navy aircraft in very bad



Owen Cooke at the No. 9 SQN RAAF 'Disbandment Wake' held at RAAF Amberley in 1988, above. Owen's No. 9 SQN RAAF SVN service was from 15 May 1966 until 6 June 1967.

weather that unfortunately resulted in a serious aircraft crash.

One notable airman at Canberra was Flight Sergeant Leibke, an engineer, who was, at the time, the champion boxer of the RAAF. Boxing was a popular sport in the services.

In January 1942, he was parted to 3 Service Flying Training School at RAAF base Amberley, QLD, where he remembers the ATC tower prominent among the wooden huts and hangars to the north of it. The unit operated Oxford and Tiger Moth aircraft.

Owen recounted the arrival of the P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft in wooden crate/boxes and how they assembled them.

Owen also remembered an unfortunate Amberley flying accident during a stream landing of an American formation of P-40 aircraft. One aircraft had encountered undercarriage failure on touchdown and after stopping, the pilot exited the cockpit and when standing on the wing of his disabled aircraft was killed when one of the other landing P-40s struck him.

After two months at Amberley, he was posted to Townsville as part of 75 SQN RAAF which was formed on 4 March 1942. The squadron was equipped with P-40 Kittyhawk aircraft. On 21 March 1942, Owen went on posting with No 75 SQN to Port Moresby, PNG, and was there for the first Japanese bombing of the Port Moresby area.

The Army air defence gunners at Port Moresby called 75 SQN the 'Tomorrow Hawks'. This title originated when at the time 75 SQN was to arrive at the 7 Mile strip at Port Moresby, Japanese Zeros arrived in their stead and conducted strafing runs of the airfield. When

75 SQN arrived two days later, they received friendly fire from the Army due to the confusion that existed at the time and although none of the pilots was hurt, a number of the aircraft ended up with bullet holes in them and had to be repaired.

Owen also recalled the pursuits of SQNLDRs John and Les Jackson and later, Les Jackson flying the only remaining and undamaged aircraft from the 12 mile strip back to Australia.

75 SQN returned to Townsville on 11 May 1942. On 17 May it moved to Kingaroy QLD to receive new P-40 aircraft. The squadron worked up with their new aircraft and this included air gunnery training at Lowood, QLD, in early July 1942. On 27 July 1942, No 75 SQN deployed to Guernsey Field, Milne Bay, PNG, where it joined RAAF No 76 SQN.

But at Kingaroy, Owen recalled it was mid-winter and having recently returned from the tropics of New Guinea, many of the blokes still only had khaki shorts and shirts to wear. Also, Owen celebrated his 21st birthday during this time at Kingaroy.

Owen served with 75SQN at Milne Bay until victory in late September 1942, before a return on 25 September to Cairns via Horn Island. He joined 75 SQN at Milne Bay in February 1943, then Goodenough Island. Owen recalled that personnel were posted back to Australia individually from Goodenough Island.

Then followed a number of postings including No 6 Aircraft Depot at Oakey, QLD and No 3 Aircraft Depot at Amberley, QLD. Owen remembers he had the responsibility for the inspections of all aircraft GSE within the region, including Oakey, Brymaroo, Lowood, and

Cecil Plains.

Interesting recollections included being responsible for the new mobile engine test stand at Oakey and that during its first run the test engine main bearings failed. It was being suggested that the new test stand was a dud but the problems were actually a run of faulty engine bearings.

The underground operations room facility at Mt Tarampa, near the WW 2 airstrip that existed at the time (the gun emplacements are still there).

Receiving a Certificate of Merit for replacing two burnt out electric motors under extreme circumstances. Used to pump water on Mt Tarampa, the pumps were located in a shaft and the work had to be completed quickly to beat the rising water that occurred naturally in the shaft; they just made it!

When No 14 Operational Base Unit at Lowood was disbanded (14 October 1946), Owen had to relocate large refrigerators to No 7 Stores Depot (7 SD) at Toowoomba and recalls that the old blitz wagon they were driving continually overheated. It was a very protracted and difficult ascent up the Toowoomba Range that basically was a drive - overheat - stop and chock - cool down - drive again. The sequence was repeated numerous times until they finally reached the top of the range.

During 1946, refrigerators seemed to be 'the bane of Owen's life' because as he was discharging from the RAAF in Sydney, he was interviewed by the Service Police about commercial style refrigerators he had delivered from 14 Operational Base Unit Lowood to RAAF Amberley that had 'gone missing' after

some telephone calls and searching, they were found in Building 108 at Amberley Base exactly where he had delivered them!

On the Lowood - 7 SD refrigerator delivery task, he was assisted by a WAAF driver named Betty at the time of this interview in May 2003, Betty and Owen have been married 58 years and are a beautiful couple!

Having contributed to Australia's 'national survival' through his Air Force service since November 1939 and, having attained the rank of Sergeant, Owen elected discharge from the RAAF on 25 November 1946.

Interviewer's Historical Note. RAAF No 9 SQN's WW 2 service ended with disbandment at Rathmines on 31 December 1944.

Post WW 2 Service

After the war-caused delay to his original motor mechanic apprenticeship, Owen completed his apprenticeship with McKenzie Motors at Glen Innes, NSW. Betty is mentioned here again in the interview, as was the Glen Innes pub and also a 1946 Ford V8 Coupe. However part of the post WW 2 process was for airmen to continue to serve on the Air Force Reserve and under these arrangements Owen performed duty at RAAF Amberley under AFR 458 rules (similar to Reserve full-time service) but with a required drop in rank to CPL. In December 1953, Owen joined the PAF, was posted to 3 AD and mainly conducted engine test work until he was next posted about three years later.

- This time, in August 1955, he was posted to No 82 (Bomber) WG at Amberley and served with No 6 SQN that at the

time operated Lincoln aircraft.

- Owen also recalls the arrival of the Canberra bomber aircraft at Amberley under what he described as 'high security' also a 'great' goodwill task that he subsequently participated in during 1956. It was a six-week Canberra aircraft deployment to the USA for the 1956 Armed Services Day activities.
- He also remembers that during the redeployment to Australia, one of the Canberra aircraft crashed on take-off at Honolulu; it was piloted by Ward Rayner.

Historical Note. One engine of the Canberra lost power during take-off from Honolulu. The take-off was aborted by the pilot (Ward Rayner) but suffered damage as it over ran the end of the runway. Years later, on 21 March 1971, the then SQNLDR Ward Rayner was captain of a RAAF No 9 SQN Iroquois that came under fire and forced down during a resupply mission to an ARVN position in the Long Hai hills of SVN. SQNLDR Rayner had a round flick through the leg of his flying suit; his co-pilot, PLTOFF Rhys James sustained a round that embedded in the centre or chest position of his 'chicken plate' but was unhurt; his crewman, LAC Trevor Hamill was wounded by enemy ground fire and an Australian Army liaison officer who was also on board was seriously wounded. For his courageous action in this incident, LAC Hamill was awarded an immediate Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM).

- Owen was then posted to No 2 SQN on the Canberra aircraft and deployed with the squadron to Butterworth, Malaysia. On 1 July 1958, No 2 SQN, Commanded

by WGCDR C. Steley, became part of the British Commonwealth Far East Strategic Reserve; the Canberras replaced the Lincolns of No 1 SQN who had operated from Singapore for eight years (Malayan Emergency). It was also at this time that Owen was (re) promoted to SGT but with seniority backdated for 2 1/2 years.

- He recalled the high readiness states that existed there at the time and this included all domestic and lifestyle aspects. The RAAF assumed control of the Butterworth Air Base and became the most forward Commonwealth air base in Southeast Asia – permanent facilities for three front-line squadrons and extensive facilities for visiting aircraft such as the RAF's V-Bombers.
- In December 1960, he was posted from Malaya to 3 AD at RAAF Amberley and then had a number of local moves with Amberley based squadrons. These included 82 WG, 482 Maintenance Squadron, 1 SQN (Lincoln aircraft), 6 SQN, and 2 SQN (Canberra aircraft).
- He had a unique experience when serving with 2 SQN and when deployed as the engineer to support a round-Australia Canberra trip. During the trip and without prior knowledge, Owen was promoted to FSGT by the then Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Valston Hancock, CB, CBE, DFC (previous AOC No 224 Group in Malaya and later, recipient of a knighthood).

No 9 SQN RAAF Service

In 1962, RAAF No 9 SQN was reactivated at RAAF Base Williamtown to operate Bell UH-1B Iroquois helicopters in the search and rescue (SAR) role. As a flexible utility helicopter, they also conducted Army support and reconnaissance with this Army support work developing to its primary role as the Australian commitment to Vietnam increased.

- Owen was first posted to No 9 SQN at RAAF Base Canberra on 16 January

1965. During this time, Owen was attached to the 9 SQN SAR Detachment in Darwin for the period November 1965 to January 1966. Eight UH-1B Iroquois helicopters embarked on HMAS Sydney and were flown ashore to their wartime base Vung Tau, SVN, on 6 June 1966; Owen left for SVN on 11 June 1966. The first CO No 9 SQN in SVN was WGCDR Ray Scott DFC, AFC, and the SENGO was FLTLT Keith Taylor; SQNLDR Clive Cotter was posted as SENGO during March 1967.



No 9 SQN SAR Detachment Darwin during November 1965 – January 1966

Detachment members: FLTLT Phil Cooke (leaning against the nose of the Huey wearing his hat and sunglasses), FSGT Owen Cooke, LACs Kerry Williams, Ross Newman, John Rattey, Norm Robertson, Barry Waters and Peter Jackson. Image, Owen Cooke.



Exchange of RAAF / RAF No 9 SQN plaques at Darwin, NT during Exercise High Regal in November 1965; FLTLT Phil Cook No. 9 SQN RAAF and the Commanding Officer No. 9 SQN RAF (No 9 SQN RAF was a squadron of the RAF's V-Bomber force). Image, Owen Cooke.

- Owen recalled that these were very tough times as the squadron endeavoured to 'shakedown'; the first sorties in support of the 1st Australian Task Force (1 ATF) were flown on 13 June 1966 the day after the main party arrived at Vung Tau from RAAF Base Richmond. Historical records and publications have detailed the most difficult circumstances under which the 9 SQN aircrew and support staff lived and worked during that early part of the squadron's time in SVN.
- He further recalls the mix of accommodations – the Villa Anna in town (seven officers shared a room) and the tents on the airfield that housed the airmen until November when they moved into tropical huts and, the all ranks 'beery' that was set-up on the base, 'The Ettamogah Hotel'.

- At the time, no parades were conducted but Owen was keen to hold a NCOs Dining-in. There was quite a bit of difficulty in obtaining port to contribute to the tradition and the dining-in dress rules stipulated 'must wear a tie'. The neckwear requirement resulted in a quite incredible variety of ties being worn. It is thought that this may have been the first and only No 9 SQN dining-in held in SVN.

- Another pursuit employed to overcome the difficult local situation was the construction of a raft for recreation purposes. A 5 hp outboard motor was sent up from Australia through Amenities and the keel construction included the use of two US aircraft ferry/drop tanks. The initial launch trials were unsuccessful, as it couldn't be steered however, after keel redesign by an ex RAN CPO and the fitting of a canopy, the raft went into recreational service at the front beach in Vung Tau.
- For his dedicated and outstanding service with No 9 SQN in SVN, on 20 November 1967, FSGT O. V. Cooke received the award of Mention-in-Despatches (MID).
- During April 1967, Owen was posted to No 5 SQN in Canberra and was promot-

ed Warrant Officer. Subsequent postings were with No 82 WG at RAAF Amberley on F-111C aircraft and RAAF Support Command in Melbourne.

- The latter posting was Owen's last two years of service in the Air Force. After an outstanding and dedicated career that spanned 31 years, Owen retired from the RAAF in 1975.

Interviewer's Historical Note. Following a government decision in 1986 that battlefield helicopters would be an Army responsibility, RAAF No 9 SQN disbanded on 14 February 1989 after its progressive relocation to Townsville from December 1988. The then Commanding Officer, WGCDR Angus Houston AFC, continued with his distinguished career and progressed to Air Marshal rank and became Chief of the Air Force (CAF).

Note of Appreciation

On behalf of the No 9 Squadron Association, I thank Owen and Betty for allowing me to intrude into their personal lives and record for posterity, Owen's recollections of his RAAF service. I was honoured that Owen would allow me the privilege.

Graeme Chalmers

Past-member RAAF No. 9 Squadron SVN

Interviewer's Comment. Over the years, No 9 SQN has come under criticism from some quarters for operating at Vung Tau and, for other matters. The No 9 SQN SVN record however, speaks for itself when one becomes aware of what the unit actually did with its relatively small aircraft resource of 16 helicopters and at most times, including the numerous intense periods of flying rate of effort (ROE) and incidences of aircraft battle damage, provided 13 hueys on line daily to support 1st ATF during the 1966 - 1971 SVN period. The reason why this was possible, in the view of the interviewer, was the vision and planning of WGCDR Ray Scott and others in deciding the squadron's 'homeplate' location, organization and establishment of US Army logistics support arrangements. Further, realistic 9 SQN Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were created and developed during the period and these provided sound RAAF guidance to the aircrews for their operational conduct. Overall, No 9 SQN's flying and maintenance support performance to sustain effective utility and gunship helicopter operations for that six year period in SVN with such a small resource base was exceptional by any yardstick (supported by the statistics and history) and one to be proud of.

To a very large degree, it was the efforts of those first 9 SQN personnel into Vung Tau, SVN, who set the standard for those who subsequently followed and served in country.

Appendix J: Memories and Experiences at No. 9 Squadron, RAAF Base, Vung Tau, South Vietnam 14 May 1968 to 22 May 1969 by A15512 Warrant Officer Graham 'Spider' Hale, Electrical fitter (Ret'd July 1993)

All of this information was taken from my memory of the events as though they happened last week.

RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia - June 1965 - 1967

I was posted to Butterworth in Malaysia, serving at the following units:

- 478 Maintenance Squadron
- 3 Squadron
- 77 Squadron
- 79 Squadron at Ubon in Thailand - on a rotating 2 month roster.

Prior to returning home we were offered a further posting to Vietnam for 12 months on the completion of our tour of duty at Butterworth. I chose to return to Australia and ended up at No 1 BFTS - Basic Flying Training School at Point Cook, west of Melbourne.

A boring posting, not much variety, pre-flighting 20 Winjeel trainers every morning, then working as the NCO I/C of the Battery Room at BFTS.

I'm not interested in Aussie Rules Football - "Aerial Pinpong!" Fanatic supporters - what the team did, ... was supposed to have done ... is gonna do next week.

Who Cares?!

I don't!

I've gotta escape from all of these 'Crazies' - somehow! I'm not interested in this code thank you! How do I get out of here?

I went to see the No 1 BFTS (Basic Flying Training School) Orderly Room staff to get some ideas. How to get back to Townsville, a 'home posting' wishful thinking, but was worth a try.

The staff 'guaranteed' me that posting if I volunteered to go to Vietnam, I would get that "home posting."

"I want that guarantee in writing from DPA (RAAF Postings) in Canberra before I sign my name to the posting," I said.

I did get the 'guarantee' from DPA.

"Yes I will be in that one," I said.

"What type of aircraft would you like to work on?" (most unusual... normally they post you to a unit with any sort of aircraft, as we do not specialise on any one type of aircraft).

a. Canberra Bombers

b. Iroquois Helicopters

I had worked on Canberras for years, they were getting old and tired, and I was not able to get into those tight compartments any more.

"Iroquois Helicopters...please," I said.

So in January 1968, I was posted to 5 Squadron to do Introductory Courses, do a B/F - AS/F, A, C and a D Servicings. A great, versatile aircraft.

My tour of duty at No 9 Squadron was from 14th May 1968 to 22 May 1969. (you can find our tours of duty here <http://www.vietnamroll.gov.au/home.asp>)

I departed RAAF Richmond in May 1968 by C-130 A Model Hercules on the weekly Mail Run via Darwin NT, Butterworth, Malaysia. With me was LAC Les Schafer an Instrument Fitter on that flight also posted to 9 Squadron.

It was 11 months since I departed No 3 Squadron, at RAAF Base, Butterworth. Looking back, we were offered a further 12 months in Vietnam instead of returning home to Australia.

We flew via Darwin NT and Butterworth in Malaysia. I remembered going into Penang to buy 8mm rolls of movie film from the Black and White Photo Shop on Penang Road.

“Ah, Mr Hale I see you are on your way to Vietnam, you just flew in on the Hercules on the Weekly Mail Run this afternoon.”

“No, I’m here for a short holiday,” I said.

NOTHING HAD CHANGED...EVERYBODY IN BUTTERWORTH & ON PENANG KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING OVER ON THE RAAF BASE - EVERY DAY!! Nothing had changed.

You could arrive in Butterworth with your wife and family, go into any store in Penang and someone in the store staff could tell you the names of your family, where you came from, what school your children went to back home in Australia!

A spy within Headquarters or the Various Squadrons - I guess.

In those days Penang was a Duty Free port, there were ways and means of getting ‘good’ - stereos, cameras, clothing through Malaysian-Customs.

At one time I had my own customs stamp - ‘Viewed Passed’. Smiles Made in Thailand.

Penang had an old world charm about the

place back in the 1960’s.

Four different prices for goods and services:

1. The local Asian Price - cheapest
2. The English Price the RAF were based at Butterworth
3. The Australian Price
4. Finally the American Price - Vietnam was just cranking up.

What you said, how your voice sounded to the Asians determined what you were going to pay.

The next day we flew off to Vung Tau, circled the airfield and returned back to Butterworth. There was a great big crater on the main runway from the previous night’s rocket attack courtesy of the VC (Viet Cong) - a normal occurrence.

Again I went over to Penang to get some more movie film and wanted to know what the Asians knew without saying anything. They told me all about my flight to Vungers, the time we took off and returned to Butterworth.

When we finally arrived at Vung Tau Air Movements the following day I had a surprise. My new SNCO I/C Electrical Section FSgt Graham “Blue” Downer and Sgt Trevor “Hack” Murry were there to greet me.

“Welcome to Vung Tau - Vietnam Graham,” presenting me with a cold beer! Gee that tasted so good.

Back at the living area we lived in reasonable living quarters. The Airmen lived in open dormitory accommodation in two storied wooden constructed blocks on concrete floor base. The showers and toilet block next building across.

The Corporals, Senior NCO's and Officers lived in quarters 2 guys to a room, in two story blocks.

The Messing three messes radiated out of one central kitchen, that worked well.

Today is Thursday - Pill Day

Those bitter chloroquine tablets to prevent malaria. There was a cutout of a trim, taught, sexy lady in a bikini inside the entrance of the servery, holding a sign saying something like this:

"You would go crook if she forgot her pills, today is your pill day!"

You signed for 2 pills from the issuing CPL and swallowed them.

The meals were excellent all the time. All the food came from the US Forces, we had better qualified cooks who prided themselves with the quality of work performed.

There was a blue RAAF 55 seater bus that would convey the workers down to the working area, Headquarters, Medical Section, the Orderly Rooms of 9 & 35 Squadrons, Main Store, Maintenance Hangar shared by 9 Sqn & 35 Sqn Engineering Workshop - Aircraft Welders, Aircraft Metal Workers, General Fitters.

Only the US Army buses had mesh screening on the windows of their buses. Probably because the Americans were hated, and to prevent being a hand grenade target.

No 9 Squadron had the eastern end of the maintenance hangar shared with No 35 Squadron operating DH Caribou Transport aircraft.

All of Avionics was upstairs on the right hand side of the hangar - Electrical, Instruments, Radio Air.

On the Ground level were the Armourers, Engine and Airframes, WOE's office, Maintenance Control Centre (MCS), and the Flight Line Office where the oncoming pilots would sign for their appointed aircraft - Iroquois helicopters for the day.

The CO was Wg Cdr John Paule
SENGO SqnLdr Ron Tucker .
WOE - WOFF Phil Mulchay
FSGT Jeffree Hudson
SNCO Electrical - Graham "Blue" Downer
SNCO Radio Air - Sgt Kel
SNCO Instruments Sgt John Mitchell
SNCO Armourers - Sgt Phil Hodge
SNCO Airframes - FSgt Bernard 'Slim' Crockett an ex Pommie
Sgt Mick Collins - Airframe Fitter
Sgt "Touchy" Heyward - Airframe Fitter
Sgt Ken Cattle - Engine Fitter
Sgt Don Wynn - Airframe Fitter
Sgt Trevor Murry - Electrical Fitter
Sgt Danny Graham - Aircraft Metal Worker

Electrical Section personnel

FSgt Graham 'Blue' Downer
Sgt Trev 'Hack' Murry
Cpl Graham 'Spider' Hale - (The Author of this Story)
(Now Warrant Officer - Retired)
Cpl Rod Garrett
Lac Mick Quibell
Lac Leon Ainsbury
Lac Wayne "Whisky" Carter
Lac Darryl "Stretch" or "Harry" Donnelly
Lac 'Robbie' Robinson
Lac Chris Hanks
Lac Bill Carson

Other personnel I remember.....

Engine Fitters

FSgt Jeff Hudson
Sgt Ken Cante
Cpl Fred Mascord
Cpl Ron Edwards
Lac Col 'Tiny' Pershouse Lac Joe Vellacott
Lac Charlie Walford

Airframe Fitters

FSgt Bernard 'Slim' Crockett
Sgt Michael 'Mick' Collins
Sgt 'Touchy' Heyward
Sgt Don Winn
Cpl Tony Harding - my roommate Cpl Warren Dougherty
Lac Alan Crawford
Lac John Webb
Lac Bob McLucas
Lac Mick Hatfield

Armourers

Sgt Phil Hodge
Cpl Peter Riley
Cpl Peter McGuinness
Lac Rob Giddings
Lac Wayne Green
Lac Neil Timson
Lac Doug Gould

Instrument Fitters

Sgt John Mitchell
Cpl Bob 'Dan' Doudle
Lac Les Schafer
Lac Zygmunt 'Ziggy' Parnell
Lac John Ooms

Radio Technicians Air

Sgt Kel ???

Cpl Eric Clark
Cpl Francis 'Billy' Bunter
Lac Rex Andrews
Lac Brian Kingston
Lac Les Denison
Safety Equipment Worker
Cpl Bill Dickson

GEMS

Aircraft Metal Workers

Sgt Danny Graham
Cpl Roy Robinson

Aircraft Welder

Lac Wasyl - "Bas" Lukan

Equipment Assistant

Cpl Edward 'Ted' Cooper

Avionics Officer-Electrical, Instruments, Radio (Air)

Flg Off Graeme "Snoopy" Shields (Played the guitar in the RAAF Pop Band)

Daily Routine - Work - Monday to Saturday

Our daily routine was rectifications, weekly and monthly servicings. Also weekly Duty Crew with a SNCO I/C and one tradesman from each mustering, commencing on Fridays at 1630hours. Usual start in the mornings 0500 hours for aircraft pre flight servicings. The aircrew would arrive around 0545 hrs, sign for their aircraft then fly off to Nui Dat for the day, running the taxi service for the Aussie troops in the field of operations. We would stand down at 0800 hrs when the day crew arrived. Then return in the afternoon, having partaken in an early dinner at 1600hrs, returning to work at 1630hrs, work till completed - whenever!

When it was Electrical Section's week on to drive the fuel tanker, that was one of my duties. First Daily Check - Check for Water.

Before going to the Base Fuel Dump to top up the fuel tanker, I would carry out another water check. Quite often the US guys at the Fuel Dump did random water checks. Our avtur tanker was only one of 2 or 3, (I think) that could defuel.

Quite often we would get a request to do a US Army Aviation unit defuel. Most of the US Aircraft's fuel tanks based at Vung Tau were contaminated with water. I would first check their aircraft, before driving the tanker to that aircraft. If the aircraft was contaminated, I would usually say our tanker was offline in for maintenance. Too bad your problem.

Once I rejected an aircraft, I observed the ground crew, remove the fuel pump, and dump the contents of the fuel tank on the ground under the Iroquios Helicopter!

Crazy people - Ground Safety - There was none - easy come - easy go!!

"We don't want 'dirty fuel,'" I said.

"It doesn't matter," I was told by the Yanks.

"Oh yes it does to the Aussies, we value our necks, we want to complete our tour and return home to Australia," I said.

Friday - Weekly Intelligence Briefings

On Friday mornings after smoko, an Australian Army Intelligence Officer would discuss with the members of 9 Squadron the achievements for the past week.

Did we complete the set tasks?

Originally we found out what was happening all theatres of war - I Corps in the North, II Corps, III Corps and in our own backyard IV Corps in the South. Later on we requested that we were only interested in our own backyard - areas of operations, IV Corps which the Australian Forces operated.

For Exercise - Hoisting at Back Beach - an afternoon swim

Some afternoons there were hoisting exercises off Back Beach beyond the breakers from the beach. The 'Crewies' were after 'volunteers'. Ah yes I will be in that one, an afternoon swim, for starters¹.

We would be driven down to the Australian Army Support Base at Back Beach, don our orange life jackets, swim out beyond the line of the breakers, " 3 'volunteers 'to be rescued this time." Inflate our life jackets, open the marker dye packets - florescent green, attach the packets to ourselves. Then wait for the 'rescue chopper' to appear.

Wok...wok...wok...wok here comes our rescue chopper.

The chopper hovers over the water.

A crewman is lowered to the water, 'let the crewman touch the water before you touch him.' Otherwise you get a big STATIC DISCHARGE.... ZAP!

"OK, remove the your marker dye bags now, we don't want a green floor inside the chopper." he said.

¹ When I was at Butterworth, Malaysia 1965 - 67 I did a lot of hoisting with the big yellow RAF Bristol Sycamore Rescue Chopper, in and out of the nearby jungle just to get action movies. That was lots of fun.

The first rescuee slips into the sling.

The crewman gives "Thumbs Up" for ready to be hoisted, and they are hauled into the chopper.

The next victim is rescued.

My turn, but I made an error, forgot to remove the marker dye bag, resulting in a green cargo bay floor! Our WOE - Phil Mulchay was not a happy chappy.

"Well seeing that you made the mess, you can clean it up - repaint the floor grey again."

Such is life with all of its ups and downs.

Detachment to Bien Hoa - south of Saigon - August 1968

About August 1968, I was on the detachment to Bien Hoa, up near Saigon (now Ho Chi Min City). We took 2 choppers, LTCDR Rolley Waddell-Wood RAN ('W squared') [also known by the SAS as 'Sinbad'] was the detachment commander, a true gentleman and a good operator.

FLGOFF 'Rocky' Dalmolen was one of the young chopper pilots. Sgt Max Baxter, Airframe Fitter was the SNCO I/C of the servicing party. CPL Graham Hale - Electrical Fitter; LAC Neil 'Timmo' Timson - Armament Fitter; LAC Graham Murray - Rad Tech Air; LAC John Webb - Airframe Fitter; LAC 'Harry' Hallas - Engine Fitter; LAC John Ooms - Instrument Fitter.

The US Battalion unit we were quartered had awful meals - yuk. We soon discovered another Battalion a bit further down the road had better meals so began going to that dining room. Nobody seemed to care.

We lived on the US Army side of the airfield

of Bien Hoa. The USAF lived on the other side of the runway, a big long air base.

I remember the first night we were playing cards in our ground floor quarters, the sirens warnings went off, for incoming rockets - we later found out. Seems ok - kept on playing cards. We all had recently had arrived in-country, not familiar with these big VC rockets. Probably coasting when they arrived over the airfield! Which is why we never heard anything coming in!

"KRUMP...BOOM...CRASH...BANG!!!!"

"What the hell is that?"

"Don't know, we're not going out there, well play on - the cards."

We didn't go to the Bunkers - a big Mistake but we were very lucky that time. We didn't know where the bunkers were!

WE WERE NOT SHOWN WHERE THE BUNKERS WERE LOCATED!

In the morning we were in for a big shock - there was no top floor on the living quarters next door! The building had been gutted!

HOLY SHIT...THAT COULD HAVE BEEN US IN THERE!

MOST NIGHTS THE ROCKETS CAME SCORCHING IN TO THE AIRFIELD!

No matter what you were doing, the Sirens go off - hightail it for the security of the bunkers constructed of big stack of sandbag wall, lots of old helicopter blades across the roof suitably propped up.

Big 110mm x about 2m long VC rockets, they make a lot of a mess!

Each day about 0530hrs we got up and went

to the flight line to do the pre flight servicing on the 2 choppers, see the aircraft off on their task - wherever they went - I don't know. Then return for breakfast. Free time till late in the afternoon when the birds came home to roost, refuel them, put them to bed. Go and have dinner. etc. Sometimes one would return early.

We took the long-wheeled base 4WD Land Rover, without the canopy. We told those gullible Yanks that this had automatic steering - yeah, five guys standing on the front seat side-by-side, the centre ones working the gears and clutch, one crouched behind - steering!

We were offered a Chinook Helicopter or a Caribou for a swop - sorry no deal!

We asked 'W' squared - our leader LTCDR 'Rolley' to find out where we could get some fridges to chill our tinnies. Beer. We bought lots of cartons with us - refreshments.

"Let us go to that big store down the road, when we see what we want, 'I'll cause a diversion, you guys move the fridges to the quarters, ok." he said.

We were escorted through this big canvas/metal framed structure, looking for 110V AC refrigerators, knowing that the Yanks - US Army would probably give them to us - for a loan.

We walked past that refrigerator storage area, Rolly pointed behind his back - over there and kept on walking with his escort. We just backed the 4WD to the store - got the 2 fridges on trolleys to our 4WD outside and transported them back to our quarters. Ah....no paperwork. :) Then returned to the main store to find Rolley, gave him the nod that mission was accomplished. He thanked the US officer for his time

and we departed the store.

Those two fridges were never connected to the power, just laid on their backs, the tinnies were 'poured into the fridges' from the cartons. Local 'noggie-ice' (NOG - Native Oriental Gentleman) chunks were placed on top of the tinnies.

The quarters next door lived the US Army Aircrew SNCOs yes WOFF pilots flew Mohawks, and Helicopters in some units. We became friends with these guys. 'Yeah - party time after work. Come on over - meet the guys...'

We introduced then to aussie beer which has a higher alcohol content than US beer. Well that caused some problems the next morning. Some of the aircrew went to 'work' in Aussie uniforms' not too well in the morning too ill to go flying. They were banned from associating with us.

We bought a kangaroo stencil and a red spray can with us - 'our calling card'. If it doesn't move - zap it.

All of the various units have lots of recreation clubs - beer halls.' We chose the nearby Motor Pool to visit. The 'Motor Pool' is Transport Section as in the RAAF. They had their club alongside the vehicle compound. We broke up into two teams, greeters - 'shouting' - offering 'freebie' beers to anyone in the club

"We are 'shouting' freebie beers to anyone in their club now!"

Meanwhile, outside in the Motor Pool, the other guys were leaving discrete 'calling cards' red kangaroos hopping over one another on the rooves of the trucks!

It was well after we returned back to Vungers

that the roos were discovered.

Each day we drove home from the flight line, we passed a compound full of small motorised flat tops - 'mules', maybe 50 in there. The driver sat on the right-hand side. The petrol engine was beneath the tray top.

Harry Hallas went to see the US Army guys to see if he could have one.

"But all of these don't go", he was told, "All U/S (unserviceable)."

"Let me have a look at some, I think I can get some working", he said.

"I doubt it" said the serviceman.

Harry went to work and soon had 7 mules running sweetly - 1 each for us guys. He departed and we returned to pick up the 'mules'. Lots of smiling faces. Great for moving between the barracks and the flight line. But all good things must come to an end, the Yanks wanted their 'mules' back. Yes we took them back and Harry made sure they weren't going to work again.

The US Army operated their elite Gunships from Bien Hoi - the Playboys - highly polished olive green Huey Cobras with a small white "Playboy Bunny" painted on the cowl just below the rotor mast on both sides.

I wanted to see if I could get a test flight in a Huey Cobra, so visited the big maintenance facility, to see if they had any Test Fights happening. "You are in luck, come back in two hours and you can go out with our test pilot a warrant officer". So I went to the ride of my life in that narrow, deadly gunship, with its big wide main rotor blade on top.

The pilot sits in the rear seat, elevated above

the nose, while the weapons officer sits in the forward seat, with stumpy controls - cyclic and collective sticks controlling the weaponry - Mini Gun, Grenade Launcher and Rockets.

We start up, get the clearance to take off to the training area. I look up at the monster wide blade main rotor as we power up, we are off, climbing, diving, tight turns.

"Are you ready for some loops?" the pilot asked.

"You mean we can loop the loop?" I ask.

"Oh yes, just watch and feel it," the pilot said.

We gather speed, go into a dive and at 700 feet, the pilot pulls back hard on the cyclic stick, at 1,220 feet I'm looking up through the big rotor at the ground, then we tumble over, rotate and fly straight and level. Then do some more loops. That was an awesome experience.

More about to happen

One night two of the pilots got on a bender - drunk too much beer, decided to have a lil fun, borrowed the stencil and the red can of paint and went visiting.

"We will leave a lil something on the "Playboys" (the attack Huey Cobra Helicopters)"

Nobody else knew anything about this one till the SHIT HIT THE FAN - BIG TIME!

Down on the US Army Flight Line at the 12th Huey Cobra to be sprayed with the stencil, the armed guard sprung the two pilots, giggling, with red paint over both of their hands, a gooey mess of streaky red paint on one side of this Huey. "Hands Up, You are under arrest!" as the

guard cocked his automatic rifle.

All of the Playboy Huey Cobras were grounded.

We were down two pilots - one crew. Under armed escort, rubbing back the paint to bare metal, applying primer, respraying the damaged areas of all of the aircraft. And re-polishing the touch-up repair which took many days.

Unknown to our Sgt Max, he had organised a flight in a "Playboy" Huey Cobra the next morning and arrived on the flight line.

Once spotted was told in no uncertain terms - "Piss off Aussie, You are not welcome here anytime from now on!" said the Crew Chief.

"What did I do?" asked Sgt Max.

"Nothing, but it was what 2 members of your air crew did to our aircraft." said the Crew chief.

"Oh shit!" said Max and departed.

I don't know what transpired between our leader LTCDR Waddell-Wood and the US Army authorities, but things were not rosy.

Time to get out of Dodge City, and return home to Vungers. The attachment ended and we flew back to base at Vung Tau.

A Phantom Parachute - Souvenir

During our tour in Vietnam it was the custom to save white 'used' Flare Parachutes, because they covered the area of a Hills Hoist rotary clothes line. Great cover to use for home BBQs.

Well our Instrument Fitter-John Ooms decided he would go one better and wanted a USAF Phantom Bomber Drag Parachute while

we were up on a detachment at Bien Hoa.

I told him they were very heavy, full of lots of holes and VERY DIRTY - COVERED IN BURNT FUEL VAPOUR.

"Do you still want me to organise to get you one?"

"Yes go for it."

I think I traded 2 large Catering Cans of Peaches for it.

A few days later I got a telephone call to say to come and get the parachute. So I bought it back to our quarters and dumped it at his feet and said,

"Well here is your Phantom Bomber Drag Parachute".

"Hey it is ALL DIRTY and all FULL of HOLES!" he exclaimed.

"A typical "Clock Winder" (Instrument Fitter) you didn't listen to me when I told you what to expect!" I said.

"Well it is your problem what you do with it!" I said. Somehow I think he thought it would be ideal to cover a rotary clothes line!

WRONG THIS TIME!!

Engine Changes - with no spare Electrical Engine Harnesses

We didn't have any spare engine electrical harnesses, a real bummer. The US engine that was removed from the aircraft was stood up on one end so the intake area and the engine electrical harness was accessible. A painstaking task removing all of the nuts and bolts to the clamps to the mounting brackets. Then transfer the lot to the newly 'reconditioned' engine

from the the big floating repair ship “Corpus Christie Bay” anchored off Vung Tau at Front Beach.

“Is this engine going to pass the Test Flight?”

We had a lot of “newly repaired engines” that DID NOT GIVE the required TORQUE - engine after engine. It takes a day to pull one apart and build it up on the next engine!!

Reinstall the ‘new’ engine on the aircraft, get FLTLT Rex Budd to do the engine run and test flight, around the circuit.

“Is it a goer or is it another dud engine? Sir?”

“Sorry guys..another dud engine.. insufficient performance!”

“Grrrr, we pull it out get another engine in from the store and start all over again.”

I remember we spent one whole week putting in something like 5 engines before one passed! That is poor workmanship, or slack testing from the repair facility.

“Harry”

We were tasked to fit a chopper with 4 large speakers, 2 per side facing outwards in the cargo bay of one of the choppers. Ther idea being a Vietnamese Officer would broadcast to the ground over ‘enemy territory’ to give up and come over to the other side for better living conditions.

This chopper was nicknamed “HARRY” after aka ‘Harry’ - Darryl Donnelly, Elec Fitt who always had a lot to say.

Good Friend

I roomed with Cpl Tony Harding an Airframe Fitter from 9 Sqn. Everyone I met at Vung Tau had good personalities.

Marijuana Spraying

Another project 9 Sqn was tasked, was to fit boom sprays on both sides outwards from the aircraft. A large container of weed killer was tied down in the cargo bay. The task to ruin the new crop of marijuana that was ready for harvesting, Our ‘sprayer chopper’ was escorted by 2 C Model US Army Gunships.

Hoists for Repair - Offshore to USNS Corpus Christie Bay

One afternoon I flew out to the “Corpus Christie Bay” with two aircraft electric hoists for some repairs. The chopper pilot said he would call back in one hour to pick me up to return to base.

One - two hours go by no ride home.

“Where is that barge going?” I asked a crewman.

“Oh that’s the last ferry to the mainland today, it will return tomorrow”, he said.

I am marooned on the ship. Better get a feed and find somewhere to sleep tonight.

The following morning a US Army chopper was going ashore - time to bum a ride back home. But - everyone of the crew seemed to be on ‘Happy Pills’ everyone were giggling.

There were missing instruments on the Instrument Panel, bare wires sticking out, shorting on the panel -ZZZZZZZ ZZZZZZZZ ZZZZZZZZZZZZ , live ammunition rolling around

on the floor of the cargo bay.

“Where do you want to go?” the pilot asked.

“Back to my unit - No 9 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force Hangar back on the airfield,” I said.

“Where is that, we didn’t know they were here,” the pilot said.

“Near where the USAF Bird Dog spotter aircraft live, midway down the southern side of the airfield, our hangar is next to them” I said.

“Point to the area when we get close,” he said.

“We took off, but lost ground effect, oh oh we’re gonna go for a swim this morning.... we just skimmed across the water at a height of about 8 feet and headed towards the airfield slowly gaining height.

“Put me down over here please,” I said, pointing to the 9 Sqn Flight line.

So I arrived home again.

“Thanks guys happy flying!” I said as they wocked off towards Air Movements. I get back to Elec Section.

“Where have you been since yesterday afternoon?” asked Sgt Trev Murry.

“Marooned on that dammed ‘Corpus Christie Bay’ ship anchored in the harbour, those pilots that took me there, forgot to pick me up!” I said.

“Yeah! Typical Aircrew, they live in another world.”

R & R Leave

The Choices of Destinations

Return home to Australia to our families for a week flying free with PAN AM Airlines.

Other destinations: Hong Kong, Taiwan, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore.

I chose to go to Hong Kong so I could buy a new Canon 512 super 8mm movie camera².

We flew from Vung Tau with the Wallaby Airlines - a 35 Sqn Caribou to Ton Son Nut airport at Saigon, then went by US Army bus to Camp Alpha the Transit Camp - what a DISGRACE, A REAL SMELLY, DIRTY PLACE. They should have bulldozed - flattened the place years ago!!!

We spent the night there before catching the Pan Am Aircraft to Hong Kong, just take your spending money for the hotel in Kowloon and to buy gifts. Lac Mick Hatfield a ‘Framie’ shared a room.

This camera was a lot better than the previous standard 8mm movie camera I owned. Super 8mm Movie film was more readily available through the US Army PX Store or Aust Army ASCO Store at Back Beach. I never lost any rolls of 8mm movie film in all of my service in Vietnam. It had to be processed in the Kodak Laboratories in Melbourne. Vic. Penang was the destination for our R & C Leave about 4 - 5 days down and return by “Wallaby Airlines” - No 35 Squadron Caribou Transport Aircraft.

We were told by the loadmaster, if there is an engine problem heading for Vung Tau, all of the goodies - stereo equipment bought in Penang will be jettisoned into the South China Sea - thankfully it never happened.

2. The Australian War Memorial in Canberra ACT now has this camera on permanent loan from me, as part of their Vietnam Collection. And all of my 8mm movies in DVD PAL format but with no sound.

Sunday morning - Activities - Choices

- Go to Church after breakfast
- BBQ at Back Beach
- Visit the Peter Badcoe Club at Back Beach
- Visit the Harold Holt 50m swimming pool at Back Beach
- Go sailing in the mornings off Back Beach using 14ft Corsair sailing skiffs from Australian Army. I did a lot of sailing but only in the mornings
- Support our Aussie Rules Footy team vs 14 Aust Army Teams.
- Go Bar Hopping in Vungers
- Go sight seeing around Vungers
- Do nothing stay on base.

We had a number of “geckos” guys who were skin flints - lousy spenders like less than \$5.00 a week. The movies on base were - FREE!! some married guys, lucky to spend \$5.00 per week! The Service Allowance was a princely sum of about \$24.00 a FORTNIGHT!! BIG DEAL!!! We didn't touch our normal RAAF pay.

I used to sign out a 14 foot Corsair sailing skiff, to launch out through the breakers, to sail off Back Beach only on Sunday mornings. An interesting scenario. Before we launched the boat I would brief my crew (most had never sailed before) what to do, should we capsize. Who does what, instead of all trying at once to get back into the submerged boat. That briefing did pay off one day we did capsize without warning. Everyone had to wear life jackets - mandatory.

We (Sgt Max Baxter, Lac Ray Bastock, Cpl Eric Clark and myself) are sailing along, everyone is leaning out over the side, keeping the boat on an even keel, suddenly the wind drops off....all the weight is on one side.

Bang...over we went.....capsized!

“Let the sheets go, everybody out of the boat!” I call out.

“Turn the bow - pointy front end into the wind.”

We right the boat - stand it up, the smallest guy - Ray Bastock climbs inside, closes the automatic bailer, begins bailing out the water overboard. while the rest of the crew hold the boat into the wind, I climb in and turn the boat just off the wind, to get it moving, ok guys climb aboard, open the automatic bailer, we are sailing again. Tighten up the main sheet and headsail, we are up for powering up the speed.

Preparation for the return to the beach - Centre board up, ease the main sheet push the mainsail boom out to the side of the boat as the wind is behind us...

“Ease up on the headsail.”

“Try to sit the boat on the back of a big wave,

“Let the big wave do all of the work to get us back in, DO NOT OVERSHOOT THE WAVE OTHERWISE WE WILL CAPSIZE!!

We move towards the stern of the boat, and surf in to the shore, the steering was delicate.

“You are going well.”

“Just keeping the boat on even keel.”

Crunch we have arrived at the water's edge on the beach.

“Pull the boat out of the water and turn it into the wind, drop the headsail and the main sail and tie them up so they don't flap,” I instruct my guys.

I return to sign off for the boat from a good sail today, wash the lifejackets in fresh water

and return them to the storage rack.

The Aust Army WOff Beach Master said to me, "that was a fast recovery, after you went over. Now I have an appreciation for what you do before you leave the beach with a different crew each week. Really no different from any other work - good housekeeping - being prepared." he said.

The Albert Ross Pontoon - 'Albatross' as in the No. 9 RAAF Squadron Crest

The squadron owned a recreational pontoon, made from two scrounged aircraft fighter drop tanks, a platform mounted on top of the two pontoons (drop tanks), 4 helicopter seats - 2 each side of the centre line.

A big eski - beer cooler between the seats in the middle. An awning over the seats with a surrey on top, powered by a underpowered British Seagull outboard motor.

This was the time when "Flower Power" was all the rage in the US. The old fighter drop tanks were painted bright YELLOW, the pointy ends at the front were NIPPLE PINK. Along the inner and outer sides were stencilled purple flowers - "Flower Power of the 1960's in the US.

Each time I had been on the "Albert Ross" we had mechanical problems with the outboard motor. Meaning sometimes needed to tow the pontoon back to the secure area of Back Beach. Another time we had to get two Gun Ships sent out to scare away the local Vietnamese. Eventually the "Albert Ross" was banned from going to any beach.

Find Something Useful to Do at Night

I got the idea of trying my luck painting by numbers - up to 40 different colours for oil paintings. It took over 3 months to complete each painting. I have one on my lounge room wall and it looks good. Purchased from the US Army PX. A good idea to while away the time.

November - early December 1968

Wilma Reading Live Show from Cairns Nth Qld - A lady entertainer at the Base Movie Theatre.

There were my mates, Neil Timson and Bazz Lukan sipping at some 'Chestnut Teal ' an Aussie liquor, sitting in the comfy canvas seats watching the show. I did rum movies during the show.

"Hey guys, we need another bottle, this is good stuff - we've run out!"

"Okay, Bazz see if you can get another one." (I later found out it came from the Sergeants Mess)

He soon returned with another bottle. At that time I did not know where he bought it, but it was going down so well - arr tasty, so we thought. The show ends, I go to stand up, and fall over, Bazz catches the movie camera and I crash back on the seat. I was gone - out for the count.

Timmo picked me up and carried me back to my room, to lie down. By then my head was booming - yeah drunk, too much incohol. Damn, got to have a throw up!

I was switched on, just enough to stagger to the door, across the passageway to the sandbag wall and have a chunder over it.

Then the guys decided to sober me up, dragging me to the showers, turning on the cold water, one arm sticking out each side shower partition, to support me. Then dragging me back to my room.

But they forgot one item - every time I was dragged over the concrete floor and through the dirt to the shower block, my feet were not working, large chunks of skin were being ripped off from my knees to the tips of my toes.

The following day I did get to work about 0900hrs, my FSGT said thank you for coming down, but go home and don't come back till you are better. I spent a lot of time at Medical Section getting my knees and feet treated.

This leads on to another story a few weeks later on. I still could not wear any closed footwear like sandals or boots - no skin down below my knees, legs still red raw, I could still only wear thongs.

Not a good situation.

It Was One Of Those Days.... You Would Rather Forget!

One of those days when everything goes wrong, u/s choppers everywhere - in the bush, at Nui Dat, everyone from Electrical Section has gone out, I'm the only Electrician at 9 Squadron left behind.

Another chopper has gone u/s at Nui Dat needing a generator change - urgently. So I gather up a spare generator, my tools, get a flight to Nui Dat. Here we go the Army has the usual bee in its bonnet!

"You can't come here dressed like that! Put your boots on!"

"Sorry about that, I can't do that, doctor's orders," I say.

"We want that damned chopper fixed NOW!!"

"Too bad" I say, and we fly back to Vung Tau. [Hey I'm only a Corporal not a SNCO!] Later I go back after more demanding and screaming from the Army.

"You again - piss off!"

"Well as far as I care your troops can rot out there in the bush," I say and I am flown back to Vung Tau. Royalty pissed off I go and see an old acquaintance - Group Captain 'Bay' Adams, our OC. I first met him at 10 Squadron at Townsville as an AC Elec Fitter in 1960 when he was a SQN LDR flying Sabre Jet Fighters. Transiting through Townsville for Amberley, then back to Williamstown, after a big exercise in Darwin, he had to show me what to do when seeing off the Sabres. I had never seen a Sabre up close before.

"Come in, what's your problem Corporal."

"Do you remember me way back in 1960 transiting through Townsville bound for Williamstown on you Sabre Jets?" I say.

"Yes that is a long time ago." he said.

I went on to tell him my problem and the domineering attitude of the Army 'the Green Machine' at Nui Dat. The task usually would have taken an hour, and four hours has gone by procrastinating and nobody is going anywhere.

"Just one moment", he rings Nui Dat Headquarters and tells them to get their act together and I am returning as I am to repair that helicopter!

"But he is not correctly dressed, no boots."

“I don’t care how he is dressed, he is re-
turning to repair that aircraft, get it!!”

“Thank you for bringing to my attention
your problem, you should have no problems
now. By the way what happened to you?”

I told him; “yea the Christmas spirit eh,” he
said.

I flew back to Nui Dat in the afternoon,
changed the generator, had the engine test run,
all servicable, but the Army were not happy - I
was back there - too bad.

I still think today the “Green Machine” is a
Big Fuckup in 2009!!

And, I used to be a Nasho 1/1957 the last of
the big intakes at Wacol in Brisbane, before I
enlisted in the RAAF on 09 September 1957. I
trained to be a Wireless Operator, not a ‘crunch-
ie’ - foot slogger.

Sunday Aussie Rules Footy vs 14 Australian Army Teams

When I was not sailing, I drove the big diesel
9 Squadron Big Truck with a long tray body to
the Sunday morning Aussie Rules Footy games.
A big left hand drive vehicle, had no horn - not
working, every time you pressed down hard on
the accelerator, great big clouds of black smoke
belched out of the exhaust.

I remember driving alongside a Vietnamese
guy on a bicycle, had to step pedal to the metal
looked back at the guy, shaking his fist, looked
like the “Black and White Minstrels Musical” -
Mammy.... all covered in black soot.

We carried the team, the supporters, eskis
of cold refreshments - lovely Aussie Beer and 4
steel pipe goal posts.

The biggest available soccer fields were the
Lord Mayor’s Oval in downtown Vung Tau and
the local Police Academy. I do have some 8mm
movie footage of some of those games.

For the first 6 months the Aust Army won
most of the footy games. Then we had a new
Barracks Carpenter posted in Cpl Les Briskie.
Les became the new Captain / Coach.

Wow what happened, we began winning lots
of footy games. A good footy coach, better co-
ordination and teamwork.

Rigged said the Army! - too bad, we said.
All is fair!

Currency Changes - Script Money - it looked like Monopoly Money

Every so often the US Forces decided to
change the Script Money, without any advance
warning. Which meant all allied bases were
closed. All old previous Script Currency had
to be exchanged for the new issue. All notes
ABOVE \$5.00 you had to sign: Service Number,
Rank, Name and Signature across one side. This
was to stop the “Black Marketeering” in the lo-
cal villages and towns in South Vietnam..

Before Going into Vung Tau, I always ex-
changed some of my scrip money for Viet-
namese Dong - the local currency.

IT WAS FORBIDDEN TO USE US CURRENCY
ANYWHERE - ANYTIME!

After the sudden change of MPC - Scrip \$’s
the locals would be caught with 10’s of 1,000’s
of worthless Scrip Money - too bad.

“Hey guy, you got new MPC - (Military Pay-
ment Certificates) - Script

Money?" "No, not today," I said.

The Base Movies - all Free

There were guys that DID NOT KNOW THE MOVIES WERE FREE!! We called them "Gekkos", and there were two or three from 9 Squadron, real skin flints, lucky to spend \$3.00 per week. When there was a Currency change they always had lots of Script Dollars to exchange!!

We were well supplied with movies most nights, all free. When the AFL footy season was on, we would watch the last quarter of all of the games, from the previous week. Sometimes at interval we would hear someone holler - "It's On Tonight!" Which means no matter who you are, head down to the Base Laundry, grab a chair to stand on, bring \$5.00 for admittance, join the queue, and blue movies will be shown there afterwards.

The only place within the RAAF Australian Camp that had 240 VAC; all of the other buildings had the American 110 VAC. The movies came courtesy from some Aust Army guys so I was told.

Our Test Pilot - FLTLT Rex Budd

Now here is a real character of a man, spent most smokos in Electrical Section.

"I've just come over for a cuppa. The real men are here away from those other pilots! Where can I store my gun?" (9mm pistol.)

"Oh, just put it in the top drawer of the filing cupboard over in the corner," one of the guy's said.

So we all had smoko - tea or coffee, some

played cards, lots of laughs.

Sometimes Rex had to fly off to Nui Dat on a special task. When he arrived, Gee, he thought "I wonder where I put my gun? I hope I don't have to use it! Oh, yes I remember where it is now - oh well, I'll get it later".

In 1969 he was appointed as OIC Ettamogera Club - Airmens Club and was very popular with the members. One afternoon down at the hangar, Rex was really pissed off at someone or something.

"I'm gonna get even with those bastards today!! Who wants to come on a Test Flight with me shortly? I've got a special something that has to be done late this afternoon."

He got a number of volunteers, guys from the hangar floor. On board were lots of brown paper bags filled with flour.

"What are these for Sir?"

"Ammunition, we are going on a little bombing exercise late this arvo," he said.

"Where to?"

"Oh you will see shortly," he said.

He later took off and joined the circuit, there was a lot of noise from lots of aircraft flying above the airfield circuit and he flew over the base, the aiming point - the roof of the Officers' Mess. An observer looking over the side, a little this way,..... a bit more, a bit more..... steady.... "Bombs away!" Out went the bags of flour and away they flew.

I do not know the outcome of the 'bombing mission' but I was told they made a bit of a mess with a big bang on the roof.

Christmas 1968

A good time of the year, but a bit sad we could not be with our loved ones. Well make the best we can of our lot. Some BBQs. Christmas Lunch was special with the Officers and SNCOs waiting on the troops, excellent food, wines and beers. A grand time was had by all.

Scroungers

I was 'king of the scroungers' if it wasn't bolted down - we took it anyway.

Everything on the US Inventory was WRITTEN OFF when it arrived 'in Country' - South Vietnam!

General aircraft hardware was so hard to come by through the stores system, common screws, washers and nuts. Our connex - steel cabinet that held our spares was always depleted. One item always in short supply was the battery cells for our Aircraft Batteries.

The Yanks had a fenced in compound near our hangar called the Graveyard, with old pranged aircraft dumped in there. We used to visit this compound looking for any hardware that could be 'recycled' for the squadron use. I'm not sure if the word 'recycling' was used then?

The Yanks gave us blank paper chits to fill in the part numbers of stuff removed from these old wrecks. For every 10 items removed we usually filled out one item, they didn't care much either what we took out, just junk to them.

Wine Tasting - before the New Year of 1968

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Our sister feeder unit, No. 5 Squadron RAAF in Canberra ACT, sent the squadron lots of boxes of premium wines, cheeses and nibbles as a Christmas present, bought up by the C-130 A model Hercules Transport before Christmas.

The white wines were chilled in tin trunks, the nibbles - cheeses and biscuits were laid out on tables for everyone available in the squadron.

A few months later they sent another shipment of wines, but the mob at Phan Rang found out about the shipment and had the Herc diverted to Phan Rang first, to offload the wines.

We later received a message - "Oh by the way your wines that we received were so nice!"

Bastards! Who can you trust these days? Inter-unit rivalry!

Rescue 8's in the Bush - Upcountry

Every so often one of our choppers would be forced to land, fast, mainly due to mechanical problems. If it happened at night or late in the afternoon, leave the aircraft there, leave some guards on site and return the next morning to rectify the problem.

DO NOT GO UP THERE AT NIGHT BECAUSE YOU WILL ATTRACT ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES BY THE VC.

Usual problems

They were 'chip detector' lights illuminating on the Master Caution Panel for the Engine, 270 or 90 degree gear boxes, associated with the tail rotor.

When metal fragments break off the gear

teeth and bridge the two magnets contacts of the Chip Detectors, a RED Light illuminates in front of the pilots on the centre of the Main Instrument Panel. Which means, "GET OUT OF THE SKY - FAST!"

My flying kit consisted of the following:

- Flying Suit grey nomax
- Boots
- Body Flack Jacket
- Flying Helmet
- 9 mm Pistol
- Canvas Bag of Tools and a Meter

2nd Canvas Bag containing my Canon 512 Movie Camera and 6 spare rolls Super 8mm colour movie film in 50 foot lengths, but with no sound. It wasn't fitted to private movie cameras in those days. I just kept a record of what the scene was, where, and who starred on the day. All Official Film was in Black and White with Sound in the 1960's in the Vietnam War!

The Engine Fitters that went with me many times were Sgt Ken Cattle and Cpl Ken Edwards. All I had to do was to disconnect the powerwire connector to the terminal on the relevant 'chip detector plug.' The main problem child was the Engine Chip Detectors. Previously 'ham fisted' engine fitters had broken the chip detector wire connectors!

Then the engine fitters would drain the engine of oil, give the engine an oil flush, replace the engine lubricating oil, start the engine, give it a good run to see if the problem occurred again. If all was ok, we would get an extra pilot up at the site to fly it home to base, unarmed. I usually flew home back to base this way.

If the problem persisted it was a task for "Helping Hands!" The big US Army Chi-

nook Helicopter to lift the Iroquois up out of the downed site, using a lifting cable on to the "Jesus Nut" on top of the rotor mast, just above the main rotor. Also deploy a small parachute behind the tail rotor for stability - keep a straight line. Fly the downed chopper back to the 9 Sqn Hangar for repairs.

On one of these trips, I shot movies of Aussie troops being flown out from this battle area and replaced by Kiwi troops. The choppers would land for about 30 seconds, one team out and Aussies climb in, away they go to the safe drop off zone. All in the line of work.

I never shot a pistol, SLR rifle, machine gun at anything, during my tour of duty in Vietnam. But many times flying to and from Nui Dat had been fired upon.

"Whizzzzzz" ----- you missed!"

If you want to shoot down a helicopter, you aim for the tail rotor, the anti-torque - the steering! No steering and the fuselage spins around and around and you are not going anywhere.

Duty Crew the Night of the Rocket Attack on the Airfield

I was working on a hoist u/s (unserviceable) late one night out on the flight line revetments. Aircraft revetments are two sets of thick walls of PSP (Pressed Steel Plate) separated by sand bags packed between the two sloping walls, then a gravel base floor to accommodate the helicopter with walk around clearance, then the opposite PSP protection walls to a height of about 6 feet.

Then all hell broke loose. Sgt Don Winn the

SNCO of Duty Crew and the Framie were with me.

BOOM CRUMP!! BOOM....BOOM!!

Rockets from Lon Son Island were raining down from the sky at around 2100hours. Fired remotely from this island. all that is needed - a clock mechanism and a torch battery to set the rockets off. The Viet Cong would have paddled their canoes to the island during the day, set up the rockets on bipods, aimed in the general direction of the Vung Tau airfield. Then paddled back to the mainland and up into their hide-aways in the hills.

At the predetermined time the rockets were sent on their way. When near the airfield they would be coasting - run out of propulsion.

I flew from the right hand side working on the hoist - through the cargo bay and landed against the opposite steel PSP wall of the revetment - with fright!

"Hey!" I yelled, to the other guys, "You are on the wrong side!!!"

I guess the adrenaline was really pumping then. There was Don and the other guy down on their stomachs, elbows working on the gravel surface under the chopper, pulling them backwards and using the tips of their toes in their safety shoes, pushing the body forwards, propelling them along - towards me.

I got the giggles at the funny sight. I did think it looked funny. They did not see the funny side of the situation and threw rocks at me.

"Hey, it is not funny!"

But then realised if we had a direct hit, everything would have gone POOF IN A BALL OF FIRE! ALL GONE!

By then the US Army roving pickets were firing their rifles at anything and everything. We locked the aircraft, left the scene, hopped in the Land Rover and hightailed it for the hanger in the dark, with bullets whizzing all around.

By chance our 'Pop Band' were having a practice session down in the air-conditioned Safety Equipment Section. The Duty Crew arrived, we joined their sing along, drank some of their beer. Then we all found comfortable sleeping places on pieces of foam. Flg Off Graeme Shields "Snoopy" our Radio Officer was a member of the band playing his guitar.

Meanwhile, the whole of the Aussie Camp spent the night in the narrow cramped, steel bunkers.

When the aircrew arrived the next morning, they asked, "Where were you when the rockets came raining in?"

"Out fixing u/s choppers," we said.

"Did anyone get hurt?"

"No, all ok just got a big fright that's all."

The only real big casualty was the big 'Mo Gas Tank' down at the Fuel Farm. The covered top of the tank cracked and caught fire. Meanwhile most of the fuel was pumped into surrounding fuel tanks. The fire burnt for another 3-4 days, just a blackened structure.

New Year's Eve - Vung Tau Aussie Camp - Festivities - 1968 - 69

Who opened the bottom Foot Valve and drained the Base Water Storage Tank down the water spear bore hole? No water - for anything! No water for the kitchen, no showers, no laundry. HELP!

The Americans bought semi trailer loads of that stinking 'potable' chlorinated water - oh phew! Maybe a New Year's Eve Prank?

That took nearly two weeks before we had nice clean fresh water again.

Night Patrols in Downtown Vung Tau

I was friendly with a number of the RAAF Police who lived in the Corporal's Block Living Quarters near my room and used to go on their night time town patrols, as something different to do, rather than go to the Ettamogera Club and drink beer. Some area of downtown, the driver of the vehicle put the accelerator down and whizzed down the roads.

1969 Activities

The Bushranger Gunship Modification Team

Project Manager/OIC

- Sqn Ldr Brian "Guns" Dirou - Pilot

Armourers

- Sgt Phil Hodge
- Cpl Peter Riley
- LAC Neil Timson

Electricians

- FSgt Graham 'Blue' Downer
- SGT Trevor 'Hack' Murry
- CPL Graham 'Spider' Hale
- LAC 'Robbie' Robinson
- LAC Wayne "Whisky" Carter

Framies

- Sgt Mick Collins

Metal Bashers

- GT Danny Graham
- Cpl Roy Robinson

A/C Welder

- LAC 'Bazz' Lukan

A2-773 was the initial Bushranger Gunship to be modified. (Now on permanent display at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra).

The Armament - where it came from - second hand from US Army Aviation sources.

The Deal for one Mini Gun with a set of 6 spare gun barrels = 12 slabs/cartons of Aussie Beer. A chopper would be loaded up with around 40 cartons/slabs of Aussie Beer and wok...wok...wok off to some pre arranged US Army Aviation facility. Then after some hours return with the booty - a Gunship Modification Kit.

The Modification Kit

- 2 x Mini Guns with 12 spare gun barrels
- 2 x Mini Gun Mounting Pylons
- 2 x Pilot's Gun Sights
- 2 x 7 x 2.75inch diameter electrically fired Rocket Pods
- 2 x Rocket Pod Mounting Pylons
- One mounting base plate for 16 ammunition bins
- 16 x 7.62mm Ammunition Bins Standard NATO
- 2 x Feeder Delinkers
- 1 Electrical Main Control Box
- 1 x Cockpit Gun/Rocket Control Panel
- Assorted large Skin Fittings power plugs and sockets.

All of the wiring came from RAAF Base, Butterworth, Malaysia. The wiring circuit was from the US Army Aviation Iroquois C Model Gunship Helicopter. No modification was written up in my time there, because it was wartime, I was informed.

I watched FSgt 'Blue' Downer and Sgt Trevor

Murry as they did the first modification on A2-773 making notes along the way - in a rough note book, called a "Good Guts Book." These unofficial books had been around for years in the RAAF.

I did the wiring from the Pilot's Overhead Circuit Breaker Panel to the Gun Sights, Mini Guns and Trigger Firing Switch, and Control Panel in the Centre Pedestal. Meanwhile Lac "Robbie" Robinson, installed the Main Control Panel in the left equipment bay, wired up the rocket pods and met me in the Centre Pedestal.

From start to completion usually took around 4 weeks. We completed the next three aircraft.

I do have some movie sequences from a flight on A2-773 before it became operational, firing twin rockets and the Mini Guns and also flying in the chase aircraft.

There were only four aircraft modified to become Bushranger Gunships.

Tuesday Afternoon Activities back at home - Living Quarters Maintenance

Sometimes on Tuesday afternoons, the Corporals would gather at our Living Quarters for some outside maintenance- replacing broken sand bags that protected the outside passage walkways.

We were helped by the always smiling Vietnamese lady workers, like General Hands, as they chewed the "Beetle Nut" - yuk awfully red teeth, nattering away in Vietnamese wearing those inverted cone shaped hats.

Yes, I did get that "Home Posting" on my return from 12months service in Vietnam!

Hooray My Posting was out - Back home to

Townsville Nth Qld.

When my posting came out, hooray DPA - 'Postings' in Canberra' honoured their promise to me, I got my home posting back to No 10 (MR) Squadron at Townsville wef July 1969.

Packing Up and Going Home to 'Uc Da Loi' - Australia

There was a ballot held within the maintenance team to pick two lucky guys, to fly back in a chopper to Saigon with the CO Wg Cdr John Paule when he handed over his command at "Free World" to his successor, before heading over to the airport terminal.

I was fortunate to be flying on that chopper, rather than a packed Caribou transport.

That was the only time I have ever flown in a QANTAS aircraft, the Big White Bird Home to Australia. Within a few hours we had consumed all the beer on the aircraft.

We arrived at Mascot at about 2am in the morning, going through Customs was a breeze, away you go, we are after the Green Men over there, Australian Army, Crunchies.

The next morning I caught a commercial aircraft to fly to the Gold Coast in Qld - my new home.

Accounto's Audit of 9 Squadron - Before returning to Australia

I'm not sure if this story is true or a 'furfy'.

The Accountants arrived for a full Audit of 9 Squadron's Inventory, before the squadron returned to Australia at the end of the tour of duty in Vietnam. Evidently the squadron had

one extra helicopter from 'trading.'

The Accountos said, "you can't keep it!" "Can't we keep it for spare parts?" the techos said.

"No, give it back, buy a new one through the normal sources," they said.

And remember all US Forces equipment was WRITTEN OFF when it arrived 'In Country' - in South Vietnam.

Well the 'Helping Hand' US Army Chinook arrived, hoisted the helicopter up, flew over the South China Sea and dumped it into the ocean! What a waste.

You can understand why techos are suspicious of Accountos who live in another world!

Moving On to 1971

In August - October 1971 I was on a Supervisors' Man Management Course at Wagga Wagga NSW. Found out I was posted to HQSC. Bugger that!

Maybe a promotion might be in the wind - it was in November 1971.

1972 - 1973

When 9 Squadron returned to Australia about 1971, the RAAF in their wisdom decided they didn't want the gunship modification and had it removed. Well, somewhere along the line later on they changed their minds.

We now want it. "Where is the Modification written. We can't find it!"

"Are there anyone from the original modification team still in the RAAF?"

By then I had been promoted to Sergeant and was working in Headquarters Support Command as a Technical Assessor on Ground Support Equipment - Aircraft Arrestor Barriers and Ground Power Carts. I received a phone call from Amberley.

"Hello, were you on the Bushranger Modification Team?" a voice asked.

"Yes I was, I worked on the four aircraft." I replied.

"What part did you play?" I was asked.

"I ran the electrical from the overhead pilot's circuit breaker panel to the gun sights, the mini guns, to the trigger switches and Gun/Rocket Control Panel in the Centre Pedestal."

"Where is the Electrical Modification written up?"

"I have no idea, nothing was written up in my time, we just had Notebooks we wrote up with the necessary hook ups to the plugs re-routing of wiring," I said.

"Do you remember much now," he asked.

"No, it is all up here now - in my head - in my memory." I replied.

"Oh we are in deep shit," he said. That was the last I heard of the matter.

Conclusion

I enjoyed my tour to Vietnam and learnt a lot about myself, matured some more. Gained a lot more diverse friends. I'm proud to talk to anyone about my experiences in Vietnam.

Graham Hale

(Warrant Officer, Retired 13 July 1993 - 35 years service)

Appendix K: My recollections of PNG and New Britain (Hazy at best!) from Trevor Moxham – 9 SQN 8 Jan 73 to 29 May 79

PNG 20May73

It was in May73 that I was sent to PNG on my first of many attachments. Before departing for the highlands a quick shopping trip was needed for groceries to supplement our 10 man Army ration packs. We flew in company via Goroka then onto Mt Hagen. The departure from Goroka was quite exciting because after refuelling we were at max T/O weight once again (which didn't bother us departing from Lae at sea level). This was my first introduction to high altitude ops, and would have dire consequences for later PNG work. The T/O from Goroka was accomplished by doing hops (overpitching) to reach the runway then doing a running T/O downhill (most of the highland strips were built on slopes).

Our journey ended at a small village called Koroba, near the Strickland River deep in the highlands. Refuelling was done on the local soccer field, and we were accommodated in a small hut on the ridgeline. We even had a houseboy to do the washing (luxury). Much of the flying was carried out in the mornings as the thunderstorms would form around 3pm and progress down the valley toward us. Our job was to support the OZ Army Survey Corps in updating the old and outdated WW2 maps. These activities were carried out in conjunction with photo reconnaissance from a 2SQN Canberra, and then all the information was sent to Bendigo for collation.

The existing maps were of dubious accuracy and had rivers disappearing in valleys only to re-emerge in a different valley. We saw many

different highland tribes (see pictures in "Wigmen of Papua New Guinea" by James Sinclair). James Sinclair was a well respected Kiap (Local Government Administrator) and his son was one of my students later at 2FTS (who carried on to become a Cathay Pacific Captain). PNG flying was very exciting and nothing like I had ever experienced before. Extremely rugged and hostile country, with a chequered history of aircraft crashes even to this day. It was only later, when I arrived back in Australia in October, that 9SQN in their wisdom scheduled me for a Jungle Survival Course. On one trip in the Strickland George we came across head-hunters who had never seen a white man before. A story has it that a local native managed to put a spear through the bottom of an aircraft, trying to bring the "Big Bird" down. The scenery in the highland was spectacular with giant unmarked limestone sink holes, and rivers gushing from the side of steep hills originating from underground streams. The maps detailed placenames such as "Tsili Tsi-li" and "Kanabea" (can of beer), and navigation features like "Black Cat Gap", "The Snake" and "Landslide Gap"; a bit of local knowledge could go a long way.

That Sinking Feeling

One humorous incident occurred when a crew had an unusually long day and were returning to Koroba. Fuel became an issue but never fear they had an extra bladder on board, and a fuel pump so a precautionary stop was in order. Much to the amazement of the captain

the crewman announced after the precautionary landing that he had “forgotten the hoses”. Not to worry a quick message went out to the other A/C to fetch more hoses. After locating the hoses a frantic call came from the stranded A/C advised that they were sinking? The situation was rectified in time (before the tail rotor settled) to recover the situation. An even funnier sinking situation happened later in New Britain. It was only a short distance from Koroba to Lake Kopyago where in Jul 1972 two choppers meshed rotors during refuel. Fortunately nobody was hurt.

From Koroba we worked the southwest down the Strickland George and moved base to Kiunga. The operations in the lowlands around the Fly River were totally different to highland operations. With numerous marshes and unreliable maps navigation was mainly by heading and distance. The local villagers on the river had to be on constant alert for crocodiles, and some tribes tattooed their skin to worship them (Puk Puk skin). The living conditions with the Army were pretty basic, with washing conducted at a local stream. At one stage the drinking water was suspect and it was soon discovered that it was good practice to fly with an umbrella and a toilet roll, as rain showers were frequent. At this stage we were not permitted to cross the Irian Jaya border of Indonesia (this came later with more crashes). Along the border we operated north across the Hindenburg Range to Telefomin, and onto a pretty place on the northern coast called Vanimo (later destroyed by tsunami on 17th of July, 1998).

New Britain 19 Jun – 15 Jul 73

The Bismark Archipelago

After completing much of PNG our map-making took us back to Lae, and then along the

northern coast of New Britain, which is part of the Bismark Archipelago. During the refuelling stop at Cape Gloucester we noticed what appeared to be small brush fires on the side of Mt Talawe (6,600' amsl). Then the ground shook and the “Whale Gusher” manual fuel pump started to work overtime to get us away, as we witnessed our first (of many) active volcanoes. On our journey to Rabaul, our next camp, we flew past “The Father” (7546 amsl) which was also active and smoking. Nearby was another caldera called “South Son”.

Rabaul itself was a major Japanese base during WW2 with around 200,000 troops stationed there, and although heavily bombed, was wisely bypassed by Gen Douglas MacArthur in his Pacific campaign. The harbour formed part of what we were told was a large extinct volcano. Our camp was at the base of extinct twin volcanoes called Vulcan and Tevurur., and I even took a tour inside the caldera to confirm this and to see the sulphur vents. The engineers were to always have 2 A/C serviceable for what we thought were SAR purposes. Someone must have thought these volcanoes posed a danger though. In the centre of the bay was a small outcrop called the “Beehive”, which marked the middle of the old volcano. What we didn't know at the time was that 500 people were killed in the 1937 eruptions at Rabaul (when the Beehive appeared from under the harbour), and a further six were to die in 1990. Following this eruption the whole town of Rabaul would later be destroyed in a huge eruption in 1994.

From the air you could plainly see where barges and small ships had run aground around the bay in an effort to stay afloat after being damaged by allied attacks. As in PNG there were many A/C wrecks scattered around the Japanese wartime strips. Many of which were salvaged for return to OZ. Some very interest-

ing finds were made at Gasmata, including Zeros and Betty bombers.

We were accommodated in old WW2 tents on the airfield that were reasonably comfortable, except for the occasional shrieking F27 taking off nearby. An important find was made in Ataliklikun Bay about 18 miles away, where a friendship was struck with the owner of a tiny island (possibly Urara Isle?). The house footprint occupied most of the island with just enough space to land on the sandy beach below, and the owner was gracious enough to show us his hospitality and take us water skiing.

That Sinking Feeling Again

On another humorous occasion I was on standby for the other airborne A/C when a frantic call came from the FIS operator (relayed through an F27) that the A/C had made a precautionary landing in a swamp and was sinking. We hurriedly gathered some groundcrew and tools together and launched. It appears the problem was a tail rotor chip detector and we soon found the troubled A/C, which was indeed settling in a small clearing on soft ground and scrub. A very quick cursory inspection was made and we escorted the chopper back to base. Sure enough the chip detector came on again and this time the crew were more selective with their landing site. They managed to put down in the middle of a large compound, securely surrounded by a high barbed wire fence. While we were circling overhead awaiting the detector results from another inspection we noticed uniformed men running toward the chopper with shotguns. We were relieved to hear from the grounded crew that this time they had picked a jail to land in, and it was thought a break-out was in progress. It wasn't long before both A/C were safely back at Rabaul, to discuss the days

events at the bar.

PNG 25-31Aug74 - Moorhead

It was around this time that I contracted a form of dysentery and, as there was a change-over of pilots due at Port Moresby, so it was a good opportunity to medivac myself out for a check-up. By the time I got to Moresby everything had cleared up and back we went to Moorehead.

I believe it was from here that an A2-383 later came to grief on Mt Basavi, with high density altitude again taking its toll. It was interesting to note a spot height on the WAC chart at the time (southwest of Mt Basavi) was accurate to + or - 1,500'. The Iroquois was good for sea level operations but we lacked the data for high altitude ops. This deficiency was later rectified with the introduction of a "Prayer Wheel" calculator from ARDU, but much too late for PNG work.

Frequent trips were made from Moorehead to Daru in the Torres Straight. It was on one of the beautiful small sandy beached islands nearby that we were told by the resident Army surveyor there that he had found a warning in a bottle buried next to the trig point. It said not to swim in the lagoon as it was alive with sharks. Being doubting Thomas's we just had to investigate, and sure enough there was much splashing around by sharks in the shallow lagoon chasing small fish. So much for adventures in paradise.

Photographs by Trevor Moxham can be found at gsqn.com.au/trevormoxham

Appendix L: Recollections by Wing Commander Nick Leray-Meyer AM Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron RAAF

2 January 1979 – 13 January 1981

Notification

In early 1978, having just (somewhat reluctantly) settled into a new staff officer position at the newly formed Chief of Air Force Materiel (CAFM) Branch, I received a call from Peter Mahood; who had been my CO in Vietnam and whom I also new from fighter pilot days. Peter had just been advised that he was to get another tour as CO 9 Squadron as a “farewell present”; since promotion to Group Captain was most unlikely, following Bob Thompson’s unexpected resignation after just a few months into his command.

I felt good for Peter since I felt he had been very poorly treated when he was not given the privilege of continuing as CO when the Squadron returned from active service in Vietnam; despite not having completed a full tour as CO. I also harboured mixed feelings over that decision given the trials and tribulations that occurred within the Squadron in the period 1972 – 74.

Notwithstanding his earlier advice, the 1978 senior officer’s promotion list contained a welcome surprise; Peter was promoted to Group Captain! I called to congratulate him (and to discuss the vagaries of DPO machinations) and he indicated that he would be remaining at Amberely as CO Base Squadron. Peter also spoke of the trials and tribulations he had experienced at Amberely where, in his opinion, the Squadron was at the very bottom of the “pecking order” We discussed likely contenders for his replace-

ment; discounting my own chances having just taken up the new Materiel position, but didn’t settle on anyone!

A day before the (embargoed) 1978 senior officer posting list was released I received several calls congratulating me on my positing to command No 9 Squadron. However, it was not until the next morning when AVM John Cornish, my boss, called me in that I believed the calls. The AVM wasn’t too thrilled that I had been posted (he apparently having had my posting ex Staff College changed so as to join his staff – I had previously worked for him as a Squadron Leader) – but stated that since it was a Command he would not stand in my way.

Later that day Peter called and we discussed a hand-over program, including a pre-Christmas visit. That plan was changed when CAFM ruled out pre-posting refresher flying and an Amberely visit; but was apparently over-ruled by CAFM on my attendance at CO Law School training in early December.

Peter rang in mid November to discuss a new hand-over program during which he mentioned that he was taking the Squadron to El Alamein for a major Army exercise; his last operation. I recall telling him to take it easy and that I would see him at Amberely in the New Year!

On Saturday morning 26th November I was having breakfast when the news of the accident was announced. By lunch-time I knew that Peter and his crew had made their last flight!

1979

I spent most of my first day at the Squadron discussing past and current events with Peter (Wombat) Wagner, who had assumed Temporary Command of the Squadron for the immediate period following the accident at El Alamein. The remainder of the day was spent primarily in discussions with the Officer Commanding (AIRCDRE Ray Drury) and the Air Staff Officer (GPCAPT Bob Walsh). Both indicated a general disquiet with the squadron's performance; the former being particularly concerned with the adverse findings of the recent HQOC Technical inspection while the latter was seemingly more interested in ensuring his Staff Officer (Bill Shepherd) got more operational flying - a position I didn't support.

Well aware of the dangers of acting too quickly I focused on completing my re-qualification. Despite my previous intention to complete it at 5 Squadron - in line with the series of training courses and protocols I had formulated when I was the 5 Sqn Training Flight Commander - I gained approval to complete the course at the Squadron. This gave me the dual opportunity to assess the competency and approach of the squadron-training regime while observing the squadron "in action". In the event I was relatively comfortable with the former (Angus Houston was given prime responsibility) but sensed some degree of "suspicion" from the hangar floor; which I later learned reflected the angst felt by some of the maintenance crew over the loss of SGT Paul Gallagher and CPL Barry Johns - the two Flight Fitters aboard Peter's aircraft at El Alamein. I also renewed my A2 Instructor Rating during a unit visit by Central Flying School examiners.

My next few months were spent on a re-structure of Squadron's activities and operational culture; not all of which was readily and/or willingly accepted.

First I reorganised the Squadron Headquarters. The administration staff were relocated to the central wing of the building and their former abode became the pilot's crew room, with the training staff in the adjacent office. Relocation of the executive staff to the western end of the building facilitated easier interaction along with an element of privacy for our discussions. The crewmen remained in an adjacent building that they had already converted to a comfortable and effective area. As with any squadron move, the map room was also relocated!!!

The Maintenance area proved more demanding; and not without some opposition. First, the SNCOs were informed in a face-to-face briefing that they were to cease being too "hands on" and revert to their supervisory roles; with trade CPLs being the primary work team leaders. Moreover, I expected SNCOs (reflecting I guess the lessons I had learned during my days on the hangar floor as an ex apprentice) to wear "dress of the day" (this was to assist in them focusing on their supervisory and mentoring roles!). Since the squadron records and maintenance control received especial adverse comment from the HQOC inspection team, they too reverted to dress of the day and their work area renovated (to reflect the need for accurate documentation etc). I also decided not to appoint the SENGO (Mark Pemberton who I knew and respected) as a "Subordinate Commander" since I wanted him to be seen as the primary maintenance "Supervisor and Mentor"; which he couldn't do if he was also, from time to time,

judge and jury. I also approved the construction within one of the hangars of a "Crew Rest Room"; readily accepted by the team though the OC wasn't all that pleased. Dress and deportment also got a shake-up; the OC abhorred seeing cap and shirt-less technicians working on the line – an unsafe practice from an occupational health and safety viewpoint as well.

Operationally I explained to the flight crew that I probably had a somewhat different approach to others they had worked for and with. Firstly, I wanted to see the squadron act operationally in peacetime as it probably would on active service. Thus, I saw Cat B captains as those to whom I would entrust "fighting the squadron" on my behalf; not just a category based on passing the HQOC syllabus. The senior Category B (or Category A) captains were expected to be capable of "fighting" the entire squadron – thus being able to plan and control combined exercises involving "slicks" as well as "Slicks and Gunships". The junior (in experience) Category B captains were expected to be competent in planning and leading either multiple "Slick" or "Gunship" operations. Cat C captains had to have my confidence (and that of the Flight Commanders) to operate a single aircraft without undue supervision on squadron away-tasks. For Category D pilots, the essence was to observe and learn!

Thus the task for the executive and training teams was to ensure that they kept this concept firmly in mind. Aircraft emergency training was to become a supportive role not the primary role! Further, there had to be a planned, rather than an adhoc, succession-training program (I reminded all the senior pilots that the threat of posting was always upon us and we couldn't

afford to leave the squadron unprepared). After some pockets of resistance the plan started to work well.

Shortly after assuming command the base GLO arranged a combined Army/RAAF briefing to be held at Amberely. I was somewhat surprised by the tenor of the remarks of several senior Army officers re lack of RAAF cooperation and support in their endeavours (an echo from the early days of Vietnam??). I put it somewhat forcibly to the Brigade Commander and his staff that they wouldn't "fight" their units without thorough briefing and training so if they didn't include their supporting helo units in the appropriate "Orders Groups" how could they reasonably expect us to understand what they wanted of us in tactical situations and the like. The Brigade Commander rose to the challenge and we were subsequently included in all the relevant and appropriate briefings and planning sessions. For our part, we spent more time of our training hours "working up" on mutual tactics; which resulted in No 6 Brigade receiving far more air support than they had to bid for through the Army system. This proved most beneficial in our subsequent working relationship as well as major exercises such as "Kangaroo 3" (October 1979) and "Droughtmaster" (October 1980). However, there was seemingly no real mutual interest in developing tactics to reflect emerging battle-field concepts, especially hand-held anti-aircraft weapons and use of gunship developments. Indeed the Army, as well as the RAAF hierarchy (including Amberely HQ as well as HQOC), demonstrated almost a total lack of interest in developing battlefield tactics – the Vietnam concepts still held sway despite attempts within 9 Squadron to develop new strategies.

In April I was sent to Canada to discuss float operations with a Canadian Defence Force helicopter unit; we were to use floats in a forthcoming Indonesian survey task "Operation Pattimura". While an enjoyable trip (though some 40 hours in a C130 wasn't exactly enthralling) little real operational information was gleaned, despite the Canadian's having operated with the large Iroquois floats for extended periods. The most useful information gleaned was "make sure they don't go flat!!!. Back in Australia, FLTLT Bruce Townsend visited a private operator (Esso helicopters) to receive float endorsement training. Bruce later endorsed myself and the Sqn QFIs; who in turn, spent some enjoyable time "splashing down" on the nearby Atkinson's Dam while endorsing the remainder of the squadron. Operation Pattimura subsequently was completed without incident and despite the floats introducing the odd handling problem (especially during an autorotation) their presence on long water crossings was very reassuring.

Following the requisite Commanding Officer's review of the Board of Inquiry into the El Alamein accident, I discussed flight duty fatigue with the HQOC psychologist (Dr Lee). As a result, we included a fatigue testing/assessment regime in the forthcoming squadron survival training program on Stradbroke Island. All the squadron pilots were involved, the lucky ones as the control group (which meant they were free to enjoy themselves "surviving" by fishing, swimming etc). The results were interesting: essentially the older pilots became fatigued faster, were slower in recognizing the onset and took longer to recover! Not good news for the RAAF since most COs and executive staff tended to be in their mid to late 30s while the

line pilots were in their early 20s. Not surprising, HQOC didn't like the results and nothing officially came of it; though within the squadron we planned operations to avoid, wherever possible, flight fatigue becoming a major causal factor.

For Kangaroo 3, I decided that the squadron should deploy as "tactical" as possible. Thus, instead of remaining at Rockhampton in support of the deployed Army units, we would deploy to the field for the entire exercise. To my delight the squadron rose to the challenge and we soon had camouflaged "put and take" hot water heaters, tents and supporting items (including camouflage nets) being assembled at the unit. All aircraft were fitted with armour plate seats and door guns (the gunships getting their full suite of weapons) with body armour and side-arms for the flight crew. Each aircraft was expected to deploy essentially self sufficient so far as crew tentage, camouflage nets etc. Obtaining tactical vehicles (Land Rovers and trailers) from RAAF Richmond (where they are stored) proved difficult (we couldn't have them until just prior to the exercise) so again the Army came to our assistance. This enabled the maintenance teams to prepare the various mobile workshops etc so provide the necessary mobility. Detachments from 5 Sqn and the RNZAF's 3 Sqn joined us with me being assigned Operational Command. The vehicles departed in convoy with the units of No 6 Brigade while the aircraft deployed en-masse from Ambere-ly to the first refuelling stop at Maroochydoore. After refuelling we continued in three flights of four aircraft until we reached Rockhampton. A planned overnight stay at Rockhampton became three nights as all Iroquois were grounded for a mandatory inspection of a rotor system fault

that had been detected at RAAF Base Fairbairn shortly after our departure from Amberely.

The exercise proved successful and while welcoming our attempts the 6 Brigade units thought we were somewhat “clumsy” in our tactical “home”; though inspecting Army officers found time to “test our field showers”!!!. For our part we learned that operating 16 aircraft from dispersed areas requires far more logistic support than envisaged. A most pleasing aspect was the interaction and cooperation between the three units (5, 9 and 3 Sqn RNZAF). As I expected, the RAAF hierarchy didn’t visit or inspect our deployed site; they obviously preferred the comforts of the Rockhampton and Brisbane command centres!

When I assumed command the Squadron was maintaining a full time SAR standby aircraft and crew; ready to respond to any request – defence or civilian. In addition squadron pilots and crewmen were still required to undertake traditional base duties such as Orderly Officer and Orderly Sergeant. I considered this an unreasonable requirement, especially given the regular deployments the aircrew made away from home base vis-à-vis other officers and SNCOs on the Base. Following protracted discussion with the Officer Commanding it was agreed to cancel the 24/7 SAR requirement; since it was a local decision rather than a HQOC imposed task, but retain a dedicated daily SAR crew who would be relieved of all other duties for the day. This ushered in a series of incidents where the Air Staff Officer (GPCAPT A Reed) and I took opposing views as to how the squadron should be tasked.

The highlight of the year was probably the rescue of three mariners by Angus Houston and

his crew. Following a call for assistance, the squadron was tasked by HQOC to deploy to the vicinity of Evans Head and await instructions to retrieve any survivors of a shipwreck located by searching P3C and C130 aircraft. Shortly after arriving in the vicinity Angus was directed to some wreckage well out to sea. On arrival he found three survivors clinging to wreckage and proceeded to winch them to safety. Huge seas battered the crewman (Sandy Roman) during his three trips to the water while Angus hovered in gusting winds of some 70 knots. Once the three survivors had been transferred to shore-based ambulances Angus conducted an inshore search for the two missing yachtsmen; but to no avail. Angus and his two crewmen were later the recipients of well deserved Air Force Cross and Medals.

Given that the 1978 HQOC Maintenance Inspection was very critical of the Squadron it was with some pleasure to see that the efforts made by the maintenance teams were rewarded with a glowing report following the 1979 inspection. Random “hats off” visits to the hangars and supporting sections during the year had proved successful though I was never quite sure whether their individual and collective efforts were because or in spite of my leadership!!! But that was immaterial to me; the fact that they were now achieving their potential was the main objective.

In early November, after returning from Exercise Kangaroo 3, I proposed to the OC that the Squadron should hold a small memorial service to commemorate the first anniversary of the El Alamein accident. I felt that it would be appropriate, especially for the maintenance staff. To my disappointment the proposal was vetoed

without any real explanation of the reasons for such a decision; though I suspect it was that previous squadron fatalities had not been accorded such an event. Nevertheless, we paused for reflection on the 25th by way of remembrance!

1980

1980, my second and last year in command, proved to have about the same highs and lows for the squadron as did 1979.

The lows included the seemingly never-ending battle for recognition of the squadron's requirements, contributions and achievements – both at Amberely and HQOC. A typical example was the annual rotary wing COs (5, 9, 12 and 35 Sqns) meeting at HQOC. Despite having four of his command's Commanding Officers present the AOC deigned not to address us or for that matter even speak to us at either of the lunch or morning tea breaks we had during the two days of discussions; though he was in the same room!! Even the Chief of Staff spent less than five minutes with us. Yet when the strike and/or fighter squadron COs (in my opinion essentially flight commanders since they had no maintenance staff, only flight crew and a small administration staff) visited there was almost the "scattering of rose petals"!!!! Another example was on the question of flying suits. The focus on designing the new flying suit (again in the hands of the Equipment folks rather than the users) was the fighter and strike flight crew requirements. Following lack of interest at HQOC on the rotary wing requirements for two-piece flying suits I was moved to send a message, with the Chief of Air Staff (AM Neville McNamara who had been Commander RAAF Vietnam during my tour there) as a CC

addressee, in which I pointed out the difficulty of using a standard flying suit on a "bush toilet" during darkness, which was a typical situation for chopper crews. I received a "rocket" for this message from both HQ Amberely and HQOC but when the CAS supported my position things seemed to change a little (though it was reminiscent of "winning the battle" but "losing the war"). HQOC's lack of interest in rotary wing units was also reflected in the almost total disinterest when I reported that by chance I had become aware of the intention of the then Army Field Force Commander (MAJGEN Bennett) to actively seek transfer of RAAF rotary wing assets to Army Aviation (Bennett having been a major critic and opponent of RAAF helicopter support during his pre-1970 service in Vietnam). My advice, later was to be proved correct during General Bennett's period as CDF.

Angus Houston had earlier left for the US on exchange duties to the USAF. In return we received a US Army helicopter pilot (Capt Fielder)! He settled in well but initially lacked the flying skill we expected of a pilot of his general experience. Nevertheless he made up in enthusiasm what he initially lacked in competency and it was not long before he was fully integrated into the squadron and awarded his aircraft captaincy. My only hope (in retrospect) was that on his return to the US Army he was able to benefit from his experience with 9 Squadron. It never failed to amaze me how DPO often "wasted" experience gained from exchange postings. For example, Graeme Chalmers on return from the USAF where he had flown CH53 Heavy Lift helicopters with a USAF SAR unit was posted back to 9 Sqn, to fly Iroquois! While we were glad to have him his recent operational experience was more beneficial to 12 Sqn with its medium lift

Chinook; a posting we were subsequently able to arrange.

The Squadron had its only aircraft accident during my command while carrying out a SAR task. HQOC tasked two Iroquois to search for a stricken yacht, being pounded by heavy seas north of Fraser Island that were the result of an on-coming tropical Cyclone, and rescue the crew. The two Helicopters were to coordinate with a C130 search aircraft. Given the prevailing weather conditions each of the Iroquois was commanded by a Category A Captain, with the "A" Flight Commander (Peter Hales) the Detachment Commander. The pre-departure briefing contained the usual qualification – don't unnecessarily hazard the aircraft or crew. The crews spent the entire daylight hours on standby on Fraser Island (at a small seaside resort at Rainbow Beach). With darkness approaching I discussed the "State of Play" with the HQOC SAR controllers and stated that I wanted the aircraft withdrawn back to Maroochydore; where the aircraft were more protected. HQOC refused the request so I advised the captains to batten down as best they could. The next morning, after advising the Squadron that the Cyclone had moved further out to sea HQOC called off the search and released the aircraft. In turn, the crews were advised to use their judgement of the local conditions and either depart without delay or be prepared to stay a further day. Both crews agreed on the former and the first aircraft departed in steady rain only to be confronted with heavy winds and downdraughts as it passed Indian Point and despite full collective, impacted the water. The flying skill of "Spida" Rider enabled the badly damaged aircraft to be flown ashore and the entire crew saved; earning him an AFC.

Although badly damaged, the Brisbane airport Bell Helicopter facility rebuilt the aircraft. At the subsequent Court of Inquiry, HQOC absolved itself of any responsibility arguing that the Squadron (the CO) should have exercised its command responsibilities by withdrawing the aircraft earlier even when HQOC had refused permission to do so! A salutary lesson for me!!!!

Despite being an operational squadron, DPO seemingly decided to "test" the squadron by posting in two female officers; one engineering officer and one administration officer. Though both performed quite competently in their roles it certainly made life difficult for us when we deployed tactically. This difficulty was increased still further when the squadron's first intelligence officer also proved to be a female. Discussions with DPO staff demonstrated that they essentially had no idea of the operational situations confronting tactical helicopter squadrons. Nevertheless, the squadron accepted the situation and made every post a winner!

The remainder of the year was essentially incident free despite the squadron being tasked well above its planned rate. Both the flight crews and maintenance teams rose to the challenge and responded to everything asked of them.

Perhaps the most disappointing event during the year was the end-of-year posting list. Although well aware that I would be posted, I had requested DPO to avoid posting out too many of the Squadron's senior staff; to avoid the pitfall of early periods where continuity was lost and overall standards were damaged. In the event, the CO, SOPSO, "A" Flight Commander, two senior pilots and the SENGO were all posted. It seemed to me that yet again there was little

interest in the RAAF hierarchy in the impact on operational effectiveness of helicopter units that simultaneous “mass:” postings of executives and experience can have!

Nevertheless, I thoroughly enjoyed the two years that I was entrusted with the command of No 9 Squadron. As events unfolded, the continuing lack of support for RAAF helicopter units was to be the catalyst for my early departure from the RAAF; something I had never previously contemplated; and at times still rue!!

Nick LeRay-Meyer AM

4th April 2009

Appendix M: Recollections by Wing Commander Peter Spurgin, Commanding Officer No. 9 Squadron.

January 1981 - November 1982

Overview

During this period, No 9 Sqn was involved in, inter alia:

- Army support including troop training and Gunship fire-power demonstrations;
- Tactical development exercises in particular Fighter vs Helo, tactical navigation and self-sufficiency in field deployment;
- Survey operations in the Eastern Indonesian Island area;
- Relief operations in the Island Kingdom of Tonga
- Joint exercises with SAS, Army and Navy;
- Deployment to MFO Sinai for Peace-keeping operations.

Tactical deployment stores were built up during the period with the objective of being self-sustaining in the field. This would allow 9 Sqn to deploy at short notice and operate independently for a period of time with the equipment thus acquired. This would pay dividends for the RAAF in due course. A secondary consideration was the obvious intention by Army to take over the helo operations which Sqn personnel at the time understandably did not want to happen. The move away from the 'motel syndrome' did not work in the long term however.

A tactical development cell was formed to explore various operational scenarios including Army support under hostile air conditions ie where air superiority had not been established. This may have been an unlikely scenario, but it created an area of high interest and developed

skills in piloting and teamwork as well as stimulating thought on various tactical scenarios. Tactics included individual aircraft navigating at low level with troops on board (taking advantage of shadow and terrain to avoid detection) to rendezvous with other troop carrying UH1-H at a specified point and time for a company insertion.

The following extracts are from the log book of Wg Cdr P.C. Spurgin (with some elaboration where necessary).

1981

Feb. Gunships-Fire Power demo- Gunships -Puckapunyal.

March. Float training in preparation for Indonesian survey operations with the Australian Army surveyors.

May. Deployment to Saumlakki an Indonesian Island 270 nm directly north of Darwin to support survey personnel. On 4th May, two UH1-H deployed, one fitted with floats and one with skid configuration. Both had winches and would operate together in separate areas in HF contact. All operations involved extensive over-water flight. Monsoon conditions added to the interest. The object of the operation was to position the Army surveyors based at Saumlakki on strategic 'trig' points on various volcanic Islands to the west and north -west of Saumlakki. Eventually, the contingent moved to the Island of Moa as the 'trig' positions moved further to the west stretching UH1-H ops to the max. The move to Moa (200 mn west of the Saumlakki base) was itself an in-

teresting exercise. The 9 Sqn and Army surveyor contingent consisted of around 100 personnel and equipment. Water needed to be found in sustainable quantity on Moa. A small party flew to the Island on the 20th May with Indonesian 'Jantop' in tow as interpreter. The party landed near a small village, whose chief figured WW III must have broken out as the last aircraft to operate from the small (now overgrown) airstrip were Japanese in WW11. The party located a source of water (in a cave which led to artesian water of absolute purity which the Army chlorinated anyway) and the contingent happily moved to beach-side 11 x 11 tent accommodation. Fuel was provided from 44 gal drums landed from a barge outside the reef and herded ashore by enthusiastic natives.

April. RAAF Air display rehearsals and exercise comprising airborne assault and solo UH1-H display by Flt Lt Rider.

June. Oakey Helo vs Fighter tactics exercise.

July. Shoal Water Bay (SWBTA)- Exercise Platypus with Navy.

Oct. 15-17: deployment SWBTA Pre K81 operation with SAS. Self sustainability in the field demonstrated - cam techniques explored with UH1-H ops from 'hides' in the Army deployment rear area (ie simulating tactical ops in hostile air environment with emphasis on precision low level navigation, min comms, dispersed routes for rendezvous and formation run-in for company assault.

Oct. Kangaroo 81 Army support exercise. During this exercise, and on the 30 Oct, Flt Lt (RNZAF) Holden's UH1-H, A2-380, experienced tail rotor failure on take-off

and subsequently the aircraft crashed, caught fire and was destroyed. One soldier was fatally injured and one 9 Sqn crewmember suffered burns injuries. The accident was due to a failed Marmon clamp which secures components of the tail rotor shaft.

Dec. Advised of deployment of No 9 Sqn assets to MFO Sinai scheduled for Feb 82

1982

Jan. Preparations underway with Wg Cdr TC Wilson for deployment of 9 Sqn aircraft, personnel and tactical deployment stores to El Gorah Sinai.

Feb. Landing trials on HMAS Tobruk (12th). 9 Sqn aircraft loaded on board HMAS Tobruk together with small contingent of pilots and maintainers headed off to the Sinai to join MFO with Wg Cdr TC Wilson as first Austair Contingent Commander.

March. Hurricane Isaac support-deployment to Tonga by Herc for relief operations devastation of Island communities following the hurricane. Distribution of emergency supplies to the various island communities carried out.

June. Ex Seastrike at Shoal Water Bay training area (SWBTA) with HMAS Tobruk (recently returned from Middle East).

July. Self deployment to PNG via Weipa to Pt Moresby for training and ops Mt Hagen, Medan and Kar Kar Island. Aircraft authorised for landing near volcanic core for deployment of activity monitoring devices by local volcanologist.

August. Ex Diamond Eagle Townsville.

Sept. Preparation for the Commonwealth games. End of Tour-posted to MFO Sinai as Contingent Commander.