SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

The Story of a RAAF Fighter Pilot on USAF Exchange Posting

From FLTLT Barry M. Schulz, AFC

I was an RAAF Exchange Officer at the 414 Fighter Weapons School (FWS) Nellis AFB, Nevada from January 1972 until December 1974. There were also RAF and RCAF exchange officers at the FWS; collectively, we 'NOFORNS' were 10% of the instructor population.

The FWS has a long history of being the centre of fighter combat expertise since post-WWII. The USN 'TOPGUN' school is acknowledged as a like unit. The RAAF FCI course, conducted by 2OCU, is an equivalent centre of expertise and the RAAF and USAF air combat tactics were pretty much on par in the early 1970s. The main role of the FWS is to train exceptional USAF pilots and weapons system officers (WSO) to become Fighter Weapons Instructors and Tactics Development Officers at their home squadrons. The course was five months in duration and consisted of air combat tactics, ground attack range, ground attack tactical, and nuclear weapons phases, with extensive academic and flying components. Every FWS instructor was qualified as an instructor in all roles.

The FWS was equipped with the upgraded F-4E modified with leading edge slats for improved in aircraft handling. Reputed to be departure-proof, it was found that, if one tried, it would depart spectacularly. Returning to base with a length of drag-chute strap streaming behind the aircraft - deployment of the drag chute was the departure recovery procedure - was not a good look! Before commencing the tactical training phases, students were re-taught how to fly the F-4E to

the aircraft and their limits. USAF units were often barred from low-level flight below 10,000 feet, no supersonic tactics, and a restricted envelope in which to fly the aircraft - G limits and angle-of-attack (AoA). Low level navigation skills were also honed. This led to some interesting incidents with aircraft returning with branches and leaf matter in tanks!

Basic air combat manoeuvres had not really changed since WWI, although fighter performance, manoeuvrability and equipment have modified many classic manoeuvres. The emphasis on 'dog-fighting' was almost negated by the missile era; however, the skill of close combat has reemerged with highly capable missiles and cannon. The continuum in air combat tactics from the Korean war theory and practice were inherited and applied up to the Vietnam conflict period.

The USAF soon recognised that their successes in Vietnam were far exceeded by the USN; kill ratios of 12:1 versus 5:1 were telling! USAF headquarters directed that the Tactical Air Command correct this anomaly. The FWS was, in turn, tasked with implementing change. USN air tactics were studied at length and many of the USN tactics were adopted, albeit with a different title; eg, 'Combat Pair' versus 'Loose Deuce' etc. Combat Air Patrol (CAP) tactics became the solution to protecting the strike aircraft, thus enhancing their success and survival. Further, the threat from enemy RADAR, SAM and AAA had to be addressed. A decision to establish specialist air combat squadrons in Vietnam operations, led to a new FWS role to train selected aircrew in newly developed air combat tactics techniques before they were assigned to that theatre. Intelligence on Vietnamese (ie, Russian and Chinese) air combat and air defence techniques was studied at length.

At the time, USAF tactics dictated a four-aircraft, 'Welded-Wing' formation. It was a configuration designed for combat with machine guns, with two aircraft serving as shooters, and two wingmen preventing adversaries from getting in close enough to attack the leaders. In Vietnam though, the enemy primarily used missiles. A MIG could launch a tailshot from a mile back. Additionally, the Welded Wing was unwieldy, taking as long as 30 seconds to turn 180 degrees. As Vietnam veterans began to filter into the USAF FWS and other training institutions, tactics began to change. The combat veterans established ways to turn the Welded Wing faster; they developed a two-aircraft 'fluid two' formation. Significantly, Aggressor programs slowly took shape, with FWS instructors using NAVY A-4s to simulate MIG 17s. Dissimilar tactics against T-38, F-5, A-4, F-102, F-106, A-7, F-104, and F-8 were introduced. I managed to fly backseat in all these aircraft during FWS sorties. Later an Aggressor squadron was formed and specialised in enemy air tactics.

Vietnamese air defence developments also needed to be countered; their detection capabilities and tactics had been developed and were becoming very successful. RADAR detection using intermittent RADAR site transmissions (to negate the anti-radiation missile threat) and triangulation from RADAR sites were perfected. SAM RADAR, use of paired RADAR unit tracking (one in elevation the other in range) and with optical tracking fallback were many of the challenges. USAF EW and CHAFF were timely developments for all platforms. SAM evasion

manoeuvres became a skilled and successful technique. Tactical formation sizes, layout and manoeuvring were dramatically revised; tactical formations were tending towards more fluid two combat pair four-ships; spacing was adjusted to enable better lookout capability; a more fluid formation dynamic was accepted and enabled more efficient lookout by all formation members. These all provided a degree of self-protection to the formation.

Conducting Air Combat Manoeuvring (ACM) required new techniques and communications. Callsign discipline relaxed, and highly descriptive 'verbal diarrhoea' of what one was doing and thought, was replaced with crisp, short SOP phraseology:

- ENGAGED - 'I'm committed to my attack; you are to support me'
- IN/OFF - 'I'm about to commit/I'm repositioning'
- SLICE BACK LEFT/RIGHT - 'Turn back into fight nose low - the fight is Low L/R'
- PITCH BACK LEFT/RIGHT - 'Turn back into fight nose high - the fight is High L/R'
- COME BACK LEFT/RIGHT - 'Turn back into fight nose level - the fight is L/R'
- CLEAR - 'I see you; you have no threats - I'm (clock code) - High/Low'
- EXTEND (HEADING) - 'Regain energy, standby to pitch back L/R/disengage'

Aircraft fatigue was always a concern to me as the F-4E had no fatigue monitoring system. Pilot reporting was not reliable; eg, I physically pushed against an experienced FWS instructor as he pulled into a sustained 10G turn; during RTB he asked me to reset the G-meter and he applied 6G! He was pissed when I wrote the aircraft up as 'Overstressed' - the only proof being my back-seat G-meter recording 10G!

We practiced conventional bombing, rocketry and gunnery day and night on a scored range or tactical range targets across the Nellis AFB range complex. High Explosive (HE) weapons (low and high drag) tactical strikes were also practiced day and night against marked targets and simulated runways, vehicle convoys and infrastructure. Nellis AFB Range Complex visual and radar navigation was used to approach the target area. Dissimilar aircraft and SAM/AAA threats were always employed. Tactical reconnaissance using fast Forward Air Control (FAC) procedures were honed. Slow FAC using low level target marking from a distance was explored. Our training weapons were BDU-33 practice bombs, 2.75" rockets and 20 mm cannon on basic day and night training. The tactical weapons employed were HE smart (laser and electro-optical guided) and HE ballistic (high and low drag) bombs. We also trained with air-to-ground missiles, rocketry, and anti-radiation missiles.

Barry Schulz in front of the YA-7E

Whilst on exchange, I flew the prototype YA-7E for evaluation, tasked by RAAF Washington. My three front-seat sorties included navigation and multiple bombing runs. The aircraft's next generation weapons delivery capability was impressive.

We regularly practised operations in a hostile EW and SAM environment, training against ground radar, SAM, and AAA, using Radar Homing and Warning (RHAW) equipment. By employing AGM-45 SHRIKE missiles, radar emitters could be identified and engaged. However, if the SAM/AAA radars were used intermittently and/or in concert, they could lure the fighter into the 'Valley of Death' with no escape. An electronic warfare range was established in the Caliente Valley north of Nellis AFB. This range was active during all training

periods so pilots were always familiar with threat signals and tactical requirements. Soviet SAM and AAA radar signals were generated and SAM launch simulators gave visual reality to the scenario. Use of chaff and flares was simulated during all sorties and air to air refuelling was integrated into instructor currency requirements.

Because of our foreign status, NOFORN intelligence criteria potentially restricted exchange instructors performing our duties in all FWS roles. However, at squadron level, we were privy to all the necessary information to be effective instructors. Although we were excluded from highly classified briefings, we were later briefed on them or were able to listen to most briefings by means of access 'back stage' from my office! It was an unfortunate situation but fortunately, the squadron chose to turn a blind eye! In 1974 I attended the USN 'TOPGUN' school as an academic student, flying in the backseat of T-38, F-5, and A-4 aircraft with a USN instructor during dissimilar air combat training.

Weekend 'cross country' flights were always encouraged; of many, two of my more memorable flights were to RCAF Base COLD LAKE, Canada; during the first in 1973 our 4-ship F-4E formation was denied crossing the Canadian border from USAF MALMSTROM AFB, Montana. Ever cooperative, the RCAF flew down and picked us up in a mix of F-104G and T-33 aircraft and ferried us to COLD LAKE. Later that night, the USAF TAC Command Post ordered us to RTB immediately - our beer-charged response was not appreciated! On return to MALMSTROM AFB (front seat F-104 - sweet aircraft!), our F-4Es were gone; They were already in Israel on Alert 3! We were rescued by a fleet of USAF T-39 aircraft. On the second trip in 1974, I had Dr Graham Moller (NELLIS AFB F-111 Flight Surgeon) in the back seat. We went from a 40^{o}C high desert to a -20^{o}C snowstorm which forced me take two GCAs to find the runway. During engine start two days later, hydraulic fluid from cold-damaged seals covered the tarmac (wondered why all the F-104s were hangered!). We were rescued a week later, however in the interim, I got to fly a few F-104 range sorties. We returned via HILL AFB and a low-level tour along the Grand Canyon. We were met by the wing commander who was up the F-4 ladder before we could move - 'Schulz, don't ever break one of my aeroplanes again' (with a wide grin)!

Another cross country was to ANDREWS AFB, Washington DC. The RAF exchange pilot and I flew to ANDREWS for a duty 'refreshments' pick-up from the embassy suppliers. We managed to squeeze 13 dozen of the best wines into the ex-napalm tank travel pods, causing many bug-eyed troops when we unloaded the booty on return! Sadly, an elected Australian Labor government saw the loss of this most valuable FWS exchange posting at the end of 1974. The post was later re-established elsewhere flying A-7 and F-15 aircraft.

WGCDR B M Schulz, AFC RAAF, 1963 to 1998
Barry completed operational tours on Sabre and Mirage aircraft at 76 and 3 SQNs, followed by RAAF Fighter Combat Instructor (FCI) course in 1968. He had Mirage operational tours at 3 SQN, 2 Operational Conversion Unit, 75 SQN and USAF exchange flying Cessna O-2A aircraft as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) and FCI in Vietnam. He then flew F-4E fighters as an FCI at the USAF Fighter Weapons Instructor School (NELLIS AFB, Las Vegas Nevada) then attended the USN Top Gun school at NAS MIRAMAR, California. This was followed by a range of staff appointments and attending the RAAF Advanced Staff Course first as a student and then on directing staff. He completed F/A-18 fighter training in June 1988, followed by more staff appointments. Barry retired on 7 December 1998, having served in the RAAF for 35 years.

Here's Mud in your Eye!

From John 'Sandy' Main (with Ted's permission)

Scene: Vietnam, late 1969, with 9 Sqn Iroquois in full swing supporting the Australian Task Force in Nui Dat. The Task Force was commanded by an Australian Army brigadier, a very eager and enthusiastic sort of chap who was very decisive and energetic; he always knew exactly what needed to be done.

The brigadier always had his own dedicated aircraft, callsign 'Albatross 05', which conveyed him around the perimeter of the Australian-allocated province of Phuoc Tuy, and to the various fire support bases. One day, after copious rainfall, the crew of a pilot officer (aircraft captain) and Flying Officer Ted Bach (co-pilot) were flying Albatross 05, brigadier on board, into a fire support base in the north of the province. They were making an approach into a deep-grass area on the perimeter of the FSB, with Ted flying and the brigadier watching him. Standing to attention on the perimeter were a hapless 2nd Lieutenant, with a salute, and some troops awaiting the brig's arrival. Before the aircraft had landed, the brigadier was out of his seat and standing in the open doorway, eager to depart. Just as Ted was settling the aircraft down from a 6ft hover, the brigadier decided he could jump from there; unfortunately, just as he started to exit, the crewie yelled to Ted 'pull up, pull up, tree stump!' The subsequent manoeuvre upended the brigadier into a free fall from whence he landed face first in a large mud patch, uniform and all. He got up, with the lieutenant trying to wipe his face with a handkerchief, and the troops standing around aghast at the spectacle, with muddy water still flying around everywhere from the rotor wash.

In the aircraft, the language was also flying around, but it was nobody's fault but the Brigadier's. After Ted had finally landed the helo, the muddy apparition of the brigadier walked across to Ted's window, with Ted bracing himself for a right royal verbal kick in the backside. Instead, this was what he got: 'Sorry son, I was a bit hasty there; my fault. Lose no sleep over it.' In retrospect, a hilarious incident, showing humility and an acceptance of responsibility; characteristics often sorely lacking these days.

Passage to Butterworth, 1965

From John Clarkson

When I received the last issue of 'SITREP' I noted that one of the articles was about the ferry flight to Butterworth in the RAAF 707s. This brought back memories for me; on Monday 15th September, it was sixty years exactly since my arrival in Butterworth! I was posted to No 78 Wing, which consisted of 478 SQN, 77 SQN and 3 SQN.

Qantas still had a charter contract with the Defence Force, but during 1965 nearly all the Qantas 707 charters were taken by Army troops going to Saigon. The charter flights from Sydney to Butterworth and return were still the responsibility of Qantas, but as they did not have any

B707s to spare, they wet-leased an aircraft from Ansett. This aircraft had an Ansett flight crew and a Qantas cabin crew. Let me describe how this 30-hour flight panned out.

On Saturday 11th September 1965, we left Brisbane by train to Sydney, arriving there at about 8.30am on Sunday 12th September. We had two nights in a two or three star hotel, then we were taken to Sydney Airport on Tuesday 14th September, where we boarded a DC6-B aircraft, which was in Ansett colours. Upon boarding, we noticed that the entire aircraft was configured for economy class.

The aircraft departed Sydney at about 12.30pm local time. We flew from Sydney to Adelaide where we picked up a few more passengers, also headed for Butterworth. I recall that the aircraft had a few minor unserviceabilities which were rectified prior to departing Adelaide for Perth. At Perth, we collected more passengers bound for Butterworth, rectified a few more minor unserviceabilities and departed for our next sector - from Perth to Cocos Island.

As the Indonesian Confrontation was still in full swing, no Australian commercial or military aircraft were allowed to over-fly Indonesia. Maintaining the pattern, prior to departing Cocos Island, some more unserviceabilities were addressed. After an hour or two, we left Cocos Island en route to Butterworth. Due to the airspace restrictions in place during Confrontation, the aircraft had to fly out over the ocean until it was far north of the northern tip of Indonesia, then fly in a wide arc prior to tracking southward toward Butterworth. We eventually landed at Butterworth at about 8.00pm local time.

For some reason, I don't know why, although most DC6-B aircraft were pressurised to some extent, all of our flying in this aircraft was at 7,500 feet and from my memory, the aircraft didn't feel as though it was pressurised. For the whole 30 or so hours, it just didn't feel comfortable at all. Also consider, by the time we left Perth, every seat in the aircraft was occupied, either by members or their wives and young children. On arrival in Butterworth, we were all transported in a fleet of busses to the RAAF hostel on Penang Island and fed a very late dinner.

Thankfully, our return trip was very smooth. We departed Penang exactly three years to the day from our arrival! We flew from Penang to Singapore by Malaysian Airlines Focker Friendship, and then by British Airways, (then known as BOAC) B707, from Singapore to Darwin to Brisbane.

Our aircraft on the ground at Cocos Island

Gone but not Forgotten

From the 466SQN RAAF Assn Facebook page, via Christopher Beazley, author unknown

Airfield

The biting wind long forgotten,
Why should we remember?
Control tower - it's job long since done,
A monument to another time,
Why should we remember?

Runway - weed strewn and unwanted,
Why should we care?
Its life blood long since gone,
The life which was mostly death,
Why should we care?

Nissen hut empty and cold,
And nobody wants to know,
Broken glass replaced broken hearts,
An uneasy silence where death prevailed,
And nobody wants to know.

Old man stands awhile at runways end,
His eyes tell so many things,
Tired old man - his spirit of youth long since gone,
Destroyed by events so long ago,
To him like yesterday,

Wipes away a tear - the memory all too clear,
And now his life almost done,
He returns one last time because he remembers,
He cares,
He knows.

Defence Education: A New Flight Path for Vocational Learning Across the ADF

From Margaret Ogston

In the high-tempo, mission-focused environment of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), continuous professional development is not just desirable, it's essential. While the Defence community has long supported higher education through university partnerships and scholarships, an equally critical opportunity remains underdeveloped. That is vocational education for lifelong learners who don't necessarily want or need, a university degree.

As military roles evolve with emerging technologies, complex logistics, cyber operations, and humanitarian deployments, Defence must expand its education model to accommodate practical, career-relevant, and transferable learning. A well-structured Defence Vocational Education Service (DVES), embedded across the tri-services; Army, Navy, and Air Force, could provide this crucial pathway.

Why Vocational Education?
Vocational Education and Training (VET) prepares individuals for specific trades, crafts, and careers at various levels, from certificate qualifications to advanced diplomas. It focuses on hands-on learning, practical competencies, and workforce-ready skills, which align perfectly with many military roles and post-service employment pathways.

While some ADF members pursue university studies through the Defence Assistance Study Scheme (DASS) or the Defence University Sponsorship (DUS), these programs aren't always suited to:

- Technicians, tradespeople, and operational personnel;
- Reservists or early-career staff balancing work and family life;
- Those seeking short courses or micro-credentials for upskilling; or
- Veterans preparing for transition to civilian life.

A Defence-led vocational education initiative would recognise these needs while reinforcing Defence's commitment to lifelong learning, staff development, and national workforce mobility.

A Simple and Scalable Model
Setting up a DVES need not be complex. Defence already possesses the foundational infrastructure to deliver vocational learning effectively:

1. Training Facilities and RTO Status Many Defence schools, like the Army Logistic Training Centre or the RAAF School of Technical Training, already operate with Registered Training Organisation (RTO) accreditation. This means Defence can deliver, assess, and certify VET qualifications internally.
2. Tri-Service Learning Hubs Creating joint education hubs on major bases, modelled on the successful Defence Learning Branches, would enable shared access to learning advisors, course materials, and industry-certified trainers.
3. Flexible Delivery Models Leveraging hybrid models, face-to-face workshops, online learning platforms, and mobile training units, would allow service members to study around deployment schedules and operational demands.
4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) ADF members acquire significant expertise through service, much of which can be mapped to national competencies. An efficient RPL framework would convert Defence-acquired skills into formal qualifications with minimal bureaucracy.

What Could Be Offered?
A Defence Vocational Education Service could offer qualifications aligned to Defence and post-Defence careers, such as:

- Certificate III/IV in Leadership and Management
- Certificate IV in Cyber Security
- Certificate III in Aviation (Remote Pilot)
- Diploma of Logistics
- Micro-credentials in Project Management, AI (Artificial Intelligence), Software and Hardware.

Short Courses in such offerings would not only upskill current personnel but also enhance Defence readiness, support transitioning members, and retain talent by offering visible career progression pathways. Many of these courses can be offered online for convenience.

Lifelong Learning, Mission Ready
Incorporating a vocational stream into Defence education strategy isn't just about qualifications, it's about empowering individuals and ultimately Defence. It fosters a culture of growth, keeps people engaged, and provides a sense of direction beyond rank or posting. In an era where Defence is competing for talent in a tight labour market, a DVES would also demonstrate to potential recruits and serving members that the ADF is a place where careers are built, not just served.

The Way Forward
A Defence Vocational Education Service could begin with a pilot program at one or two major bases, targeting in-demand technology, trade and leadership areas. With collaboration between the Australian Defence College, existing RTO units, and external education partners, a full rollout could follow within 12–24 months. With strong command backing, streamlined enrolment processes, and targeted communications, vocational education could soon sit alongside university programs as a respected, accessible and strategic learning pathway for all ADF personnel.

Time to Taxi for Take-off?
The Defence Force has the expertise, facilities, and operational need to make vocational education a core pillar of professional development. Establishing a Defence Vocational Education Service would be a powerful and practical way to equip service members with lifelong skills, enhance Defence capability, and smoother transitions to life after uniform. It's time for Defence education to embrace a broader runway, for all who wish to fly, not just those seeking a university runway.

Commemorative Plaque Dedication, National Vietnam Veterans Museum – Phillip Island Victoria

From Col Coyne, President No. 37 Squadron (RAAF) Association

Following on from the HQRIC Det 'S'/Operation Babylift event in Canberra on 23 July this year, the 37 SQN [RAAF] Association, in conjunction with the National Vietnam Veterans Museum [NVVM] at Phillip Island Victoria, performed another memorial plaque dedication commemorating 50 years since the deployment of HQRIC Det 'S', which incorporated Operation Babylift.

Approximately 40 attendees included former 37SQN aircrew, adopted Vietnamese orphans and their family members, representatives from the Vietnamese community and Melbourne RAAFA division. Due to inclement weather the plaque was unveiled inside with the ceremony presided

over the by Mr Bob Elworthy, the secretary of the museum. Col Coyne, President of the 37SQN Association, provided a brief overview of RAAF C-130 operations since the arrival of the first C-130A on 13 December 1958, 57 years ago, then providing attendees with the purpose of the plaque dedication, remembering the 185 RAAF personnel, 8 Hercules from RAAF Richmond and 3 Dakota transport aircraft from TSF RAAF Butterworth to Saigon in March / April 1975.

The plaque will be installed on a commemorative stone within the Garden of Remembrance at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum. Following on from the ceremony attendees, including the adoptees and family members, were provided the opportunity to enter the flight deck of the C-130A nose section currently under refurbishment, the first time they had been in a Hercules since they were uplifted on either the 4th or 17th April 1975. Obviously, it was a very emotional experience to be in a Hercules with some of the aircrew members who flew them out 50 years ago.

This gathering, where attendees reflected on the significance of the day and the lasting impact of Operation Babylift on the Vietnamese community in Australia, was a fitting event to bring to a close the commemoration of this historical AF event from 50 years ago. The 37SQN Association has been privileged to assist in facilitating these events in conjunction with the AWM Canberra and National Vietnam Veterans Museum, Phillip Island, VIC.

Hercules Fleet Clocks 170,000 Flying Hours

From www.defence.gov.au/news-events, author, Flight Lieutenant Madeleine Magee

In September 2025, 37 Squadron's C-130J Hercules fleet surpassed 170,000 flying hours, marking a significant milestone in the squadron's history of delivering tactical airlift capability to the Australian Defence Force and beyond. Introduced in 1999, the C-130J brought enhanced range, payload and avionics to the fleet. With its ability to operate from unsurfaced airfields and deliver precision airlift in complex environments, the C-130J has become a cornerstone of Defence capability.

A 37 Squadron C-130J Hercules taxis onto the RAAF Base Richmond apron after a flight that marked 170,000 cumulative flying hours in the C-130J for the squadron.
Photo: Leading Aircraftwoman Maddison Scott

37 Squadron pilot Flight Lieutenant David Campbell spoke about the significance of flying the aircraft's 170,000th hour. 'It was great to see that the milestone ticked over during a sortie very typical of C-130J operations – a resupply mission to Port Moresby in support of [Exercise] Olgeta Warrior,' Flight Lieutenant Campbell said. 'It was a good opportunity to reflect on not just the flying hour milestone, but the immense contribution behind the scenes by our maintenance, logistics and operations personnel to keep the aircraft flying all these years, which would be many multiples of the flying hour total.'

Aircrew and maintenance personnel from 37 Squadron mark 170,000 flying hours in Hercules C-130Js.

From tactical resupply and airborne operations to aeromedical evacuation and humanitarian relief, the aircraft has proven its versatility across thousands of missions, consolidating its role as the backbone of Australia's

tactical airlift capability from its home at RAAF Base Richmond. The fleet is expected to remain in service into the 2030s, when it will be replaced with a new fleet of C-130s under Project AIR 7404, ensuring Australia maintains a robust tactical airlift capability.

The squadron is also celebrating the cumulative 870,000 flying hours flown by 36 Squadron and 37 Squadron across the C-130 variants. Commanding Officer 37 Squadron, Wing Commander Dianne Bell, emphasised how important the milestones were to the squadron. 'These significant milestones create an opportunity to stop and reflect on what the C-130 capability has safely delivered both domestically and globally over decades, and what it needs to be prepared for in the future,' Wing Commander Bell said.

Notable operations, exercises and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts include:

- Middle East operations, including: Slipper, Bastille, Falconer, Catalyst, Highroad, Okra, Accordion.
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, including: 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Queensland floods, Cyclone Yasi, 2019-20 bushfires, 2022 Tongan volcanic eruption.
- Operation COVID-19 Assist.
- Continued support for exercises, including: Pitch Black, Talisman Sabre, Indo-Pacific Endeavour, Cope North.

NATO Praises Nation's Support for Ukraine

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As the Royal Australian Air Force's E-7A Wedgetail aircraft prepared to leave Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) praised Australia's contribution to NATO's Support and Assistance to Ukraine (NSATU).

Flight Lieutenant Rhett Allen, left, Corporal Jonathan Zinger and Flight Lieutenant Georgia Crean while deployed to Poland as part of the E-7A Wedgetail contingent.
Story and photos by Lieutenant Commander John A Thompson.

Since July, the aircraft and its crew – operating out of Poland – have been tasked with more than 45 operational missions, with many resulting in the aircraft being scrambled to provide operational air battle management. Its efforts have been focused on supporting NATO efforts to

secure the humanitarian and military assistance for Ukraine, in particular the logistics hubs and ensuring Ukraine receives the assistance provided by Australia and other international partners. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte told journalists in Brussels that he highly valued the relationship with Australia. 'Let's be absolutely clear on this: Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Republic of Korea – in NATO parlance, the IP4 or the Indo-Pacific Four – we work very closely with them because we acknowledge that the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific cannot be seen as two separate theatres,' Mr Rutte said. 'So we have to stand ready. We have to work together. We have to train together…this very practical cooperation is really crucial.'

Australia's Military Representative to NATO Air Vice-Marshal Di Turton, centre, addresses media with members of the E-7A contingent at Melsbroek Airbase in Brussels, Belgium.

Australia's Military Representative to NATO, Air Vice-Marshal Di Turton, said the deployment of the E-7A Wedgetail had reinforced Australia's commitment to standing against Russia's illegal and immoral war. 'It has also enabled us to demonstrate our interoperability and ability to deploy at range and speed a highly effective capability anywhere in the world,' Air Vice-Marshal Turton said.

The Wedgetail combines long-range surveillance radar, secondary radar as well as voice and data communications systems to provide an airborne early warning and control platform. During a standard mission, the E-7A Wedgetail can cover more than four million square kilometres, an area the size of almost half of Europe. It is also capable of extended long-range deployment with in-flight refuelling. Wing Commander Sam Thorpe, his crew and support team of up to 90 personnel ensured the mission was a success, with valuable lessons to take home. 'We've been able to refine our procedures for ground alert and integrated air and missile defence given we've been in an environment where there's a real threat,' Wing Commander Thorpe said. It's enabled us to look at how we can refine our team, fuel management and our ground service equipment to be able to maximise the value we get from the aircraft.'

With the aircraft preparing to leave, the crew were looking forward to heading home. Wedgetail pilot Flight Lieutenant Georgia Crean, originally from the Sunshine Coast, said it had been a highlight being deployed to Europe and working with Australia's NATO partners. 'The thing that this deployment has taught me is that the training that I have received at home has well prepared us for the environment here,' Flight Lieutenant Crean said. 'It has been a challenge but

nothing that we haven't been able to overcome.' Mission commander Flight Lieutenant Rhett Allen, originally from Wangaratta in Victoria, said he was lucky to be able to fly on the most advanced platform of its type in the world. 'We've proven ourselves in multiple parts around the world – it's survivable and we can deliver any task that is given to us,' Flight Lieutenant Allen said. Avionic technician Corporal Jonathan Zingle, originally from Penrith in NSW, said working with the NATO ground forces had been a highlight. 'I've thoroughly enjoyed being here, working with NATO and integrating their systems with the E-7s so that there is seamless communication between what we're doing and the information that we're passing on to our partners,' Corporal Zingle said.

Australia's Ambassador to Belgium, General (retd) Angus Campbell, said the Wedgetail crew left with their heads held high. 'The opportunity to be here in Europe to assist as a partner with NATO over the last three months has been extremely valuable for our aircrew, maintenance teams and the planners who formed the capability,' General Campbell said. 'This contribution has been deeply appreciated by NATO.' Australia has committed more than $1.5 billion in support to Ukraine to fight for its sovereignty and territorial integrity against Russian aggression.

Crew of the Royal Australian Air Force E-7A Wedgetail, deployed with NATO, prepare to depart Melsbroek Airbase in Brussels, Belgium.

Butterworth Charter Story stirs response

From Tony Baker RAAF Support Unit Singapore (RAAFSUTG) SNCO I/C Movement Control

Reference the *Butterworth Charters Adventures* story from last issue. Just letting you know some of the flights stop off at Singapore to collect Service personnel for returning to Australia.

Editor: This sounds like a dream job for an Air Mover!

Just Another Day at the Office

From Ken Mitchell DFC, DFC (US), AM (US); Vietnam FAC

This is an excerpt from Ken's autobiography and describes the role of RAAF Forward Air Controllers (FAC) attached to the USAF supporting the US Army in Vietnam, 1969-70.

I was airborne out of Lai Khe on a VR mission when I heard a call for help on the command frequency. A US advisor and a company of Civilian Irregular Defence Group troops (Montagnard tribesmen formed into paramilitary units) were in contact with a battalion size North Vietnamese Army (NVA) force. I arrived at hight speed over the grid reference to see from the explosions, smoke and dust that the contact was continuing. I called the commander to throw smoke so I could identify him, and two blooms of different colours came about 150 metres apart. Confirming with the commander which colour he had thrown, I immediately rolled in and placed a brace of rockets onto the bogus smoke. The NVA were now aware I was on the scene! This was a common ploy used by the enemy to confuse and delay fire support, but this day it failed.

USAF OV-10 Bronco firing a rocket. This was the aircraft type flown by Ken when attached to the USAF in Vietnam.

The US advisor also advised that I was taking ground fire every time I made a pass. I ordered TACAIR (tactical air support fighters), gunships and artillery as soon as possible to provide fire support to the embattled company. The artillery was always the most responsive in these situations. I brought the fire of two batteries of 105 howitzers to within a hundred metres of the company's front, a battery of 155 howitzers at 200 metres and a battery of eight-inch guns at 300 to 400 metres. Because of the number of Fire Support Bases (FSB) at our disposal in our AO, it was almost always possible to select a parallel gun target (GT) line. In this case I had perfectly parallel GT lines.

The gun crew of a 105mm M2A2 Howitzer of 101 Field Battery Royal Australian Artillery (RAA) prepares to re-load, Phuoc Tuy Province, Vietnam July 1969.

At this time the gunships arrived and I ordered them to place their ordnance fifty metres to the friendlies front, flying parallel to the GT line. I marked the target with rockets and the gunships hosed the area to the friendlies

front with rockets and mini-guns. The US advisor advised that he had taken casualties, both KIA and WIA, and called for dust-off choppers. They arrived as the TACAIR arrived. I got the dust-off choppers to approach from the south and land in a clearing where they proceeded to load the casualties.

I briefed the fighters, giving them an attack heading which was parallel to the artillery GT lines I had been using. I then lifted the gunships and 105 batteries and shifted the 155 and eight-inch batteries 200 metres north, ensuring that the flight leader knew he was flying parallel to and south of the artillery and that I was going to keep it firing during the air strike. The flight leader replied, 'No sweat, Sidewinder.' What a sight! I felt like I was conducting an orchestra; controlling and coordinating tremendous amounts of varied fire support, on three different radio nets, all working at the same time onto the enemy.

The fighters dropped 750-pound high drag bombs, napalm and strafed with cannon. I continued to mark enemy locations with rockets throughout the contact. My yank mate on the ground called saying I was still taking ground fire every time I made a pass. I remember thinking 'Good, that means I am on target.' During the contact I noticed the brigade commander's command and control (C2) chopper slot into my six o'clock and follow me around. I didn't have time to talk to him during the battle, but after about 30 minutes I was able to call him up to see if he wanted to add anything to proceedings. He replied, 'Negative you have it under control, but I have scrambled the ready reserve company to act as a blocking force to the west.' 'Roger that', I replied.

When the dust settled, contact had been broken off by the NVA, the friendly casualties had been evacuated and the US advisor on the ground announced he owed me a beer or three! This was one of the most satisfying missions I flew in Vietnam.

RAAF Radar Station Bombed & Strafed - by the US Army Air Force!

19 November 1943

From SQNLDR (Ret'd) Jim Stewart, Hon historian, 41WG

The hapless unit, 332 RS (LWAW Mk 1), Sio Island, New Guinea - was bombed and strafed by an A-20 '*Havoc*' and a B-25 '*Mitchell*' of the US Army Air Force. Fortunately, (perhaps due to the USAAF aircrews having a level of marksmanship equal to their map reading skill and Intel) there were no casualties and no damage to equipment.

Douglas A-20 'Havoc' Medium Bomber
US Army Air Force

North American B-25 'Mitchell' Medium Bomber
US Army Air Force

A Century of Service, a Lifetime of Memories

Reprinted with permission from CONTACT Magazine

The roar of jet engines, the thrill of aerial displays and a century of proud history came together at RAAF Base Richmond during its 100th anniversary airshow on September 27 and 28, 2025. Among the thousands of visitors were four very special guests, veterans whose service spans generations of Air Force operations. One of them was former World War 2 Lancaster wireless operator, Roy Taylor, who embodied the courage, skill and dedication that have long defined RAAF personnel. The 102-year-old stood shoulder-to-shoulder with two former Air Force C-130 Hercules loadmasters: 93-year-old Herman 'Dave' Jones, and 82-year-old Bob Pearman. Each represented decades of expertise in tactical airlift and humanitarian operations within Australia, the South Pacific Region and around the world.

L -R: RAAF veterans Cole Coyne, Bob Pearman, Stue Hablethwaite with his service dog, Roy Taylor and Herman 'Dave' Jones in front of a 100 Squadron CAC Wirraway at the RAAF Richmond Airshow.

For these veterans, returning to Richmond was more than a visit, it was a powerful journey back in time. Walking the familiar tarmac surrounded by modern jets and the next generation of Air Force aviators, they reflected on eras when 36 and 37 Squadrons' C-130 Hercules fleet carried Australia's transport and disaster-relief missions across the globe. Mr Taylor recalled operating and maintaining airborne communications in a very different technological age. 'In those days, we didn't have the sophisticated digital systems of today,' he said. 'Every flight demanded your full attention. Every mission was a test of trust between crew members.'

The loadmasters shared their own memories of coordinating complex airdrops, ensuring critical supplies reached remote locations, and working shoulder-to-shoulder with crews under challenging and often arduous conditions. 'Being back here at Richmond reminds us of the close-knit crews, teamwork and the sense of purpose that kept us going,' Mr Pearman said. Between them, they flew more than 35,000 hours in their respective C-130A, E, H and J-30 model Hercules

and contributed to the Richmond and Windsor communities for more than 60 years. 'It wasn't just about moving cargo; it was about making sure troops and communities had what they needed, no matter the conditions,' Mr Jones said. 'Seeing these aircraft fly today reminds me how proud I am to have been part of that legacy. The aircraft are incredible, but it's always been about the people – past and present – who made everything possible.'

Beyond the spectacle of roaring engines and precision flying displays, RAAF Richmond Airshow offered a living connection to the base's heritage. For younger attendees, meeting the veterans was a chance to understand the people behind the aircraft; the men and women whose skill and dedication built the Air Force's reputation. RAAF Base Richmond has stood as a cornerstone of Australia's defence capability for a century. The airshow celebrated not just its history but also the enduring bond between the base and its surrounding community. As their visit ended, the veterans looked out over the crowd of families, cadets and serving members. They saw modern jets gleaming in the sun, young aviators brimming with enthusiasm and an unbroken thread of dedication stretching from their generation to today's. The Air Force may have changed, but its heart – its people – remains the same, capturing the spirit of Richmond's proud century of service.

A minister absolutely LOVED to play golf. It had been a very bad winter and he hadn't played in months. He awoke one spring morning and the weather was perfect. The sun was shining, it had warmed up a bit, and everything was perfect for a round of golf…except one thing. It was a Sunday morning and he was to lead the church service.

But, he really wanted to play golf. He had an idea. He called the assistant minister; told him he was sick and couldn't come to church. However, the entire service with sermons was planned, written, and on his desk. All the assistant had to do was follow what the minister had written. With that done, the minister hopped in his car and drove 75 miles to a beautiful golf course where he figured no one from his church would ever see him. EXCEPT, up in heaven, St. Peter and God were watching. St. Peter was visibly upset with the minister's irreverent behaviour, lies and decision to ignore his responsibilities to his congregation. St P asked God what he was going to do. God told St. P that he'd take care of it and St. P relaxed.

The minister got up on the first tee - a 345 yd. par 4. He hit a tremendous drive, the ball bounced, rolled up onto the green and…plunk…hole-in-one! St P looked at God and said, "WHAT THE HECK?!" God looked at St P and said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it."

The minister got up on the second tee - a 410 yd. par 4. He hit an even more tremendous drive, the ball bounced, rolled up onto the green and…plunk…hole-in-one! St P looked at God and said, "WHAT THE HECK?!" God looked at St P and said, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it."

The minister got up on the third tee - a 185 yd. par 3. He hit an eight iron. The ball arched up into the sky. It rose up into a beautiful rainbow, came down on the green, took a curve toward the hole and…plunk…hole-in-one! Now St P was really worked up. "God," he said, "You promised you'd take care of this!" God sighed and replied, "I told you I'd take care of this…now lighten up!"

Well, hole after hole after hole…every single hole was a hole-in-one. After all 18 holes, St Peter looked at God with total disdain and said, "God! What's the story?" 18 holes-in-one? He just shot the greatest round of golf in history! You said you'd take care of his lies to his assistant and his congregation!"

To which God replied, "Who's he going to tell?"

SAS Patrol Insertions by 9SQN in the Vietnam War

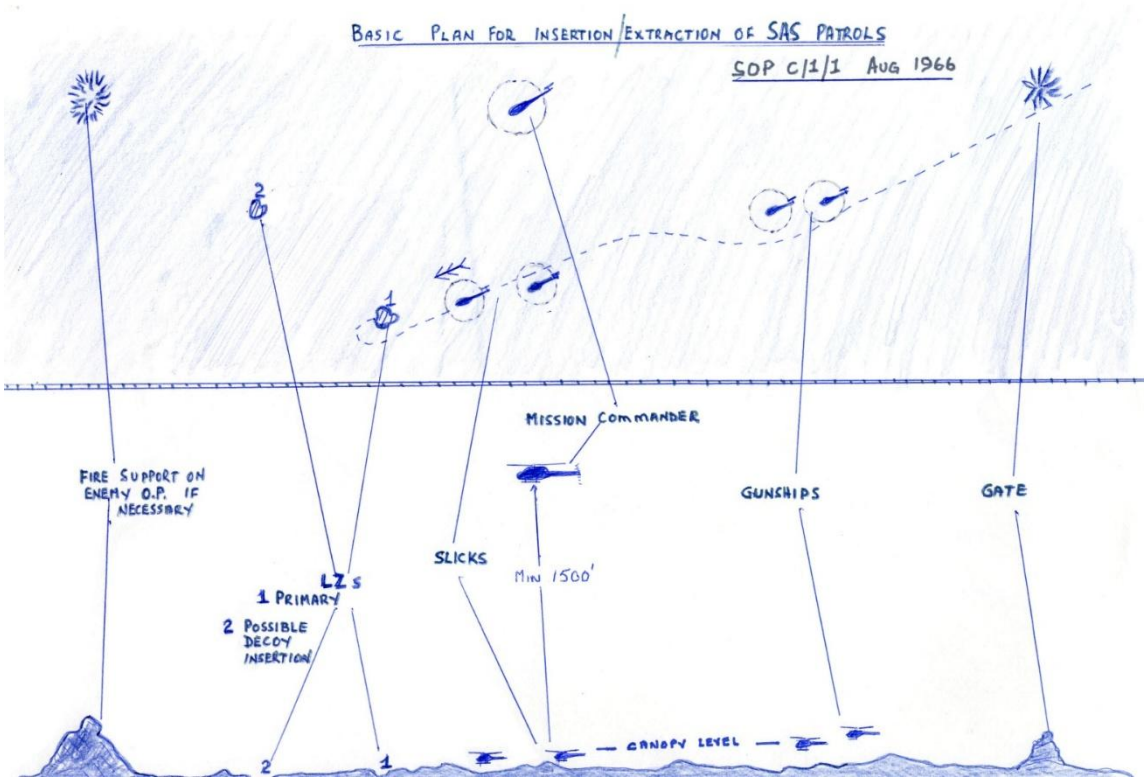
By Brian Dirou, DFC, Wing Commander RAAF (Retired)

Background

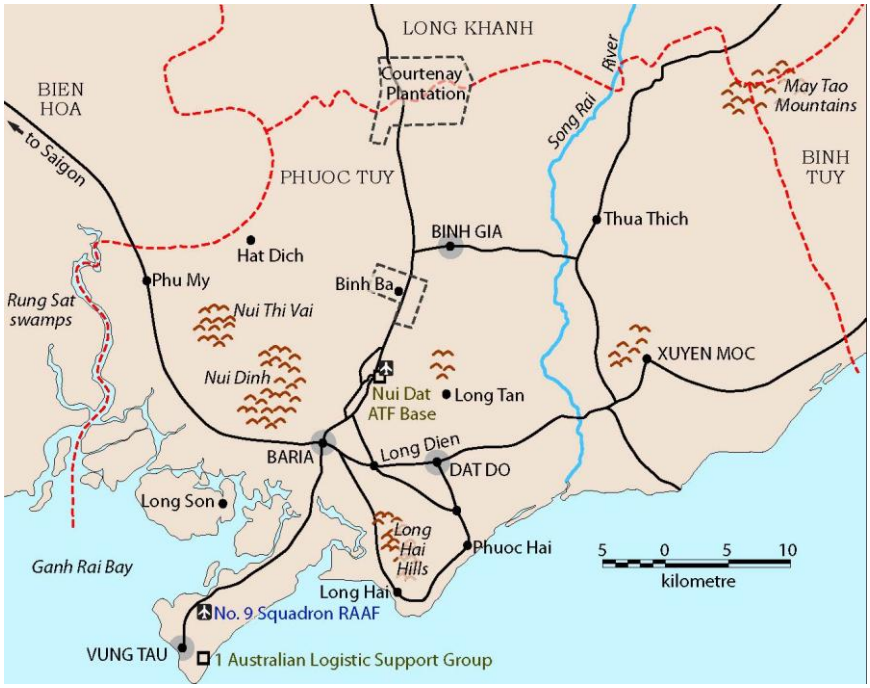
9SQN effectively began unit development in 1963 to conduct search and rescue functions at some RAAF bases with Bravo model Iroquois, helicopter operations being a relatively new role for the Royal Australian Air Force. This necessitated finding resources to establish aircraft maintenance and training functions for both technical and aircrew needs.

In 1964, the Australian Government thrust Army support upon the emergent RAAF helo component and prematurely committed an element to support counter-terrorist operations in Malaya. That small force was redirected to Vietnam War operations mid-1966. The RAAF then operated 2 Iroquois helo units, 5SQN at Canberra in Australia and 9SQN at Vung Tau in Vietnam, both of these outfits still being somewhat embryonic.

In July 1966, when 9SQN received tasks to extract SAS patrols from enemy controlled territory back to their base at Nui Dat, SAS techniques and procedures were unknown to aircraft captains. Involvement in contested extraction of SAS patrols deemed it essential that some joint operating procedures be developed. Then Wing Commander Ray Scott, the initial CO 9SQN in Vietnam, devised a procedure for insertion of SAS patrols by Iroquois as depicted in his following sketch.



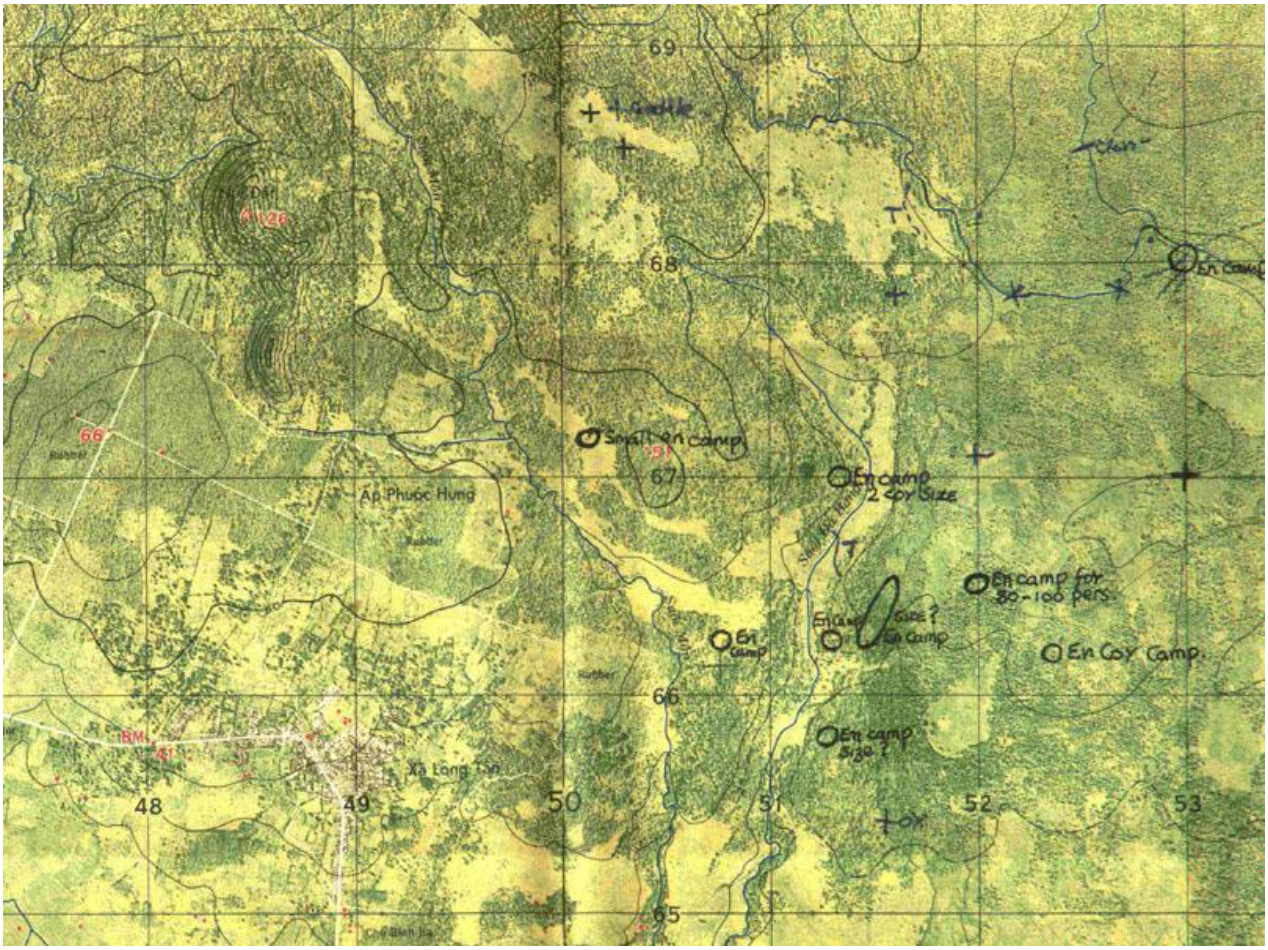
The relatively small Phuoc Tuy Province area of about 60 x 40 kilometres being the primary Area of Operations for the first Australian Task Force (1ATF) was replete with elevated features enabling observation of helo activities, which was recognised in initial procedural development. But the enemy had limited radio communications, so even if a SAS patrol insertion team was



observed leaving Nui Dat, this info could not be relayed to a suspected landing zone in a timely fashion.

Eventually, a SAS Patrol Commander would do a visual recce of his desired insertion point via an Army Aviation 'Possum' and that would be followed by the 9SQN mission leader doing a separate reconnaissance by Iroquois. These dual recces were of course a direct signal to enemy in that area that a SAS insertion was imminent.

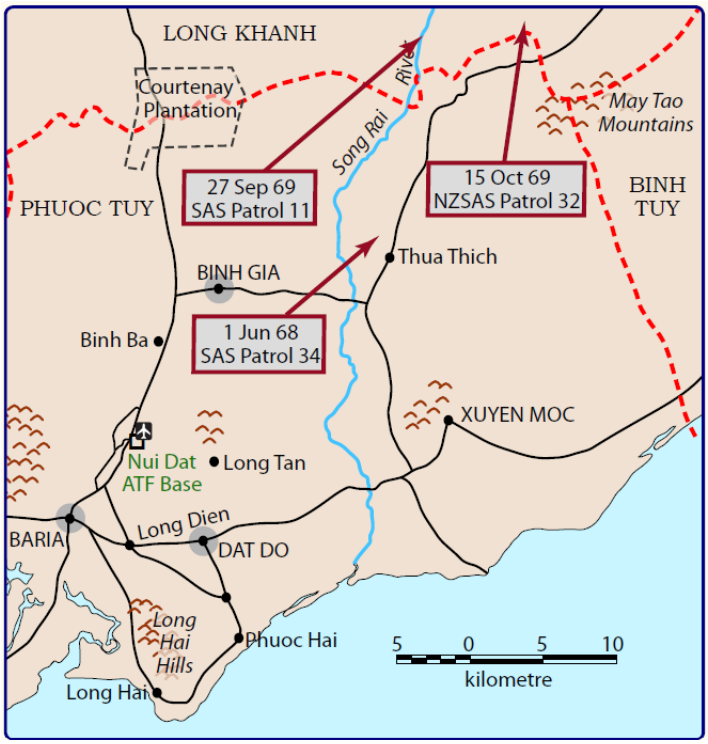
Neither of these recces was necessary as the detail on the 1:25,000 Pictomaps illustrated, which the SAS also used when patrolling, was adequate for patrol insertion planning.



In a 'War Whispers' You Tube interview, Charles Stewart of 2SAS mentioned that **on 11 out of 15 patrol insertions, they were engaged by enemy within 20 minutes of deplaning**.

This account of my personal experience on a SAS insertion:

On 01 Jun 68, I was captain of Albatross 04B for insertion of 2SAS Patrol 34 in the eastern part of our area of operations, the Patrol Commander being 2LT Dave Procopis ('Zorba'). We were walking out to the aircraft following the pre-mission briefing when our crewman, who had only recently arrived in country, mentioned: '*My first time out on one of these jobs Sir; anything special that I need to know?*' I responded: '*If we encounter opposition Jan, try to stay calm and tell me what is happening and please do not shout on the intercom*'.



So, off we went at about 50 to 100 feet above the treetops at around 80 knots, accompanied by supporting US Army gunships with our mission leader directing progress from altitude about two kilometres astern.

Bright sunlight on the raw beauty of the jungle had a soporific effect and we eventually made a gentle straight in approach toward the tree line of a large clearing perhaps 100 metres across. We were almost stationary and touching down when my peripheral vision detected movement and smoke puffs about abeam on our right. Four enemy dressed in black had popped up from behind fallen timber in the middle of the clearing and were engaging us from about 40 to 50 metres.

Several things then happened within three or four seconds. There was a shout on the intercom, the starboard door-gun began firing and I called '*Enemy on the pad, right three o'clock*' on the radio. A SAS trooper dragged Zorba back in off the left-hand skid and the other SAS guys dived to the right-hand side of the cabin and began engaging the opposition with their considerable firepower; ordnance from our supporting US Army gunships began impacting alongside us in the centre of the clearing and the Huey wanted to roll over with much of the weight now on one side. We somehow managed to stay upright and got airborne again with the SAS patrol still on board, while our supporting gunships did their bit.

After we had departed the scene of action, a somewhat apologetic voice said: '*Sorry I shouted on the intercom and didn't tell you what was happening Sir, but I thought it best to start firing*'. '*You did well Jan; you did well*'.

The enemy collectively fired up to 100 rounds from four automatic weapons at a virtually stationary Iroquois, side on at very close range, yet amazingly there were no holes in our SAS friends, aircrew or the aircraft, as we discovered after landing. But the opposition were not so lucky; at least three lay prone and motionless as we departed the clearing. Good teamwork got us out of a perilous situation, but the event demonstrated that it takes a cool head to hit an aircraft, particularly when the occupants are retaliating and adrenalin is pumping.

The primary lesson was the enemy were expecting us so our insertion procedures were flawed. Pre-insertion recces were not envisaged when procedures were first created and apparently evolved later.

Prior to about mid-1968, 9SQN Standard Operating Procedures were concise just covering standardization of essential aspects. **Up to that time, some Pilot Officers were accorded mission leader status and in my view they excelled**. As the Vietnam War rolled on, it became more or less a career stepping-stone for the ambitious and mission leader functions were assumed by unit executives and senior ranking pilots.

The insertion procedures established mid-1966 had become like The Ten Commandments. At some stage, I briefed a slight variation in gunship positioning. One of the favoured senior Flight Lieutenant pilots complained to the CO and I was directed to adhere to SOPs.

According to a unit executive, CO 9SQN in 1968/69 considered me his foremost mission leader (211 insertions/extractions overall), but I was never invited to participate in any SAS/9SQN discussions regarding standard operating procedures, if they ever eventuated!

After 16 Hotel models had been introduced and the Squadron had grown to full strength, SOPs were expanded to cover new roles. They were further broadened in 1969 after introduction of the Bushranger gunship capability, **ultimately evolving to 125 ridiculously detailed pages covering all roles**.

I had dialogue with Ray Scott over many years and visited him at his home just two weeks before he died on 10Nov16. When I mentioned to him how absurdly ponderous 9SQN SOPs became, he responded: '*Arse covering*!' Here are some of his words from previous written communication referring to 17 pages of 9SQN SAS related SOPs:
'To me these SOPs are badly written, verbose, disjointed…Radio discipline appears to be ignored…They appear to ignore the intelligence and capabilities of the enemy...In my view they are unacceptable and I would be ashamed to pass them on to anyone, particularly the Army.' – R.A. Scott, 22Mar14.

While concise SOPs are necessary to standardize unit operating practices, flexibility is essential for success in military operations. I was a disciple of the Douglas Bader dictum:
'Rules are made for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men.'

Low Level Operations

Ray Scott and myself disagreed on some aspects of low-level operations. These considerations were pertinent:

- Vulnerability of helos to groundfire was much lower than generally assumed (See HELICOPTER BATTLEFIELD SURVIVABILITY feature).
- The aiming solution for shooting at a moving helicopter is 4 dimensional including time and continually changes regarding crossing speed, apparent range and gravity drop.
- Transit speed for Bravo model Iroquois was generally kept at about 80 knots to enable station keeping with supporting US Army Bravo and Charlie model gunships.
- Transit speed for Hotel models was also ideally kept at about 80 knots (41 metres per second) to enable physical functionality of door-gunners at rear crew stations due to slipstream effects.
- Transit at 50 to 100 feet above jungle canopy was desirable to enable flaring to kill forward speed following power loss before crashing into trees and also to avoid large dead trees in low visibility.

The USAF dropped about 96,000 tons of defoliant chemicals on Phuoc Tuy Province and many big, dead or dying trees penetrated above the jungle canopy. These were often difficult to see in low visibility conditions.

A 9SQN aircraft impacted such a tree when trying to fly right on the jungle canopy. The branches of the tree broke the leg of a SAS trooper sitting on the edge of the cabin floor.

CPL John Delgado whose leg was broken when a 9SQN Iroquois collided with a dead tree at low level

So-called 'Nap of the Earth' flying is unnecessarily risky and of no significant benefit in avoiding groundfire in my opinion.

Not everybody is comfortable when flying, even some elite SAS troopers. Ideally, they should be calm but highly alert during an approach for insertion, viewing surrounds for signs of enemy activity and especially orientation when landing. Similarly for helicopter crew with door-gunners prepared for immediate response to any enemy action. **This was best achieved by minimal manoeuvring during a gentle approach to the LZ. The team was then better placed to retaliate if engaged and bug out**.

A Low-Level Insertion

I was mission leader for planned insertion of a 3SAS patrol but the weather turned bad with a low cloud base, maybe around 150 to 200 feet. I informed the Patrol Commander that we would have to cancel the mission, which drew smiles from his men who were not enthusiastic. We advised ATOLL, our tasking agency in the 1ATF Command Post (CP) accordingly. Soon after, the landline telephone in our Alert Hut near Kangaroo Pad rang and the Brigadier Task Force Commander wanted to speak with me. I explained to him that the weather prevented us from doing a normal insertion and he

responded: '*I don't care how you do it, but the patrol has to be deployed.*' I replied: '*Okay, we will try*.'

We had other tasks lined up, so then a 10-minute exercise in mental arithmetic and placing chinagraph pencil marks on a Pictomap ensued, with timings to run to the destination insertion point. There were two egg-shaped adjacent clearings separated by a narrow strip of vegetation and the desired LZ would be the first one from our approach direction. I decided we would embark the patrol in the lead aircraft, with the other four aircraft in the five-ship team tagging along behind us at low level. We had selected a gate feature to commence a timed run of maybe four minutes or about 10 kilometres, below the low cloud base to the desired clearing. At the end of the timed run, I gently turned right maybe about 60 degrees into a clearing and landed where I thought the Patrol Commander desired.

He looked at me quizzically and I nodded, but then saw something indicating it was not the preferred LZ. '*Bugger, wrong bloody pad*!', but the patrol had already disappeared into the vegetation. **We had turned about four seconds too late for the correct LZ**.

When back at Nui Dat, we informed the CP where the patrol had been inserted and they were advised on a due radio sched. A week or so later, I bumped into one of the patrol members and apologised profusely for putting them in the wrong LZ. He responded: *'Don't worry about it, we knew where we were and had to move a few hundred metres to get to our start point but that was okay.'*

I did not inform 9SQN hierarchy of this non-standard happening and explanation was not sought. On reflection, I figured we could suitably modify our insertion procedures so all aircraft in the team operated at low level to enhance SAS operational security. Most unit pilots would have revelled in the challenge of low-level visual navigation.

Epilogue

Over 2,000 days, about 5.5 years of Vietnam War operations, Australian and New Zealand SAS patrols were inserted by 9SQN Iroquois on around 1,130 occasions. Near 110 (10 percent) of these patrols were extracted in contested situations, some of them resulting from ambushes initiated by the patrols. Favourable outcomes of some perilous situations resulted from good teamwork but in my view, there was also much luck involved. No SAS patrol members or 9SQN aircraft were lost through direct enemy action during insertions/extractions, apparently persuading executives of both units that SOPs were sound. **In effect, they became dogma and change to insertion methodologies was seemingly not considered, despite repeated contested situations**.

This snippet from Page 356 of 'Phantoms of the Jungle' by David Horner:
'After almost 5 years of SAS operations, the VC had become familiar with SAS insertion techniques. Some days before an insertion there would be a reconnaissance of the proposed area of operations by a light plane or reconnaissance helicopter. Then perhaps the day before the insertion or on the day itself there might be a further reconnaissance of the area, particularly of the proposed LZ, by the patrol commander. Finally, on the day of the insertion two or three gunships and two lift helicopters would swoop into the area. And there were only a limited number of suitable LZs in any area of operations. Not surprisingly, SAS patrols continued to be contacted soon after insertion.'

It is hard to argue against success, but unnecessary pre-insertion recces alerted the enemy to prospective SAS patrol incursions. Operational security could have also been enhanced by all Iroquois involved in the insertion team operating at low level.

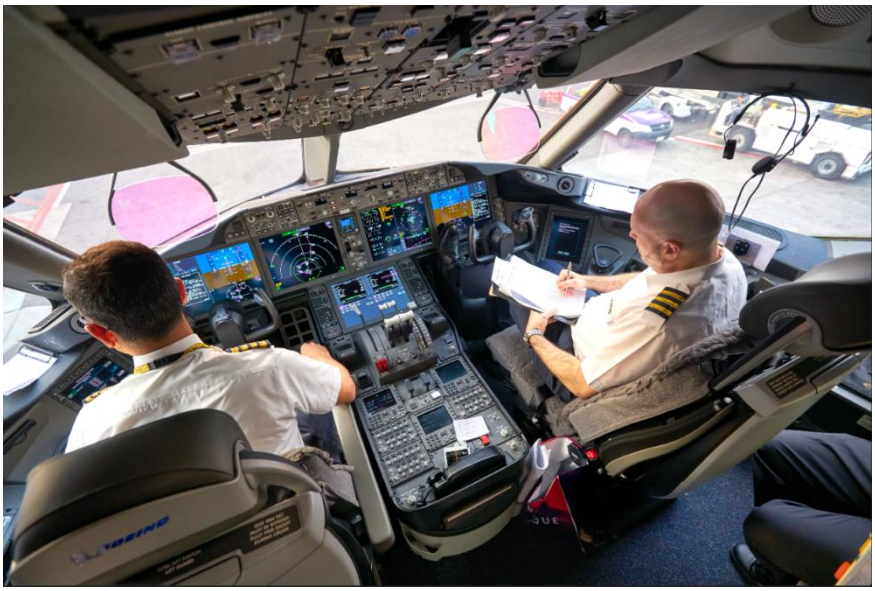
We could have done it better.

Why do Pilots use the Term 'Roger' Instead of 'Yes'?

From simpleflying.com; by Aaron Spray, Published Oct 31, 2025

One of the most iconic aviation terms that has also become a household word is 'Roger'. The word comes from early radio transmissions and the US Army Signal Corps just before the outbreak of WWI. The word persisted through the interwar period and was also adopted by the US Navy. The word rose to fame in WWII and the many subsequent movies about air battles of the conflict. As the British and US deepened their cooperation with each other during WWII, the word was soon adopted by the RAF.

Previously, the RAF's counterpart was 'Robert' or 'Robertson', which had a rather different ring. However, even being adopted by the RAF did not enable 'Roger' to survive in the phonetic alphabet in the long run after WWII, as it was supplanted by 'Romeo'. Still, pilots continue to use the word, though not in its original phonetic alphabet usage. Here is what to know about the history and meaning of 'Roger', and why it was dropped by the US Air Force, US Navy, RAF, and ICAO.



In the days of Morse Code, as well as the early days of radio communication, the letter 'R' was the shorthand for 'Received'. As radios started to replace morse code, the audio quality was frequently crackly and poor. It was easy to mishear and therefore misunderstand people. The phonetic alphabet was developed to ensure letters could be easily distinguishable over a noisy radio. In this early period, the phonetic alphabet pronunciation of 'R' was 'Roger'. This was later replaced in the NATO Phonetic Alphabet made popular by Hollywood movies with 'Romeo'. Other phonetic pronunciations or suggestions for the letter 'R' by various organizations before standardisation have included Rome, Rivoli, Roma, Robert, and Rosa. But while the phonetic alphabet changed with 'Roger' being replaced by 'Romeo', the word stuck in aviation.

The word 'yes' is a single-syllable word that could easily be mistaken for other words or otherwise lost in transmission, especially with the radios of the 1920s. It was necessary to use a clear, two-syllable word. In other words, 'yes' was not a suitable word to use, and 'Roger' was the way to say 'Received'. Additionally, 'Roger' does not mean 'yes'. In aviation speak, 'yes' is 'Affirmative.'

As stated, the word 'Roger' stands for the word 'Received'. It means 'I received and understood your last transmission'. What it doesn't mean is any intent of the pilot to carry out any instructions in that last transmission, only that the pilot understands. The word remains part of the aviation and radio tradition alongside other well-known words like 'Mayday'. The word that signifies the pilot will carry out instructions is 'Wilco', standing for 'Will comply [with your instructions]'. In aviation talk, the word replacing 'yes' is 'affirmative', while the word standing in

for 'no' is 'negative'. These words are used by civil pilots, military personnel, and even spacecraft crews and shipping. They benefit from being unambiguous and internationally understood.

In the RAF, the expression 'Roger Wilco' stands for 'Received, will cooperate' and is used to acknowledge a request or order. A popular online explanation that 'Roger' stands for 'Received Order Given, Expect Results' was popularized by David Goggins. Goggins is a motivational speaker and former Navy SEAL. It's unclear where this belief originated or where Goggins got his information.

A Long Life of Loyal Service

From www.defence.gov.au/news-events, by Corporal Jacob Joseph,3 November 2025

On October 14, Bruce Robertson, a 105-year-old Air Force World War II veteran – who was the first to detect a Japanese submarine attack on Sydney Harbour – died peacefully, surrounded by family in Sydney. He was farewelled at St Paul's Anglican Church in Castle Hill, Sydney, on October 28. Bruce's two daughters, Judy Thornton and Penelope Svarups, were presented with a folded RAAF Ensign and Airman's cap respectively, as a memento of Bruce's distinguished service.

Then-president of 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association, Bruce Robertson, during his 105th birthday celebration at Castle Hill RSL Club, NSW.
Photos: Aircraftwoman Mikaela Fernlund

He enlisted in the Air Force in 1941 and posted to 30 Squadron as a wireless radio operator the following year. Bruce was scanning for Morse code transmissions in the middle of the night, when he detected an unfamiliar signal. What Bruce heard was communication between Japanese submarines as they readied for an attack on Sydney Harbour, which would claim 22 lives.

Soon after, Bruce and 30 Squadron deployed to New Guinea, where he fought in the Battle of Milne Bay – the first defeat of Japanese land forces. His squadron provided support to Australian and Allied troops, deterring Japanese vessels. In March 1943, 30 Squadron Beaufighters led an assault on a Japanese armada carrying reinforcements across the Bismarck Sea and helped clinch a decisive victory on Australia's doorstep.

Bruce was passionate about the squadron's role in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea and wrote of the anxiety those sitting back at the Wards Strip experienced after they farewelled the Beaufighters and their precious crews. However, that anxiety changed to delight when he tuned to the Beaufighters' radio frequency. They put the signal through on a loud speaker so all could hear the Bismarck Sea battle taking place. The words '*Well done boys, let's go home*' came through. For a battle to be won in 28 minutes is incredible', Bruce said. 'In all probability, [it was] a feat never accomplished against such a large force, in war's long history.' The squadron's fighters, along with United States aircraft, sank eight transports and four destroyers.

Bruce discharged in 1946, but spent his whole life honouring the memory of those he served alongside. He was sought after for interviews and as a guest of honour at veteran and commemorative events. He regularly spoke at schools, ensuring the legacy of the past was never forgotten. Decades after the war, Bruce designed and constructed a brick memorial honouring fallen 30 Squadron personnel, who died from 1942 to 1945 in service. The memorial is in front of the RAAF Base Richmond chapel and serves to commemorate the Battle of the Bismarck Sea each year.

Bruce was the squadron's last surviving World War II veteran, who was also part of the squadron when it first formed. He was president of the 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association when he died. Wing Commander Sharyn Bolitho was the first Commanding Officer when it was reformed in 2010 at RAAF Base East Sale, and became vice president of the 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association this year. She said Bruce was a dear friend whose calibre was measured by his commitment to honouring the legacy of 30 Squadron, particularly those who sacrificed their lives during the war.

In 2022, Bruce travelled for the fourth time to RAAF Base East Sale – this time for the squadron's 80th anniversary. To mark the occasion, Bruce organised and unveiled replica plaques to those on the memorial at RAAF Base Richmond, commemorating the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. 'My most vivid and touching memory of Bruce was when he unveiled the plaque with all those names', Wing Commander Bolitho said. 'Bruce just ran his hands over the names and he said, "They are not just names, they were mates".' 'It was such a poignant moment. I had tears in my eyes, and I know everyone else there did too. It was a privilege and an honour to be your mate, Bruce. Thank you for your service.'

At the funeral, Air Vice Marshal Dave Rogers (Ret'd), Patron of 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association, passed on condolences from Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, and then delivered an Air Force eulogy. The RSL also paid tribute. Bruce was a much-loved member of the Castle Hill RSL.

Then-president of 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association, Bruce Robertson, speaks of his RAAF experience during his 105th birthday celebration.

The story of 'Harry's Café de Wheels'

From Chris Beazley via Ian Dimmock and Peter Millar

All we old timers would remember 'Harry's' with fond affection.

The story of 'Harry's Café de Wheels' goes back to the Great Depression years of the 1930s. With the world on the brink of a devastating war, an enterprising Sydneysider named Harry Edwards used a small, converted caravan to open a mobile café near the front gates of the naval dockyard at Woolloomooloo. In those days the caravan was towed by an ex-Army ambulance. Word quickly spread with Harry's pie 'n' peas and crumbed snags soon becoming a popular part of the city's nightlife – keenly sought after by sailors, soldiers, cabbies, starlets and coppers alike.

Harry operated the caravan until 1938 when it closed, due to his enlistment in the AIF. During Harry's time in the Middle East, he was nicknamed 'Tiger' owing to his boxing prowess, and the name stuck. Upon his return and demobilization in 1945, Harry realised that Sydney hadn't changed much, and it was still almost impossible to get a good late-night feed, so he reopened, and the caravan has been operating continuously ever since. His signature dish, a meat pie topped with mushy peas, mashed potato and gravy, became known as a 'Tiger'.

The café was originally simply known as 'Harry's' but the city council came up with a ruling that mobile food caravans must move a minimum of 12 inches a day. Hence the new name 'Harry's Café de Wheels'. Harry (Tiger) Edwards operated the business for a further 30 years before selling out to Alex Koronya in 1975. With Alex getting on in years, in 1988 he sold out to Michael Hannah. Michael's father, a Sydney cabbie, would take his children down to the 'Loo for a pie at Harry's. Michael recalls returning from a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1970 with his first stop on disembarking from HMAS SYDNEY being of course, Harry's. It would be another 17 years before he purchased the business.

With redevelopment of Cooper Wharf and the construction of the Fleet Base East in the early 1980s, the original caravan, which was showing its age, was forced to relocate to a new position near the Finger Wharf, close to where it now stands. A high point of the enterprise came in 1985 when the old caravan was donated to the Powerhouse Museum and, over a pie and a glass of champagne, Rear Admiral David Martin (later Governor of New South Wales – Sir David Martin) commissioned the new caravan as 'HMAS Harry's'.

As the years have passed, Harry's has become a must for visiting celebrities and sporting stars, having served the likes of Frank Sinatra, Robert Mitchum, Marlene Dietrich, Kevin Costner, Brook Shields, Olivia Newton-John, Jerry Lewis, Elton John, Kerry Packer, Sir Richard Branson and Russell Crowe. The chicken king, the late Colonel Sanders, stopped at Harry's, and enjoyed the food so much that he ate three 'pies and peas'. Rupert Murdoch had pies flown from Harry's for an Australian-themed Oscar party held in Los Angeles. In 2004 the National Trust of Australia (NSW) classified 'Harry's Café de Wheels' on its register as a quintessential Sydney icon.

In recent times, Michael Hannah franchised the business and extended it to 13 stores in New South Wales and one in Shenzhen, China. In May 2018 Tino Dees was having a pie at Harry's in

Woolloomooloo when he heard Michael was thinking of retiring and putting the business on the market. Tino jumped in and made an offer which was accepted, becoming the fourth proud owner of this business which has been closely associated with the RAN in its 80 years of operation.

Tino Dees moved to Australia from his native Germany in 2008 where he worked in the meat industry. He opened his own German butchery in 2012 which won numerous awards for sausages, hams and bacon. Under his ownership he now intends to expand Harry's to more than 100 locations. Patrons can expect a change in the menu with all types of hotdogs in addition of course to its famous meat pies which remain faithful to their traditional recipe. And does anyone remember when and why the wheels disappeared and it became known colloquially as 'Harry d' Axles'?

RAN A-4 Pilot Recalls Scoring Simulated Kill on RAAF F-111

From The Aviation Geek Club, by Dario Leone, Sep 30 2025

The magnificent Douglas A-4 Skyhawk served with the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) from 1968 until 1984, with two squadrons: VF805 and VC724. VF805 was the front-line fighter unit that served aboard the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne, while VC724 was shore-based at Naval Air Station Nowra for training and support. During that period, the aircraft on the Melbourne gave the RAN a unique capability that was central to Australian defence policy.

P. Allen (Nobby) Clark, former RAN A-4 Skyhawk pilot, recalls in the book The Skyhawk Years: A-4 Skyhawks in Australian Service 1968 – 1984 by Peter Greefield, David Prest; '[In 1979] VF805 was embarked for Exercise Kangaroo III, which was being conducted off the Queensland coast. During the early phase of the exercise, we had received a number of attacks from the F-111s but our A-4s had not been able to counter these with any effective intercepts. The successful raids on the fleet were invariably conducted at first light so I suggested to our then squadron CO, Lieutenant Commander Errol Kavanagh, that we should have two aircraft prepared on deck before first light, engines running with one aircraft on the cat ready for launch. As soon as we received intelligence a raid was inbound, we could have two aircraft airborne within a minute or so. I'm not at liberty to reveal how we discovered an inbound raid was imminent (maybe

something to do with airborne helicopters being advised to maintain a particular altitude), but Errol was immediately airborne and climbing through low broken cloud, and I followed moments later.'

'As I climbed out, and just a few miles straight ahead of the carrier, I spotted through the broken hazy cloud a very low F-111. Immediately, I rolled into a tight right-hand dive and accelerated to maximum speed, latching onto the tail of the raider. With only Sidewinder missiles on board, the A-4 was capable of over 600 knots at sea level and, assuming the F-111 was simulating a bombing attack, its speed at that stage would have been subsonic and slower than my aircraft.

'When conducting a Sidewinder attack, the indication of a successful 'lock on' is listening for a 'growl' (which can be heard through the helmet headset) from the infra-red sensor located in the nose of the missile. When the missile is launched (real or simulated), the call over the radio is "Fox 2". In this instance, just before we flew over the flightdeck, I locked on and made my Fox 2 call. Meanwhile, in the Operations Room, the Fighter Flight Ops Director was being monitored by the exercise umpire. 'The probability of achieving a 'kill' was determined by the simple throw of a dice. I'm unsure what number coincided with a successful attack, but in this instance the radio call came back saying the shot was a miss which necessitated another launch.

'By now, the F-111 had started to 'sweep' its wings and was accelerating away from me but, in cognisance of the strong growl in the headset and my eyeball estimate of distance, I was confident I was still within Sidewinder range. Again, I made the "Fox 2" call and, from what I was later told, the director was yelling "Roll the dice, roll the effing dice". The call then came over the radio saying I'd achieved a kill. This resulted in a heated complaint from the hierarchy at RAAF Amberley questioning the integrity and professionalism of the Skyhawk pilots!

'My guess as to what brought this about was the fact a second F-111 had just completed an attack on an outlying warship approximately ten miles to my port side (possibly HMAS Supply) and was turning to join his companion. By the time he saw me and his buddy, there is little doubt my target had accelerated away at supersonic speed and I would have been well and truly out of missile range.'

Clark concludes; 'The resulting story of our successful attack against the raiding F-111 was promptly recorded in the Brisbane newspapers and it was this story that infuriated the boys in blue and led to their 'nastygram' to the fleet commander. Ah, the fun and games of inter-service rivalry.'

9 Squadron Flies Again

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No 9 Squadron has officially reformed, marking its proud return to Air Force service with a ceremony at Torrens Parade Ground, South Australia. The event honoured the squadron's Vietnam War veterans and celebrated the arrival of a restored Bell UH-1 Iroquois 'Huey' helicopter, a symbol of the unit's enduring legacy and the connection between past and present generations of aviators.

The reformation also marked 100 years since the squadron's birth in 1925, when it began as 101 Fleet Co-operation Flight at Bowen, Queensland. From seaplanes to helicopters, and now the cutting-edge MQ-4C Triton, 9 Squadron's evolution reflects the adaptability, innovation and spirit of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Members of No. 9 Squadron participate in a Ceremonial Review Parade formally celebrating the reformation of their unit at the Torrens Parade Ground in Adelaide.

Commanding Officer 9 Squadron Wing Commander Lawry Benier said the day was a moment to reflect on the courage and mateship that defined the squadron's Vietnam service and to recognise those who shaped its history. 'The proud legacy of 9 Squadron lives once again', Wing Commander Benier said. 'To the Vietnam veterans of 9 Squadron, welcome back. This squadron is yours, and today we honour your legacy. From the moment 9 Squadron deployed to Vung Tau in 1966, its members set the standard for how an Air Force unit should operate in war. You showed what it means to serve with courage, mateship and quiet determination. 9 Squadron flies again, and with it, the spirit of those who came before soars once more.'

By the end of its Vietnam deployment, 9 Squadron had flown more than 237,000 missions – a testament to the skill, endurance and sacrifice of its members who served under constant threat in some of the most challenging conditions of modern warfare. 'As we reflect on that service, we remember those members of 9 Squadron who paid the ultimate sacrifice', Wing Commander Benier said. 'Their names and their courage are etched into our history and into the hearts of all who follow in their footsteps.'

Air Commander Australia Air Vice-Marshal Glen Braz said the squadron's reformation signified both renewal and remembrance, bridging a century of service between the aviators of the past and those serving today. 'The legacy of 9 Squadron has never faded and continues to inspire every aviator who serves under its banner today', he said. 'With the arrival of the MQ-4C Triton, the squadron now delivers an unprecedented long-range, persistent and networked intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability.'

The ceremony was also an opportunity to honour those who served before, with the presentation of the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation formally recognising the squadron's bravery. 'To the veterans of 9 Squadron, we honour you and we thank you. Your actions will never be forgotten', Air Vice-Marshal Braz said. '9 Squadron flies again, and with it, the spirit of those who came before soars once more.'

The Colour Party presents the 9 Squadron Standard at the Torrens Parade Ground's Vietnam War Memorial during the final stages of the squadron's reformation parade, recognising its legacy of distinguished conduct.

No. 9 Squadron MQ-4C Triton aircraft A57-001 taxis during its first Royal Australian Air Force operated flight at RAAF Base Tindal.
Photo by Leading Aircraftsman Campbell Latch.

Seasons Greetings to all our readers and contributors! I look forward to receiving lots of interesting, informative, entertaining contributions in 2026.