

THE VERACITY OF UNIT HISTORY – NO. 9 SQUADRON, VIETNAM

By
BRIAN DIROU, DFC

The detail for Form A50 – Unit History Sheet was generated by Officers who were appointed Oi/c Unit History as a secondary duty. They were usually pilots whose primary flying role came foremost and the degree to which they could attend to secondary duties varied according to operational demands. The zealousness toward performance of such tasks was also a variable.

9SQN did not have an Intelligence Section established specifically for the purpose of debriefing aircrew, like in some WW2 squadrons, so it behoved the Oi/c Unit History (when able) to ascertain from aircraft crews the detail of action events for recording in the A50.

'...The content of individual war diaries depends on the unit concerned and their functions and daily activities. Overall, however, the main factor controlling the contents and quality of contents of a particular diary remains the skill, dedication, and enthusiasm of the officer who was in charge of compiling it...' - Australian War Memorial

Seldom was detail for the Unit History Sheet correlated on a daily basis and in some circumstances, several days may have elapsed before the Oi/c managed to attend to his secondary duty. It may be that I was debriefed by an Oi/c Unit History regarding some action events although I really cannot recall that ever happening.

Pilot Mission Debrief forms were provided for each aircraft crew to complete for a day/night of activity, but these were mostly utilized just to record statistical information and not the operational detail of missions. The data from these forms was somehow transposed to another document Form A51 – Detail of Operations which was presumably generated from a template in the AAP103 – Manual of Administration. For 9SQN, no column was included for aircraft callsigns making it difficult to correlate with the Form A50 to ascertain detail of crews involved in particular happenings.

Sometimes, the pace and nature of operations was such that facts may have been preferably shed by individuals within a few days. My personal preference was to focus on tasks ahead as a way of coping with ugly past actions. Records of events in the A50 in which I was involved are mostly not as I might have explained them and there are errors and omissions.

The following are erroneous A50 entries for 11Jun68 and 12Jun68:

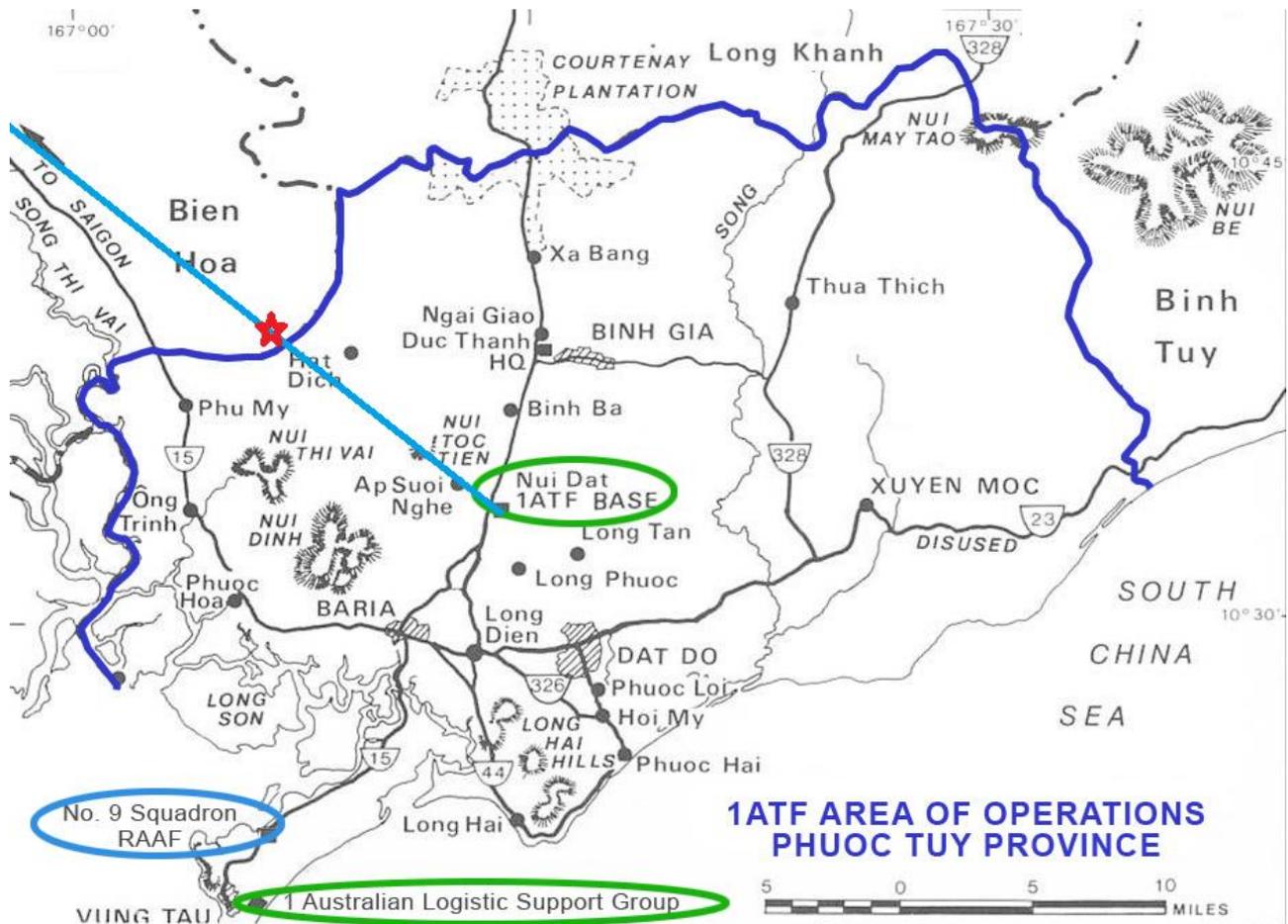
11Jun68 – *Whilst on approach to RED CATCHER pad at Bien Hoa, aircraft A2-382, with Commander 1ATF on board, received fire. One round entered the aircraft through the open doors and exited through the roof. Crew of the aircraft were BD, John Brown (RAN), Bill McCreadie, Bannister...*

12Jun68 – *An after-flight inspection of A2-382 revealed that a bullet had passed through the cabin roof beside the starboard gunner. The round then passed through the air intake filter and entered the engine causing damage to the 1st stage compressor blades. The aircraft had completed over 6 hours of flying during the day – much of it at low level in AO BIRDSVILLE North-East of Long Binh where it received fire the previous day.*

The preceding A50 accounts by the Oi/c Unit History seem conjecture and the following dialogue between both pilots (57 years later) reflect the reality of what happened on **11Jun68**.

To John Brown from BD on 21Nov25. *'My recollections re the subject incident are as follows. On 11Jun68, we received one hit that exited top of the cabin roof near the left-hand pilot seat. We were at 1500 feet AGL or higher over the Hat Dich while transiting from Nui*

Dat to Long Binh with Commander 1ATF aboard. The round impact was heard by all aircrew and located after landing at Long Binh. I presumed the hit to be from 12.7mm due to our height AGL and the size of the tear in the roof.



All a bit fuzzy now. When we heard the 'clink', I noticed you leaned forward and then attempted to look behind you, but you were well clear of any passengers.'

To BD from John Brown on 21Nov25. *'I remember like it was yesterday - I reckon I was the luckiest bastard in VN that day. Maybe 2-3" further forward and I would have been saying hello to Pat Vickers (Killed in action when serving as RAN Detachment Commander with 135th US Army Assault Helicopter Company).*

*You are right about the location. You were in the right seat. The round (I think it was only 7.62 but I may be wrong on that) came in just behind your bum around the external step hatch. It then proceeded to whack me on the back of the helmet (probably when you saw me nod forward) and departed the scene as you describe (just in front of the upper nav light). I turned around to tell the crewie to tell the grunt sitting on the floor behind me (facing aft) to "control his weapon". I thought the whack was the barrel of his SLR on my helmet. When we shut down someone noticed the hole in the roof - an exit hole, so where did the entry one occur. It was traced to just behind your seat but the path didn't match. **Only then did we discover it changed path via my helmet. And yes it did leave a groove!***

Being young, stupid and ignorant then it did not cross my mind how lucky any of us were that morning. A2-382, You, me, McCreadie and Bannister Alb04. My logbook sez "Shot at" - bit of an understatement !!'

On return to Nui Dat a while later on same day 11Jun68, I did a very thorough post-flight inspection of A2-382 that revealed one round of 7.62mm through the engine air intake without any crew awareness. This apparently entered above the Crewman's head on the right side of the aircraft but unknown when.

9SQN was involved in Vietnam operations for 2,000 days or about 5.5 years. There were significant changes in unit related happenings over that period as the Squadron evolved from an embryonic 8 Bravo model Iroquois outfit prematurely committed to combat operations to a full-strength unit of 16 Hotel model Iroquois with a variety of roles. The very challenging formative growth of the Squadron and facilities eventuated over 3 years between mid-1966 and mid-1969.

An operational tour left an indelible impression on participants and experiences of unit functioning differed appreciably over time. Although 50 plus years have now elapsed since many events were outlined in the A50, they should be treated circumspectly regarding veracity, despite having been signed by CO 9SQN and OC RAAF Vung Tau. Where practicable, best to try and verify recorded history with any living parties who were involved.



BRIAN DIROU, DFC
Wing Commander RAAF (Retired)
Rockhampton, Queensland
November 2019

