



The Repatriation of Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver

Bracelet Closing Ceremony National Vietnam Veterans Museum Commencing 10.45am, 31st August 2009

Recap: Monday 31st August 2009 realised a sight that most RAAF Vietnam Veterans, especially those who had served with No 2 Squadron, never expected to see: after nearly 39 years MIA in Vietnam, the caskets of FLGOFF Mike Herbert and PLTOFF Bob Carver being ceremonially transferred from the C130 that had brought them from Hanoi to the tarmac at RAAF Base Richmond.

Bracelets for FLGOFF Mike Herbert and PLTOFF Bob Carver

On that chilly morning, Gary Parker, the President of the National Vietnam Veterans Museum at Phillip Island, in a voice full of emotion, explained to a gathering of some 150 the symbolism of the two beautifully carved bracelets, each nestling in a small open silk-lined box, centrally placed between four other identical, but closed, boxes. The boxes, one for each of the six Australians MIA, were intended to be both a visible yet spiritual symbol that even though the six were missing, they were not forgotten.

Unlike the US practice, where a near relative of the MIA agreed to wear the bracelet until either the MIA was accounted for or death intervened, the National Vietnam Veterans Museum elected to retain all six bracelets at what is for many Vietnam Veterans, their spiritual home.

By the end of 2008, only the crew of Canberra bomber Magpie 91, FLGOFF Mike Herbert (Pilot) and PLTOFF Bob Carver (Navigator), remained unaccounted for. Only two bracelets remained open!

As the C130 carrying the caskets of FLGOFF Mike Herbert and PLTOFF Bob Carver landed at RAAF Base Richmond, the 150 other RAAF and Army Veterans, guests and friends, gathered at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum, heard the words they'd been waiting for from the Director of the RAAF Museum, Dave Gardner:

"Nick, the boys are home! Close the Bracelets!" Dave Gardner (Director RAAF Museum)".

Gary Parker gave the command.

"Nick, the boys are home! Close the Bracelets!"

RAAF Museum President, Gary Parker gave the command and WGCDR Warren Madsen, also from the RAAF Museum and SQNLDR Graham Henry (Retd), the Victorian State President of No 2 Squadron RAAF Association, stepped forward in unison and gently closed the last two bracelet boxes.

Thanks to the initial efforts of Jim Bourke (and all of those who later supported his endeavour) and despite almost overwhelming odds, the mortal remains of Mike Herbert and Bob Carver were finally home.

Following the recital of “The Ode”, Padre Laurie Dawson, himself a Vietnam Veteran, noted, in an eloquent and most appropriate address:

“... The immediate sharp grief that we may have felt on the loss of our Missing in Action personnel is long gone, to be replaced with a sad acceptance of reality. They, like us, have long since been consigned to the historical records by the population at large.

But, to their credit, many have kept alive their memory through the maintenance of these memorial bracelets.

Today, closure is achieved on another aspect of our Vietnam experience. The bracelets are all closed. The mission is successfully concluded.

... There is something special about coming home to Australia. We owe our deceased nothing less than their own special homecoming...”

Later, Mike and Bob were deservedly accorded funerals with full military honours within the care of their extended families.

We Did Remember Them and Will Not Forget Them

The Official Ceremony – Order of Service

Welcome

Mr Geoffrey Archer ~ Master of Ceremonies

Introduction

Gary B Parker ~ President, National Vietnam Veterans Museum

The Closing of the Bracelets

Wing Commander Warren Madsen

SQN LDR Graham Henry KSJ (Retd) ~ President, No 2 Squadron Association (Vic)

The Ode

Bill Noble ~ Secretary, Museum Sub-Branch

Last Post and Rouse

Eric Cross

Address and Prayer

Laurie Dawson ~ Museum Chaplain

National Anthem

End of MIA Bracelet Ceremony

Mr Geoffrey Archer ~ Master of Ceremonies

Invitation to address the gathering is extended to:

Bob Elworthy

State President VVAA — Victoria Branch

Secretary of the Museum Board of Trustees

WGCDR Nick LeRay-Meyer AM (Retd)
President RAAF Sub-Branch
Vice President of the RAAF Association (Vic)

SQNLDR Graham Henry KSJ (Retd)
President No 2 Squadron

Patron: Major General Paul Stevens AO

Museum formed under the auspices of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia

Extract from the Address by Museum President, Gary B Parker

Good Morning. Distinguished guests, veterans, families of veterans, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you to the National Vietnam Veterans Museum. I also acknowledge and welcome the year 12 class from Fairhills High School.

This Museum was established to tell the story Australia's longest war in an unbiased and non-political manner. It is to be a lasting legacy from Vietnam Veterans to be a resource for the education of future generations – and their presence in a scheduled tour as a part of their regular curriculum reinforces that that is happening.

That they are here on this historic occasion is fortuitous.

Another goal of the Museum was to be the Spiritual Home for all Vietnam Veterans and it is in this spirit that we are gathered here today.

As servicemen in Vietnam there were at least three things that we could be sure of when things started to get tough.

- If we were killed, the Australian organisation of Legacy would look after our wives and families.
- If we were wounded, we would get rapid medical attention with the aid of Australian and American Pilots; and
- Wherever we were, we knew that we would not be abandoned by our mates. We would never be forgotten.

This creed was the same for our American brothers-in-arms. We were together then – and today, in spirit we are together again.

Today is a significant day in Australia's military history. It is a day which should be celebrated by all Australians and which will certainly be acknowledged throughout America – and in particular by their servicemen and veterans.

From today all Australian servicemen exposed to Australia's longest war are accounted for and have arrived home.

This simple ceremony is steeped in symbolism that has united Australia and America – and I need to expand on how that came to be.

The Flag displayed below, the POW MIA Flag with the words 'You are not forgotten' is known throughout America.

It is the only flag apart from the Stars and Stripes to ever fly over the White House, having been displayed in that place of honour on National POW/MIA Recognition Day 1982.

It is the only flag ever displayed in the US Capitol Rotunda where it stands as a powerful symbol of that Nation's commitment to their POW/MIAs until the fullest possible accounting has been achieved for U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

Further, by an Act of Congress, that flag is to fly on six prescribed days of the year on all Federal buildings, installations, cemeteries and included all Post Offices.

Such is the acknowledgement of the flag as the symbol 'of their Nations concern and commitment to end the uncertainty for their families and their Nation.'

In the mid-1990s, the ex-President of the VVAA and the current Curator of this Museum, John Methven OAM, travelled to America to address their Vietnam Veterans Congress. He spoke on the Lifestyle Courses that he and the VVAA had initiated and which was being conducted by our Department of Veterans Affairs.

During that address, he advised the Congress of over 1,000 delegates from their sub-branches and chapters, that the VVAA had adopted the POW/MIA Flag and that it would always be displayed or flown at our Museum – it was only the Mobile Museum at the time – but on announcing this, he received a standing ovation from that Congress.

From that time, true to his word, the flag has always been flown or displayed. I undertake now to continue to do so.

About that time another group of Veterans went to America in part to witness "Rolling Thunder" – when thousands of veterans on (mainly) Harley Davidson Motorbikes joined the circuitous route through their nation to finish at The Wall in Washington on Remembrance Day. While there, by chance they met the designer of the Wall and also people from Ohio who made the Bracelets for each of their MIA servicemen.

A bracelet is made for each POW/MIA from the Vietnam War and has their name, rank and date of loss engraved on to the bracelet.

The bracelets are then worn by a family member or a veteran with a vow that it will not be removed until the day that the person's real status is determined or that he returns home. They claim that taking that vow brings new lessons on old concepts: Unity. Caring. Brotherhood. When the wearer dies – the bracelet then goes with him.

They made six bracelets for the Australian missing servicemen and they were forwarded to the Museum for safe keeping. And here they are.

We never really believed that this day would ever come. The Museum Staff gathered in June 2007 and with a silent prayer and some awe as the Curator was able to close the bracelets to rest for Pte Peter Gillson and LCpl Richard Parker as they were returned to Australia.

In December 2007 we repeated the process for the return of LCpl John Gillespie and hardly dared believe that the last soldier who was with the Special Air Service Regiment would be located, recovered and returned.

On 10 October 2008, Pte David Fisher did return and his bracelet was closed to rest.

This left just the two airmen and it seemed too much to hope for that they could be returned and have us all present and correct. We under-estimated the endeavour of many people – Lt Col Jim Bourke and many others – and we will discuss them in more detail after this ceremony.

It is appropriate to acknowledge that while our own comrades were continuing the search, we would not have been able to succeed without the help of the people of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The closing of the bracelets today will coincide with the arrival of the aircraft at RAAF Richmond and the bodies of Pilot Officer Robert Carver and Flying Officer Michael Herbert being on Australian soil. We trust that this ceremony will symbolically leave these six returned servicemen at rest in this the spiritual home of Vietnam Veterans.

The closure of the cases will assist many with the closure of one aspect of Australia's longest war. We will continue to 'Honour the dead – and fight like hell for the living.' There is still much to do.

Finally, we pray that this sense of closure will assist relieve the families that have grieved for so long and also to those servicemen who had worked and trained with these men.

Thank you.

**Address by WGCdr Nick LeRay-Meyer AM (Retd)
President RAAF Sub-Branch Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia
Vice President of the RAAF Association (Vic)**

After all Australian combat forces were withdrawn from South Vietnam in 1972, four Army and two RAAF remained behind; officially listed as "Missing in Action" (MIA).

I believe it is fair to say that most Vietnam Veterans and the families of the MIAs thought our missing comrades would never be found and returned home. While the task seemed so daunting and almost hopeless, we hadn't counted on the enthusiasm and dedication of LTCOL Jim Bourke AM MG and his team of "Operation Aussie Home" (OAH). As recounted in an address by Bob Elworthy, Victorian State President of the Vietnam Veterans Association, Jim's team, initially without any major support, certainly not from the Government of the time, painstakingly but steadfastly pushed ahead in their quest to find our six colleagues. Later, the team was supplemented by Government funded specialists and support personnel.

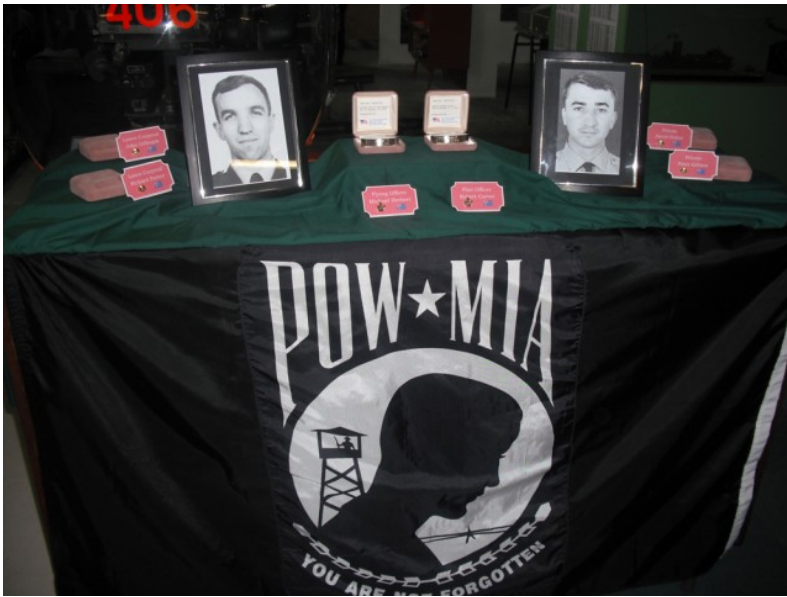
In April 2007, with the assistance of the Vietnam Government and local villagers (in some instances former enemies) the OAH team had its first success when the remains of LCPL Richard Parker and PVT Peter Gillson, former members of 1RAR, were located on the battlefield where they had lost their lives on 8th November 1965. Brought home in June 2007 they were each accorded a ceremonial "Welcome Home" and burial with military honours they so richly deserved. Unknown to most, on the arrival of the aircraft bearing their caskets; the first pair of Bracelets at the Museum were closed.

A DVD presentation containing the full video and photographs of the ceremony is currently being produced for sale through the RAAFFVVA and Vietnam Veterans Museum

On behalf of the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association (Vic), we salute LTCOL Jim Bourke AM MG, as instigator and leader of "Operation Aussies Home", and all those who have worked so hard and with such dedication and diligence to bring all our colleagues home; and extend to Gary Parker and his team at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum our sincere appreciation for the manner in which they conducted the final "Closing of The Bracelets" ceremony. You did us all proud!!!!

Nick LeRay-Meyer AM
President
RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association (Vic)
and Mike Herbert's No 1 AFTS initial Vampire flying instructor





Extract from 2 Squadron Association President's Address

SQNLDR Graham Henry KSJ (Ret)

Malaya and Vietnam

The Squadron reformed at Amberley on 28 February 1948 with Lincoln aircraft and converted to the Canberra Jet Bomber on 18 December 1953. The first Canberra crashed on 16 April 1954 with the loss of the three crewmembers, Davis, Nicholls and Adler.

On 1 July 1958, the squadron moved to Butterworth, Malaya to take over from No 1 SQN flying Lincolns from Tengah, Singapore in the ten-year campaign against the Communist Terrorists. Two Canberra aircraft were converted to components after crashing at Butterworth. (239 and 243).

On 19 April 1967, the squadron under WGCDR Rolf Aronsen, moved to the 5ACS constructed base at Phan Rang, Vietnam, to be part of the United States 35th Tactical Fighter Wing. The personnel numbers doubled to about 300 with the addition of dedicated ADG and base support staff.

During the next four years, the squadron dropped 76,389 bombs and suffered mortar and rocket bombardments, attempted base invasions by enemy sappers, and two aircraft were lost on bombing missions. A84-231 was reported missing in action on 3 NOV 70 with Herbert and Carver as crew.

A missile downed A84-228 on 14 March 1971 with the crew of Downing (CO) and Pinches quickly rescued. The last mission was on 31 May 1971 and they return to Amberley on 9 June 1971 after 13 years overseas.

Casualties: 2 KIA, 3 killed in accidents and 2 died of illness. Petith, O'Hanlon, Fitzpatrick, Wooley, Herbert, Carver, and Hewitt.

Awards: The squadron personnel received 53 Awards: 3 DSO's, 2 MBE's, 7 DFC's and 1 Bar, 1 MM, 3 BEM's, and 36 MID's.

Citations: No 2 Squadron received the 'Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm – Unit Citation' and the 'United States Air Force Outstanding Unit Award (with Combat V Device)'.

No 2 Squadron now became the most highly decorated Squadron in the RAAF and the only squadron that had participated in the four conflicts, WWI, WWII, Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War.

The Citations from USA and Vietnam show the gratitude of the Allies who fought with and saw the value of the actions of our personnel, knew of the sacrifices made and endured in the face of the enemy and publicly acknowledge the debt owed to those who served our Country and Allies so gallantly.

Such men were the two-crew members missing in A84- 231. Flying Officer Michael Herbert, from Glenelg, had already flown 198 missions for the RAAF in Vietnam, and his tour would be over in weeks. Pilot Officer Robert Carver, from Toowoomba had only been in Vietnam for a couple of months,

Herbert and Carver took off in A84-231, Magpie 91, from Phan Rang on the evening of November 3, 1970 and sometime later made radio contact with the U.S. radar officer who was directing them to the target.

At 8.22pm, six bombs dropped on the target and the plane headed for home. Exactly 70 seconds later, without any warning, Magpie 91 suddenly vanished. Dozens of intensive search-and-rescue missions carried out over the next 72 hours by both Australian and U.S. aircraft failed to find any trace of it. A court of inquiry held in Vietnam in subsequent days could not find a reason for the disappearance. The weather was fine, Herbert had been flying above the range of anti-aircraft artillery, and there were no known North Vietnamese missile launch sites near the flight path. Herbert and Carver were simply gone. They were both age 24.

The Search

Then, nearly four decades later the Australian Defence Force announced that the wreckage of the Canberra bomber had been found in inhospitable jungle in central Vietnam's Quang Nam province. In April this year, Major Jack Thurgar, from the Army History Unit, and RAAF Squadron Leader John Cotterell trekked through the jungle to the crash site and found various items of equipment which determined, definitively, that the wreckage was from the plane of the last two Australians missing in action in Vietnam.

Finally spurred into action by Jim Bourke from Operation Aussies Home, the RAAF decided to find the lost officers and bomber.

In 2007, Bourke had been central to the discovery of other Australians missing in action, and he had written an exhaustive report on Herbert and Carver. Le Ngoc Bay, then a lieutenant in command of the reconnaissance platoon North Vietnamese 141st regiment, told Thurgar he remembered the plane that had dropped six bombs near their hidden mountain headquarters in November of that year. The bombs came close to knocking out the BT44 military command unit, where an earlier transmission on a 15-watt radio revealed their position to U.S. forces setting them up as a target for Carver and Herbert's bombs.

With this information, Thurgar zeroed in on the villages closest to the crash site. At his request, Vietnamese officials visited the villages of Thon Vinh and Ta Bhing, and three elderly KaTu men said they knew of a place deep in the jungle where they had found remnants of a plane many years before.

One young KaTu man volunteered to trek to the crash site and brought back two crumpled bits of metal for examination. One of the pieces of metal was a warped air-position indicator made by Kelvin and Hughes, from either a Canberra bomber or a U.S. B57 plane. Thurgar took the rusting indicator back to the RAAF Museum in Point Cook, near Melbourne, where director David Gardner decided it was 99 per cent certainly from a Canberra bomber, probably A84-231. Identification of a crumpled and rusting air position indicator was enough for the RAAF to approve a large expedition to the jungle crash site, to begin preliminary excavations and bring back to Australia yet more evidence.

Accompanied by two Australian scientists, 2 Australian military officers, 10 Vietnamese officials and 30 KaTu porters, Thurgar set out on the trek in April this year. Subsequent searching located the remains of the missing crew, thanks to the outstanding efforts of Aussies Home and the Search and Recovery teams with the helpful assistance of the Vietnamese people.

Tribute

We acknowledge here today, in this special place dedicated to the gallant Vietnam Veterans that Michael Herbert and Robert Carver have returned to their homeland and families and will now receive the tributes and grateful thanks of the Nation denied them for nearly 40 Years and will shortly reach their final resting places.

No 2 SQN was not alone in this war and I acknowledge the gallant and dedicated service of all Army, Navy, Air Force and Allied Forces Units and their personnel who served in the Vietnam War and past wars, particularly those who paid the supreme sacrifice and lie in distant and many unmarked places.

We pay tribute to those who also served and returned, especially those who suffered and later died from their experiences.

Lest We Forget.

(Extracts from an Article by Sian Powell, The Advertiser, Adelaide 20JUN09, and references from "Highest Traditions" by John Bennett, the RAAF Museum and 2 Sqn Association Inc. websites were used in the above address.)

FLGOFF M.P. Herbert: 1946 – 1970

Michael Patrick John Herbert was born on 6 September 1946 in Freeling, South Australia and completed his secondary schooling at Sacred Heart College in Somerton Park, Adelaide.

Herbert was interested in aviation from an early age and was awarded his civil pilot's licence at the age of 16. He served in the South Australian Flying Air Training Corp from 6 September 1960 up until he accepted a commission in the Royal Australian Air Force as a cadet at the Royal Australian Air Force Academy on 17 January 1964.

Members of the aircrew selection board commented that Herbert was "A very keen and motivated lad". He graduated from the RAAF Academy on 6 December 1967. He then commenced pilot training on No 67 Pilot Course on 11 December 1967 and graduated on 6 January 1969. After graduation, Herbert was posted to No 30 (B) Operational Conversion at RAAF Amberley, completing the 12-week course on 30 May 1969. He was then posted to No 2 Squadron as a pilot on Canberra Bombers.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert arrived in Vietnam on 25 February 1970. Prior to his last fateful mission, he and already flown 198 missions and he was due to return home to Australia within several weeks.

PLTOFF Robert Carver: 1946 -1970

Robert Charles Carver was born on 2 July, 1946 in Toowoomba, Queensland. He graduated from Harristown High School in 1963 and began work as a cadet radiographer with the North Brisbane Hospital Board. Gaining his Diploma of Radiology in 1965, Carver continued to work as a radiographer. He felt he wanted to make "more" of his life and stated, "I would like to learn to fly".

Members of the aircrew selection board commented that Carver was, "Most impressive as a person. Mature, steady, alert." He was accepted into the RAAF as a Navigator and commenced training on No 37 Navigator's Course on 13 January 1969 at RAAF East Sale in Victoria. After graduation, Carver was posted to No 33 Bomber Operational Conversion Course at RAAF Amberley, completing the 11-week course on 22 May, 1970. He was posted to No.2 SQN as a navigator on Canberra Bombers.

Pilot Officer Robert Carver arrived in Vietnam on 17 September 1970. Although he had been in Vietnam for less than two months, Carver had already impressed his superiors as an enthusiastic officer who was developing into an excellent navigator.

Extract from the Address by the Museum Chaplain, Laurie Dawson

Good morning all

Last week Gary [Parker] asked me to contribute with a short message today. I puzzled over the nature of this occasion. Would you categorize it as a ceremony? Is it a service, a commemoration, a dedication, a memorial, or a wake??

On reflection I came to the conclusion that it is the opportunity for a celebration. In the best sense of the word it has to be a celebration. The celebration of an ideal – the ideal we describe as mateship; but at its roots is our capacity to unselfishly love our fellow man.

The English language is deficient when we come to describe love. The ancient Greeks had at least four words to describe love.

- Agape... spiritual sacrificial love
- Eros... sensual, sexual, erotic love
- Storge... family affection

- Philia... a dispassionate virtuous friendship or brotherly love or love for fellow mankind; hence we get words like philanthropic and Philadelphia

What we celebrate today is an excellent example of pure philia love: the love or mateship ethic that requires that we never abandon one of our own. We endeavour to never leave one of our own behind.

There were only six Australian servicemen unaccounted for out of over 500 Killed in Action after 10 years of fighting. This in itself is a remarkable testimony to the spirit of the ideal we recognize and celebrate today.

40 years on and we are all older, greyer, and I hope wiser.

The immediate sharp grief that we may have felt on the loss of our Missing In Action personnel is long gone, to be replaced with a sad acceptance of the reality. They, like us, have long since been consigned to the historical records by the population at large.

But, to their credit, many have kept alive their memory through the maintenance of these memorial bracelets.

Today, closure is achieved on another aspect of our Vietnam experience. The bracelets are all closed. The mission is successfully concluded. The last of the Missing In Action have been returned to home soil.

This has been the culmination of years of dedicated and arduous work by a small dedicated group of Vietnam Veterans who have succeeded in achieving what was thought to be a virtual impossibility: to locate and return the remains of our 6 MIA.

Jim Bourke, as instigator and leader of the group, deserves our highest honour and praise for his efforts.

True brotherly love is much more about action than emotion. The attributes of loyalty and perseverance motivate men to go to heroic lengths to support a mate. We see the result of the outworking of these ethics with the ceremonial arrival today at Richmond RAAF base, of 2 caskets containing the last of the mortal remains of Pilot Officer Robert Carver and Flying Officer Michael Herbert.

I reflect on the fact that when I arrived home from SVN in 1968, I was blessed to be able to walk unaided down that C130 ramp. I was able to kneel down and kiss the tarmac.

There is something special about coming home to Australia. We owe our deceased nothing less than their own special homecoming.

My hope is that the generation following us note the example set by Jim Bourke and his supporters and absorb it into their collective character traits. Certainly, I believe our current serving men and women are the equal of their forebears. We can be proud of our sons and daughters who currently serve their nation overseas.

So today let us celebrate the lives of our once lost, but now found – fellow servicemen – with an attitude of gratitude remembering all those who gave their all that we may be free and secure.

We honour them by fully participating in the liberty that their contribution has made possible.

Let Us Pray.

Heavenly Father we thank you and are grateful for the liberty, freedom and bountiful supply we enjoy as Australians.

We are mindful that we are blessed above most others in this world. Help us to act worthy of the blessings and calling you have endowed us with. Help us to maintain Christian virtues in all we do and say that others may share in our good fortune.

As we remember our MIA and those who have faithfully served to locate them, we pray:

... for those that grieve... give them comfort
... for those that strive... give them rest
... for those who are troubled... give them peace
... and for those whose health is failing... restore their strength

We ask this in and through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Amen.

Thank You and may God bless you each and every one.
