

Air Force Association

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CONTACT

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The National Memorial was dedicated on 3 Oct 1992 with the current inscription: For All Those Who Suffered and Died Vietnam 1962 – 1973.

RAAF HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS FROM SAIGON IN 1975

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the RAAF humanitarian airlift from conflict zones in South Vietnam in 1975.

The RAAF played a significant role in humanitarian efforts during the final days of the Vietnam War in 1975, despite facing significant risks to personnel.

As the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated rapidly, with the North Vietnamese Army advancing towards Saigon, the RAAF helped evacuate Australian citizens and other foreign nationals from the country.

Vietnam Veterans Branch member and publisher of the Branch Newsletter, Geoff Rose, has been instrumental in seeking the support of DVA and the National Capital Authority (NCA) in having the year 1975 added after the dates 1962-1973 on the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial, which was dedicated prior to recognition of the humanitarian operations being deemed to be part of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war.

Support is looking positive at this stage with the DVA ESORT offering the unanimous support for the AFA submission and DVA undertaking to write to the National Capital Authority in support of adding 1975 to the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial.

Read Geoff Rose's personal account of the RAAF's humanitarian airlift in 1975 on page 10



John Clarkson – President, AFA Victoria.

WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION OF CONTACT FOR 2025.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate two of our members who have received recognition for outstanding service; John Price received an OAM in the 2025 Australia Day Honours list and Ron Bishop received a CAF Commendation late last year. Full details follow in this issue. Both belong to the Geelong Branch which makes me wonder if there is something in the water down there.

The biennial Avalon International Airshow has come and gone. On this occasion we shared a stand with “Wings”, the Association’s impressive quarterly magazine. This arrangement meant that our staffing demands were significantly reduced from previous shows so I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who have volunteered to assist us at previous shows. From our perspective, the show went well and the feeling all around was positive, notwithstanding the terrible accident involving the aerobatic display pilot on Friday evening.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 25th April this year marks the 50th anniversary of the evacuation of Saigon, a task performed with great honour by crews assigned to RAAF Richmond Detachment S. Those involved were formally recognised by the Federal Government and added to the Vietnam Nominal Roll in August 2003. But the matter does not rest there. AFA Victoria has put forward an agenda topic for the next Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) in Canberra in a process to have the National Vietnam Forces Memorial in Canberra altered to reflect that Australian’s involvement in the Vietnam War extended to 1975. The Memorial currently reflects 1962-1973. I hope we have a successful outcome by the time you read this.

On this topic also, immediate past AFA Victoria President, Max McGregor, has taken on the task of documenting just what did happen in those last few days, in particular, on 25th April when four ADGs were evacuated from Tan Son Nhat on the last flight out. Watch this space.

Please stay well

John Clarkson

AUSTRALIA DAY HONOUR FOR GEELONG BRANCH PRESIDENT



Geelong Branch President, GPCAPT John Price (Retd), received an OAM in the 2025 Australia Day Honours

Geelong Branch President, GPCAPT John Price (Retd) has been awarded an OAM in this year’s recent Australia Day Honours.

The Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) – Military Division was awarded to John for meritorious service as an Inquiry Officer and facilitator of the administrative inquiry capability in the Royal Australian Air Force.

The citation read: “GPCAPT Price has made a prodigious contribution to the Australian Defence Force in a number of sensitive and complex administrative inquiries since 2007. Application of professionalism, emotional intelligence and superior aptitude ensured ongoing success of the Air Force administrative inquiry process and the military justice system. Moreover, application of such leadership, process knowledge and superb education skills have been effective and inspirational when training and mentoring future inquiry officers.”

79 ADF members ranked from craftsman to rear admiral, were honoured for excellence and achievement in areas ranging from strategic leadership and command, operational planning, combat capability, and intelligence to psychology, safety, chaplaincy and catering in the Australia Day honours list.

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS FOR BALLARAT HERITAGE WEEK



Hut 48 in the Airport Precinct

The Ballarat Branch will be the sponsor of a major celebration to be held in the Airport Precinct over the weekend of 17-18 May as part of the overall Ballarat Heritage Week celebrations. The theme for the weekend will be “Entertainment of the Air”.

Ballarat Branch occupies Hut 48 in the Airport Precinct, being one of the P huts and other buildings constructed to house the thousands of trainers, staff and trainees of the WWII No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School. Ballarat Airport precinct contains Australia's most intact WWII site where over 6000 trainees passed through the school between 1940 and 1945.

82ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAM BUSTERS

The weekend of 17-18 May coincides with the 82nd anniversary of the famous Dam Busters incident of WWII. In late March 1943, a new elite squadron was formed to carry out a raid on three main targets - the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams. The Möhne dam was a curved ‘gravity’ dam and was 40m high and 650m long.

617 Squadron was led by 24-year old Wing Commander Guy Gibson and was made up of aircrew from Britain, Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia.

The drum-shaped bomb (codenamed ‘Upkeep’) needed to be dropped from a height of 60 feet (18m), and at a ground speed of 232mph. The bomb would spin backwards across the surface of the water before reaching the dam. Its residual spin would then drive the bomb down the wall of the dam before exploding at its base.

Australian Pilot Officer Frederick Spafford trained in 1WAGS course number 6 flew with Wing Commander Gibson, who regarded Spafford [Spam] as the best bomber there was.

The operations were successful with Spafford being awarded the DFC and Gibson the Victoria Cross.



Wing Commander Gibson and his crew board their Avro Lancaster A3-G (ED 932/G) for the Dams' raid.

Image: IWM (CH 18005)

EVENTS TO BE HELD OVER THE HERITAGE WEEKEND

BAFA FLIGHT 1705-01 ESSENDON TO BALLARAT RETURN

The Ballarat branch of the Air Force Association (BAFA) is chartering the Shortstop Jetcharter (SJC) Douglas DC-3 VH-OVM to operate Essendon-Ballararat return flights on Saturday 17th May and Sunday 18th May as part of Ballarat Heritage Week.

BAFA is selling seats on these flights via the Friends of the RAAF Museum Inc.

Anyone wishing to purchase a flight please contact Ballarat Branch's Peter Dowling on 0418 281 775.



Flight 1705-01 - the Shortstop Jetcharter (SJC) Douglas DC-3 VH-OVM flying Essendon-Ballararat return flights on 17-18 May, as part of Ballarat Heritage Week.

COMMENDATIONS FOR 1972 AIR CREW



From left, Michael O'Loghlen, Ron Bishop, Graham Christian, Stan Flack, Tony Lea and Chris Young after receiving a Chief of Air Force Level 3 Group Commendation during a ceremony at 34 Squadron in Canberra. (Photo: Aircraftman Jakob Reid)

Vietnam veteran pilot, and Geelong Branch member, Ron Bishop is one of nine Air Force crew who received CAF Level 3 Group Commendations for their bravery on a rescue mission for one of the worst aviation peacetime accidents in Air Force history.

In December last year, Deputy Chief of Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Harvey Reynolds presented Ron and five other crew with their commendations (on behalf of Chief of Air Force (CAF) Air Marshal Stephen Chappell) in Canberra, for their outstanding efforts in the recovery of the remains of aircrew and passengers from a Caribou crash in PNG in 1972.

Air Vice-Marshal Reynolds said the rescue and subsequent recovery was successfully accomplished due to the commitment of all those involved operating as a professional, coordinated and dedicated team.

“The bravery and dedication they showed are in keeping

with the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Australian Defence Force,” he said.

The crew members (all retired) of the 5 Squadron Iroquois presented with a CAF Group Commendation are:

Iroquois: A2-487 (three survivors rescued)

- Captain: Flying Officer Tony Lea; Co-Pilot: Pilot Officer Michael O'Loghlen.
- Crewmen: Leading Aircraftman Neville Pratt, Leading Aircraftman Ken Tanswell; Observer: Flight Sergeant Stan Flack.

Iroquois: A2-490 (two survivors rescued)

- Captain: Flying Officer Graham Christian; Co-Pilot: Flying Officer Ron Bishop.
- Crewman: Leading Aircraftman Raymond Morrison; Observer: Flying Officer Chris Young.



Ron Bishop (L) with Athenaeum Club Immediate Past President, WGCDR Richard Bluck (Reid) AM RFD, during Ron's presentation on the 1972 PNG search and recovery mission at The Athenaeum's Aviation Lunch on 3 February.

With thanks to [Air Force News](#), we can share the story of the treacherous rescue and recovery below:



The crew of the A2-487 Iroquois, at a village near Garaina, PNG, seek witnesses to the crash of a RAAF Caribou in August 1972.

On August 28, 1972, under hazardous conditions of heavy rain, poor visibility, low fuel and difficult terrain, the crew of two RAAF Iroquois helicopters searched for survivors of a missing RAAF aircraft.

A Caribou carrying 25 Papua New Guinea Army Cadets, three RAAF aviators and an Australian Army liaison officer had crashed in thick jungle while en route from Lae to Port Moresby.

After three days of searching, four survivors were sighted attempting to walk to safety in a deep ravine. The crew rescued them, with great difficulty given the conditions, and were directed by the survivors to the crash site.

Continued on page 5

There, the treacherous mission began of lowering crew members into the wreck site to search for more survivors.

The helicopters took turns hovering for more than 30 minutes in a down-wind condition, nose-on into a steep slope, in a small hole between and under tree cover.

Ray Morrison, one of the winch operating crewmen, further described what it took to allow the winch cable to reach the ground.

“Graham settled into one of the tightest hovers I have ever seen,” Mr Morrison said.

“We used all the cable available and had to sit the chopper down in the trees with only a couple of feet clearance all round.”

Chris Young, one of the other pilots, added: “On the following day when we took the engineers in, I was able to look up through the overhead window at major branches immediately above the main rotor.”

Stan Flack, then a flight sergeant ground crew, remembered the mission with a mix of pride and sadness.

“I admit that going down into a hole in the jungle at the end of a thin wire just on dark when the wind was gusting and it was raining was a very fast learning curve for me,” Mr Flack said.

“Looking back after 50 years, I’m proud to have been involved with all the members of both crews. I particularly have great admiration for the captains of both aircraft.

“Unfortunately, in life there are some things that you cannot leave behind. 1972 PNG is one of mine.”

‘The bravery and dedication they showed are in keeping with the finest traditions of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Australian Defence Force.’

While the captains of both Iroquois were awarded well-deserved Air Force Crosses (AFCs) in 1975 for their exceptional flying and captaincy skills, it is only now that all the crew members have been honoured.

Tony Lea, the detachment commander, said they were lucky to have a well-balanced, professional and dedicated team.

“Even then, as things unfolded during the actual rescue, the augmented crews were stretched to the limits,” Mr Lea said.

“The superb teamwork displayed that day was the reason for the extraordinary results achieved.”

VETERAN HEARING SERVICES OFFERING



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

From 20 January 2025, implementation of the Veteran Hearing Services Framework will provide a more streamlined pathway to fair and consistent funding decisions on appropriate hearing devices for veterans with service-related hearing needs.

The Department of Veteran Affairs' Veteran Hearing Services Framework comprises:

- an updated Audiology Prior Financial Authorisation Request form, co-designed with providers and audiology advisers to assist expedite complex hearing requests,

- updated internal DVA processes to ensure requests are reviewed against the elements of the DVA Wellbeing Framework, and
- enhanced communication with, and information for, veterans, families and services providers through materials including information sheets and FAQ's.

The Veteran Hearing Services Framework will assist veterans to better understand hearing services request processes, and resulting in more positive and straightforward interactions for veterans and service providers.

For further information on the Veteran Hearing Services Framework please visit the related documents below or email Hearing@dva.gov.au.

RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE



No. 23 (City of Brisbane) Squadron has acquired a 1950s-era Vampire - its first aircraft after a 65-year break from flying.

The Vampire was refurbished by History and Heritage – Air Force Restoration Support Section (HH-AF RSS) after they re-acquired the airframe in 2020 and a team of volunteers from the RSS began to restore it as a static display.

Formed in 1937, 23 Squadron operated a variety of aircraft types, from Hawker Demon biplanes at RAAF Base Laverton in Victoria, to World War 2-era Wirraways in Papua New Guinea, to Vampire and Meteor jets at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland.

When the unit ceased flying operations in February 1960, one of these Vampires (A79-440) was mounted as a Gate Guardian near the entrance at Amberley. As the base expanded, more space was required, so the aircraft was taken down and sold.

Warrant Officer Paul Wendt, of RSS, said the restoration team went to great lengths to return the aircraft as closely as possible to its original condition.

“This has been one of the best restorations we’ve done in a long time,” Warrant Officer Wendt said.

“It took our team of mostly volunteers about 18 months to complete.

“Our aim is to avoid refabricating parts as much as we can, so we ended up picking the best pieces from other aircraft and restoring them to their original condition.”

Today, 23 Squadron is responsible for delivering safe and effective airbase operations, which includes airfield services, firefighters, physical training instructors, cooks, mechanics and air movements.

23 Squadron Warrant Officer Aaron Reynolds said refurbishment of the Vampire was an important reminder to all service members of the significance of their contribution to air power.

“For 23 Squadron personnel, the restoration of the Vampire is a reminder of the unit’s historical contribution to Australian air power, and while we don’t fly any more, we continue to enable the RAAF to operate across the globe right here from our base at Amberley,” Warrant Officer Reynolds said.

The refurbished aircraft is now on display at the RAAF Amberley Aviation Heritage Centre.

Source: Story courtesy of Department of Defence

YOUR LATEST EDITION OF WINGS IS OUT NOW

The latest edition of Wings – the AFA’s flagship magazine - is available online now. Click here to access the online version or go to <https://wingsmagazine.org/view-wings>

WINGS will be distributed by post in the coming weeks.



MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS - CHRIS POTTER



In our continuing series of Meet Your Board members, we introduce you to GPCAPT Chris Potter.

Chris joined the Air Force in 1996 as a Nursing Officer posted to the then 6 Hospital RAAF Williams. Following various roles including garrison health, perioperative nursing and training he was posted as XO to 2EHS RAAF Williamtown in 2006.

Chris has deployed overseas numerous times notably as OIC operating theatre during INTERFET with the RAA, on OP RAMSI with the RAN, on OP TREK with Air Force and completed several stints in the MEAO including as Aeromedical Liaison Nurse in Afghanistan in 2009.

Chris transferred to the Air Force Reserves in 2010 working for Victoria's Department of Health in the planning and performance of Victoria's acute health services, intergovernmental relations and emergency management. In his Air Force career, he was appointed on promotion to GPCAPT as the Regional Director Air Force Health Reserves Vic and Tas – a role in which he remains.

Chris maintained an interest in training as the Director of Australia's peak training course for perioperative nurses in trauma. In addition to his role as a Director on AFA Victoria's Board, he also holds a voluntary role as the medical representative for the Defence Reserves Association Victorian Division.

REFORM FOR VETERANS' AND FAMILIES' BENEFITS ENACTED



The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide's Interim Report recommended the urgent simplification and harmonisation of the veteran compensation and rehabilitation system.

On 13 February 2025, the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2024 (VETS Act) was passed by Parliament.

This recommendation has now been put to effect through the Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2024 – the VETS Act - which brings the three current systems governing veterans' entitlements under a single Act: an improved

Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA).

This reform will make it easier for veterans and families to understand their entitlements, simpler for advocates to support veterans making DVA claims, and it will streamline claims processing within the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The changes come into effect on 1 July 2026 and no veteran will see a reduction in their current payments.

The legislation will open a pathway to a Gold Card for many veterans that were previously not eligible.

New claims made after 1 July 2026 will all come under the improved MRCA. Some current payment recipients, such as the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 (DRCA) incapacity payment recipients, will transfer to MRCA incapacity payments on commencement, resulting in an increase in payments.

Veterans currently under the DRCA will also have access to appeal DVA decisions to the Veteran Review Board for the first time from early April 2025.

For more information on the new legislation, visit the [DVA website](#).



Vern Roberts has fond memories of working on the Liberator bombers during the Second World War. (Photo: Courtesy Vern Roberts)

WWII B-24 Liberator Squadron veteran, Vern Roberts tells his story of witnessing the signing of the Japanese surrender at Morotai on a recent Ad Astra podcast with Gareth McCrae OAM.

Having turned 100 in October 2024, Vern Roberts is possibly the oldest living person who witnessed the signing of the Surrender at Morotai with General Sir Thomas Blamey and the Japanese Generals on September 9th, 1945.

Listen here: <https://raafansw.org.au/podcasts/>

Vern was born on 25th October 1924 in Footscray in Melbourne. At 18 he joined the RAAF in November 1942 and reported to Royal Exhibition Buildings, Melbourne for uniforms. Vern, V.F. Roberts RAAF 120410 LAC Fitter, was stationed at East Sale air base only a matter of weeks after it first opened in 1943.

He was in a B-24 Liberator Squadron which was attached to 82 Wing of 21, 23 and 24 squadrons. He spent time in Tocumwal, NSW and Darwin NT.

The signing of the Instrument of Surrender was carried out on Morotai on September 9th, 1945 where he was present along with many other servicemen.

The General in Charge with his other Officers, was General Sir Thomas Blamey. Japanese Generals were brought over to Morotai from the islands for that great occasion.

Continued on page 9



ASTRA AVIATOR PODCASTS

An initiative by AFA and AFA NSW to capture the recollections and experiences of both retired and serving Air Force personnel.

Listen to former and current Australian aviators share their stories of life in the Air Force with interviewer Gareth McCray OAM.

Click on the link below to listen.

[AD ASTRA PODCASTS](https://raafa.org.au/media/#videos) or visit <https://raafa.org.au/media/#videos>

Every ANZAC Day, he walked in the Parade to the Shrine of Remembrance along with a very few remaining gentlemen from his Squadron. At 94, it was the last time he participated in the march and now watches the ANZAC service on television. Since 1994 he was heavily involved in the restoration of a B24 Liberator in Werribee, Victoria. This restoration is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere and accredited by the National Trust.

The Ad Astra podcasts are an initiative by AFA NSW to capture the recollections and experiences of both retired and serving Air Force personnel.

You can read more about Vern's journey here: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/vern-roberts-and-the-second-world-war>

Read more about the B-24 Liberator Restoration project here: <https://www.b24australia.org.au/>

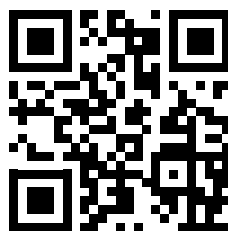


Vern Roberts at the B-24 Liberator Restoration project in Werribee (Photo: Courtesy Herald Sun)



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visit our website!**

afavic.org.au



RAAF'S HUMANITARIAN AIRLIFT IN 1975

In 1975, as the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated rapidly, with the North Vietnamese Army advancing towards Saigon, the RAAF helped evacuate Australian citizens and other foreign nationals from the country under extremely challenging conditions.



Despite facing significant risks, the RAAF personnel involved in these humanitarian efforts worked tirelessly to ensure that as many people as possible were evacuated safely.

Geoff Rose recalls his involvement in the RAAF's humanitarian airlift from Saigon in 1975.

From late March until 25 April 1975, No's 36 and 37 Squadrons and the 4 Transport Support Flight from Butterworth participated in this airlift known as Headquarters Richmond Detachment 'S'. In recognition of this anniversary, 37 Squadron Association is arranging a commemoration of the operation at the Australian War Memorial on 23 July 2025.

At the time, the Vietnam war was considered to have ended with the Paris Peace Agreement on 27 Jan 1973. However, although this agreement ended the involvement of the allied forces in Vietnam, the war continued until the South Vietnam government surrendered on 30 April 1975.

On 29 March 1975, the South Vietnamese Govt had advised the Australian Government that refugees were pouring into Danang following increasing attacks within South Vietnam by North Vietnamese forces and requested assistance from Australia.

As a result, 36 and 37 SQNs were immediately despatched (on 29 March), initially to Butterworth and then to Saigon for humanitarian operations under the direct control of the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. Initial operations were from Phan Rang to Can Tho.

The first operation carrying Vietnamese orphans on 4 April as part of 'Operation Babylift' from Saigon to Bangkok followed soon after the crash of the USAF C5 Galaxy.

Geoff recalls the confronting scenes of helicopters ferrying survivors from the crash site. By 17 April it was considered too dangerous for operations to be based in Saigon, so Bangkok was selected as the base from which individual flights to Saigon continued.

The last scheduled flight from Saigon occurred on 25 April when the Australian Ambassador and staff were flown out and a subsequent flight on that day occurred to pick up the 4 ADGs who were still at the airport.

Geoff was working with Vietnam Airlines 1995, and he recalls the celebrations conducted by the Vietnamese to commemorate the end of the Vietnam War which led him wonder why Australia did not recognise the war ending in 1975.

In 1997, the Department of Veterans Affairs published the Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans without including the RAAF personnel conducting humanitarian operations in 1975.

DVA also initiated a survey about veteran entitlements in the same year. Two ADGs and Geoff made a submission regarding the 1975 operations which resulted in DVA recognising the 1975 operation as 'warlike service'.

Department of Defence also initiated issue of the Australian Active Service Medal (Post1975) with Clasp 'VIETNAM 1975' and the Returned from Active Service Badge. In 2002, the nominal roll was extended to include Detachment S participants and Geoff accepted that entitlements did not include the Vietnam Medal (which was a campaign medal).



A RAAF C130E Hercules of HQRIC Det S, on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut, Saigon on 4th Apr 1975 - the second of the two RAAF Hercules that participated in Operation Babylift that day.

RAAF'S HUMANITARIAN AIRLIFT IN 1975

Geoff's final aim in the recognition of Detachment S is now the addition of 1975 to the dates on the Australian Forces National Memorial in Canberra. It is important to note that some memorials around Australia, including the Shrine of Remembrance and the Veterans Commemorative Walk in Seymour have amended the reference dates to '1962 – 1975'.

As mentioned in our earlier story, support is looking positive at this stage with DVA undertaking to write to the National Capital Authority in support of adding 1975 to the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial.

(With acknowledgement to Geoff Rose and the Vietnam Veterans Branch for this item.)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P01973.002

: RAAF aircrew comfort some of the babies with bottles before take-off during the second airlift of orphans from Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport. (Source: AWM P01973.002)



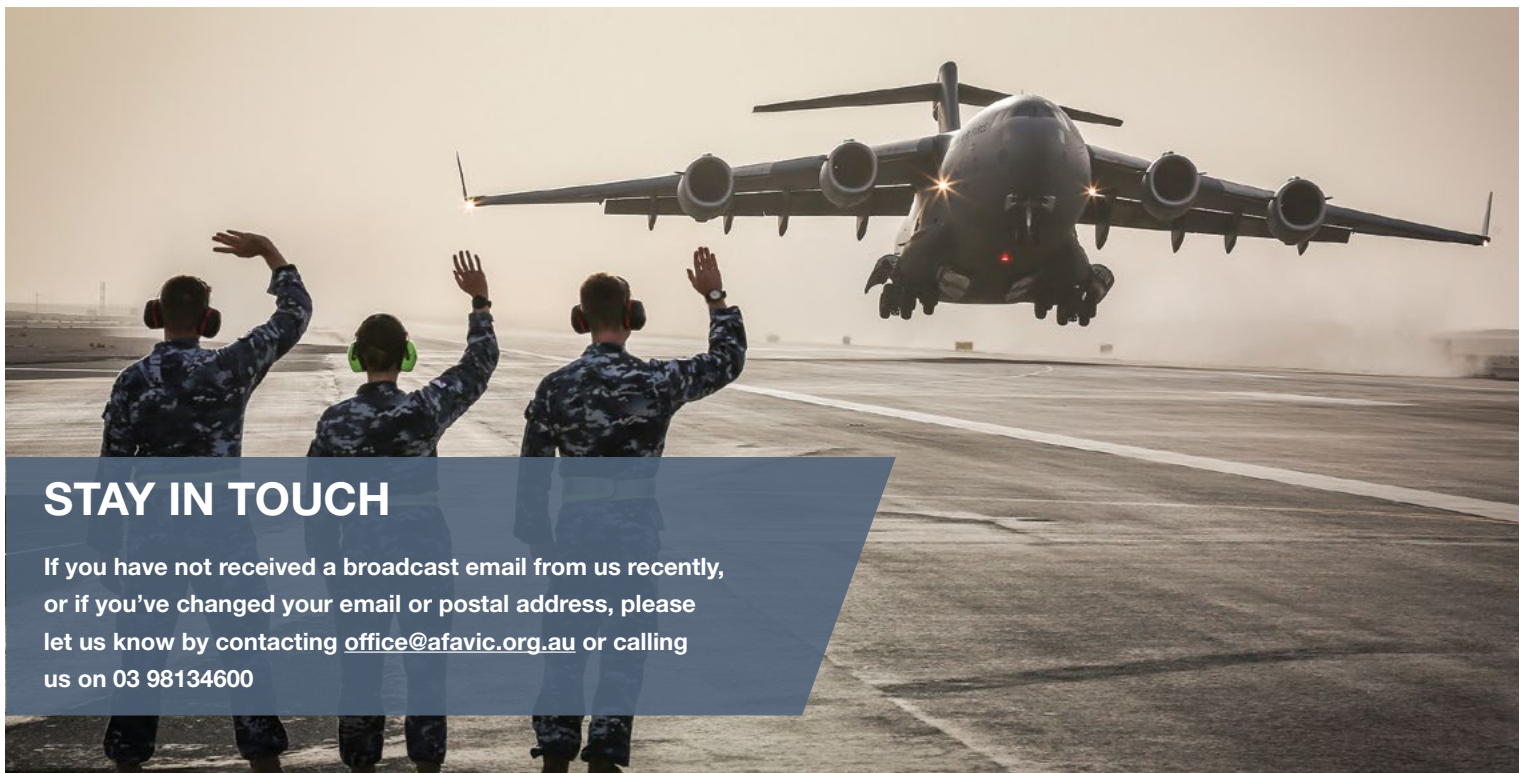
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05608.005

South Vietnamese refugees crowd the cargo compartment of an RAAF Detachment S Hercules in April 1975. (Source: AWM P05608.005)



Unloading at An Toi (Photo courtesy Geoff Rose)



STAY IN TOUCH

If you have not received a broadcast email from us recently, or if you've changed your email or postal address, please let us know by contacting office@afavic.org.au or calling us on 03 98134600

CHRIS HUDNOTT - AWARDED LIFE MEMBER OF THE AFA



Vietnam Veterans Branch President and former AFA Victoria Director, Chris Hudnott has been elected a Life Member of the Air Force Association.

Chris Hudnott retired from the executive of AFA Victoria in 2023 after 5 years as a director on the AFA Victoria Board of Management. During this time Chris carried out the tasks of the Communication Director and his leadership in this role raised the standard of our regular contact with our members via our quarterly Contact magazine. His contribution to AFA Victoria as a Director has been sadly missed.

Chris joined AFA Victoria in 2010, when the RAAFVVA organisation voted to join AFA Victoria as they realised that the VVA had a limited lifespan. The Vietnam Veterans branch of AFA Victoria is currently the largest of our affiliated branches, and Chris is currently the President of this Branch. Joining the Committee of the RAAFVVA in 2014, he became Vice President in 2015 and President in 2017.

Whenever there was a need for volunteers, Chris was always one of the first to step forward. This included tasks like stripping and repainting the Iroquois helicopter at the Vietnam Veterans Museum at Phillip Island - a task not normally associated with the pilot fraternity.

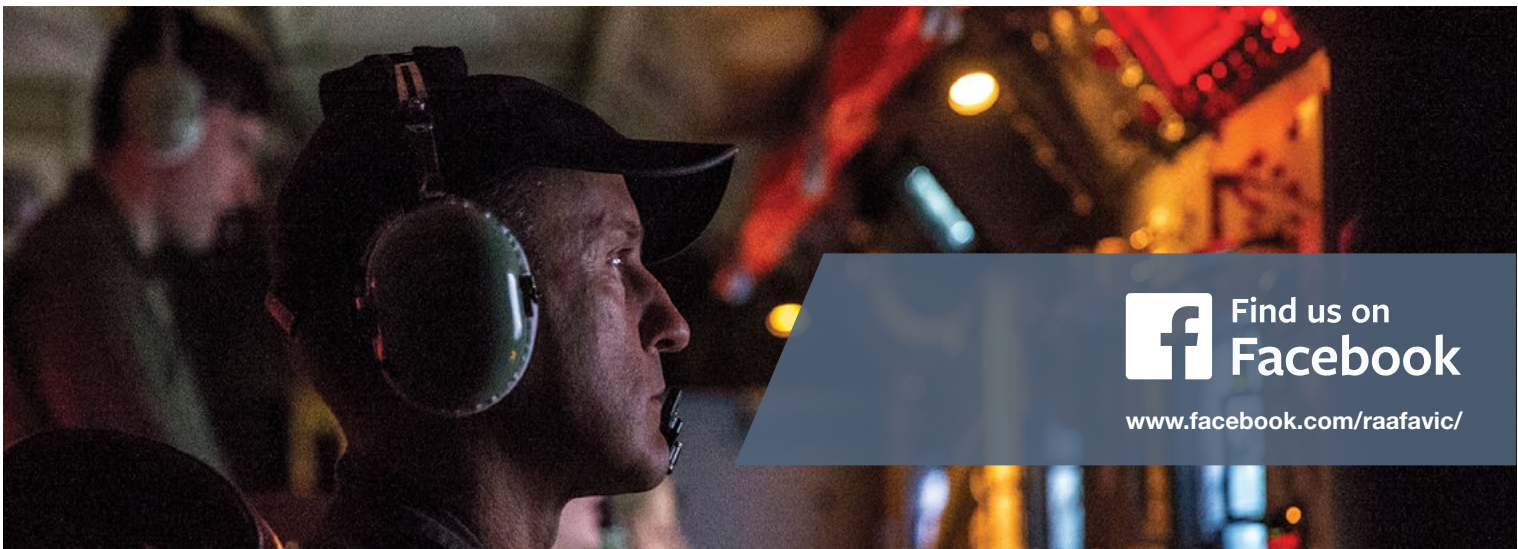
The Board of Management of AFA Victoria voted unanimously in support of the proposal to award life membership to Mr Christopher Hudnott.


AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson presented the official Badge and Certificate to Chris, a most deserving recipient who has contributed so much over many years to AFA Victoria

Congratulations, Chris!



John Clarkson presented the official Badge and Certificate to a surprised Chris Hudnott during Vietnam Veterans Branch Committee meeting late last year.



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80TH ANNIVERSARY OF LOST AIRCREW

On December 11, 1944, a B-25D Mitchell bomber crashed off Point Addis, marking a tragic chapter in Australia's wartime history.



Wing Commander Aarian Birch pilots his CAC Winjeel from 100 Squadron at Point Cook over the cliffs of Point Addis during the 80th commemoration of the ditched RAAF Mitchell Bomber in 1944. (Photo: Warrant Officer Don Kenny)

This year, families of the fallen airmen, along with descendants of the local heroes who rescued the survivors, gathered to commemorate the 80th anniversary and honour the lives lost and the courage that followed.

The B-25D Mitchell bomber, which took off from RAAF Base Laverton for a routine weapons test, crashed into the sea after a fire broke out. Captain of the aircraft Flight Lieutenant Robert Wines, Squadron Leader Frederick McGrill and Leading Aircraftman Ronald Cavanagh were killed in the crash. However, Flight Lieutenant Albert Claire and Leading Aircraftman Dennis Roberts survived, thrown clear of the wreckage and rescued by local fishermen.

Eighty years later, the families and community gathered at Point Addis for a memorial service that marked both the tragedy and the extraordinary heroism that followed.

"It's difficult to express the loss felt by those of us who never met our loved ones. But today, we are reminded not just of the tragedy, but of the bravery that emerged," said Grant Reeckmann, nephew of Flight Lieutenant Wines.

"We gather together in tribute of the sacrifice of these men, and the courage of those who did everything they could to save them."

The brave actions of Allan Smith and Bill Thompson, who risked their lives in the rough seas to bring Claire and Roberts back to shore, were a central part of this story of survival.

Chris and Nick, sons of Leading Aircraftman Roberts, shared their pride: "We've always felt the need to carry on our father's legacy. Today, we see the impact of his story, not just on our family, but on the entire community."

A moving address from Squadron Leader Christopher Hayden emphasised the legacy of courage.

"We gather here today not just to mourn, but to honour the extraordinary courage shown by all involved," he said.

"The sacrifices made remind us that in times of tragedy, humanity shines brightest."

The ceremony concluded with a flypast at 11.07am, the exact time the crash occurred. The 100 Squadron heritage aircraft CAC Winjeel flew in honour of the men who had perished and the rescuers who ensured that others survived.

The Anglesea Historical Society also unveiled an exhibition sharing the story of the crash, the search and the ongoing legacy of bravery.

– Story courtesy Department of Defence



Squadron Leader Christopher Hayden, on behalf of RAAF, prepares to address the crowd.

21 SQN CHANGE OF COMMAND CEREMONY

On 12 December 2024, No. 21 (City of Melbourne) Squadron held a Change of Command Ceremony at RAAF Base Point Cook.

Wing Commander Rob Gill, CSC handed over all duties and responsibilities of Commanding Officer No. 21SQN to Wing Commander Nikki Clements with the signing of Acceptance of Command.

The Change of Ceremony included the transfer of the No 21 Squadron Colours and the presentation of the Squadron Sword as symbolic handover of the responsibility of command.

The sword was presented to the Squadron in 1972 by No. 600 Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force. The two Squadrons have an affiliation personally approved by His Majesty King George the 6th in 1938.

WGCDR Gill prepared a YouTube video overview of No 21 Squadron's year which you can view [here](#).



WGCDR Rob Gill, inspects No 21 Squadron for his last time as Commanding Officer before handing over authority to WGCDR Nicole Clements at RAAF Base Point Cook.



WGCDR Gill presents the Squadron Sword to WGCDR Clements.



WGCDR Nicole Clements receives No 21 Squadron Standard from outgoing Commander Officer WGCDR Rob Gill in the presence of Squadron aviators.



(L to R) GPCAPT C. Schiller (Ret) Immediate Past National President of the Air Force Association, Mr Richard Tuft (Ex 21SQN member), WGCDR Nicole Clements, Mike Dance (former XO 21 SQN), Wing Commander Rob Gill, CSC, Robert Schouten (former CO 21SQN), AFA Victoria Communications Director, John Delia.

ANNUAL BURSARY AWARDED



L-R: AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson and Immediate Past President Max McGregor presented the AFA Victoria Educational Award and John 'Snow' Coughlan Encouragement Award to Charlize Long.

At its AGM on 16 February, the Vietnam Veterans Branch once again presented Educational Bursaries and Encouragement Awards.

The Bursary (financially supported by AFA Victoria) and the Encouragement Award (funded by members of the Vietnam Veterans Branch) were this year presented to Charlize Long.

AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson presented the AFA Victoria Educational Award and Immediate Past President Max McGregor presented the John 'Snow' Coughlan Encouragement Award on behalf of Gill Coughlan. [Read John 'Snow' Coughlan's story here.](#)

Charlize was very pleased and most grateful to receive both financial awards and said the funds would greatly assist during her second year of a Bachelor of Education course at Deakin University (Burwood Campus).

Read more about the AFA Victoria Bursaries [here](#).

GENERAL INFORMATION

AFA VICTORIA BRANCH CONTACTS

21SQN	Mike Dance	0438764629
ATC/AAFC	Hugh Tank	03 98773424
B24 Liberator	Tony Muller	03 97414635
Ballarat	Peter Dowling	0418 281 775
Bendigo	Reinhard Goschiniak	0419 375 160
Catalina	Ronald Kirk	03 98193527
Technical	David Graham	0407 248 874
Geelong	John Price	0415 077 805
RAAF Radar	Chris Harnath	0425 770 011
RAF	Val Boyd	0428 174 070
Sunderland SQNs	Ricky Hattam	0418 994 759
Vietnam Veterans	Chris Hudnott	0438 331 215
Williams	(contact AFA Vic)	03 98134600

CONTACT: EDITORIAL DATES

WINTER 2025

Contributions by 27 May 2025
Publication: 20 June 2025

SPRING 2025

Contributions by: 1 September 2025
Publication: 19 September 2025

SUMMER 2025

Contributions by: 28 November 2025
Publication: 17 December 2025

AUTUMN 2026

Contributions by 2 March 2026
Publication: 20 March 2026

MEMORIALS UNVEILED ON 83RD ANNIVERSARY OF DARWIN BOMBING

On the 83rd anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin, two memorials located in front of 13 Squadron headquarters at RAAF Base Darwin were unveiled to honour the fallen.

On February 19, 1942, seven Royal Australian Air Force aviators tragically lost their lives defending Darwin during the largest single attack by a foreign nation on Australian soil.

Two memorials honouring the sacrifice of aviators killed in a Japanese attack have been unveiled in Darwin.

The memorials are a result of the work and dedication of 13 Squadron personnel to ensure the seven are remembered and their names and stories live on.

During WWII, more than 240 Japanese aircraft, across two separate raids, created widespread chaos and destruction in Darwin, killing 235 Allied service personal and civilians.

In paying tribute to the men and women who lost their lives on that day, Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell said that memorials, such as the two that were unveiled, served as a place to reflect on the scale of their selfless sacrifice and the debt of gratitude owed to those who served.

“They remind us of the sacrifice of those who have worn our uniforms before us, and that the best way we can honour their sacrifice is with an unwavering commitment to peace.”

Read more about the bombing of Darwin on 19 February 1942 here or visit <https://battleforausvic.au/>

(Story courtesy Department of Defence)



An aviator pays her respects at the unveiling of the Bombing of Darwin memorial at RAAF Base Darwin.



A plaque marks the place where Wing Commander Archibald Robert Tindal died while manning a Lewis machine gun during the Bombing of Darwin.



Members of the catafalque party standing at their post during the commemoration of the 83rd anniversary of the bombing of Darwin. (Photo- Private Struan Roxborough).

RAAF RESTORES KITTYHAWK 'MING THE MERCILESS'



Warrant Officer of the Air Force Ralph Clifton, Gary Walsh, Rodney Tidler, David Gardner, and Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell at the unveiling of the restored P-40E Kittyhawk. (Photos: Leading Aircraftwoman Maddison Scott).

World War 2 aircraft, THE P-40E Kittyhawk A29-90, nicknamed 'Ming the Merciless', has recently been restored to its former glory by a dedicated team of mechanical experts.

The restored aircraft was unveiled as part of the Australian International Airshow 2025 by Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell.

"Our Air Force has an incredibly proud history, especially the history of our aviators during the Second World War – they were daring, brave and endured unimaginable danger and sacrifice," Air Marshal Chappell said.

"By restoring 'Ming the Merciless', we are preserving the stories of the men who crewed this Kittyhawk, as well as the stories of the men who crewed the more-than 840 Kittyhawks operated by the RAAF during the Second World War."

Soon after being allocated to 76SQN on May 2, 1942, A29-90 fought in the Battle of Milne Bay, New Guinea, in August and September that year.

On August 4, 1942, Flying Officer Peter Ash set out in A29-90 from Gurney Field near Milne Bay, engaging with six enemy Zero aircraft as part of a patrol. Flying Officer Ash was credited with a confirmed aerial victory against an enemy aircraft, the first for 76SQN over Milne Bay, before later returning to Gurney Field – despite A29-90 sustaining damage from enemy fire.

After further service at several Australian bases, A29-90 was damaged beyond repair in 1944 following a forced landing.

The work to restore 'Ming the Merciless' began in 2012.

"The restoration of A29-90 could not have been completed but for the efforts of Mr David Gardner, Senior Air Force Heritage Collections Manager, and Mr Gary Walsh, Air Force Heritage Collections Curator," Air Marshal Chappell said.

"I would also like to acknowledge the work of Mr Doug Hamilton, Mr Mark Rendell and the team at Precision Automotive in Wangaratta Victoria – without whom this project would not have succeeded.

P-40E Kittyhawk A29-90 will be on permanent display at the RAAF Museum at RAAF Base Point Cook.



Air Marshal Stephen Chappell and Warrant Office of the Air Force Ralph Clifton unveil the restored Kittyhawk.

World War Two Service



SQUADRON LEADER
CHARLES ARBUTHNOT
CROMBIE DSO, DFC
404099

SERVICE
DATE OF BIRTH
PLACE OF BIRTH
DATE OF ENLISTMENT
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT
NEXT OF KIN
DATE OF DEATH
POSTING ON DEATH
WW2 HONOURS AND
GALLANTRY

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
16 MARCH 1915
BRISBANE, QLD
24 MAY 1940
BRISBANE, QLD
CROMBIE, BETTY
26 AUGUST 1945
5 OPERATIONAL TRAINING UNIT
COMPANION OF THE
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER
DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

VETERAN SEARCH

Seeking any relatives of SQN LDR Charles Arbuthnot Crombie DSO DFC (ex 5OTU), died 26th August 1945.

Please contact AFA Victoria on 9813 4600 or raafavic.org.au.

RAAF HONOURS VETERAN OF TWO WORLD WARS



Captain Francis Smith, MC, DFC, in front of an SE5a fighter of 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, in France, circa 1918.



War Medal 1939-1945 and Australian Service Medal 1939-1945 of Squadron Leader Francis Smith, MC, DFC, alongside his World War 1 medals. (Photo: Douglas Ferguson)

A soldier and aviator who served in both world wars has been posthumously awarded the War Medal 1939–1945 and Australian Service Medal 1939–1945.

History and Heritage – Air Force (HH–AF) was researching the military service of Squadron Leader Francis Ryan Smith MC DFC when they discovered he might be entitled to the War Medal 1939–1945 and Australian Service Medal 1939–1945.

On March 7, HH-AF personnel presented the service medals to Squadron Leader Smith’s descendants in the Royal Air Force Central Church of St Clement Danes in London.

“It has been a privilege to present the service medals of this remarkable Australian to his family,” Wing Commander Rich MacNeil from HH–AF, said.

“Squadron Leader Smith was a courageous and highly skilled soldier and aviator whose service in both world wars continues to inspire current generations of ADF personnel.”

While serving with the 31st Battalion in 1916, then-Second Lieutenant Smith received the Military Cross after leading a raid on German trenches while severely injured.

Later serving as a pilot with 2 Squadron Australian Flying Corps in 1918, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his audacious actions in aerial combat.

Squadron Leader Smith then volunteered for the Air Force during World War 2, joining the RAAF’s Administrative and Special Duties Branch in 1941, where he made a significant contribution to the development of the Air Training Corps in southern Queensland.

HH–AF is writing a book on the life and military service of Squadron Leader Smith, which is due to be published in 2027.

Story courtesy Department of Defence.

AROUND THE BRANCHES

VIETNAM VETERANS

The Vietnam Veterans Branch began 2025 with the Annual General Meeting held at the Air Force Association Office and attended by the AFA (Vic) President, John Clarkson and 12 Branch members.

As is our custom, we began the meeting by presenting the AFA Education Bursary (kindly funded by the AFA Victoria and the Encouragement Award sponsored by members of the Branch Committee

in memory of John ‘Snow’ Coughlan CGM. This year, both certificates and cheques were awarded to Charlize Long and pictures of the presentations by John Clarkson and Max McGregor appear in the

Branch newsletter which is available on-line in the VV Branch section of the AFA website.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the RAAF humanitarian support

Continued on page 19

as Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces closed in for the final assault of the war and Nos 36 and 37 Squadrons and Transport Support Flight from Butterworth participated in the airlift known as Headquarters Richmond Detachment 'S'.

In recognition of this anniversary, 37 Squadron Association is arranging a commemoration of the operation at the Australian War Memorial on 23 July 2025. Additionally, the publisher of our quarterly Branch Newsletter, Geoff Rose, has been

instrumental in seeking the support of DVA and the National Capital Authority (NCA) in having the year 1975 added after the dates 1962 – 1973 on the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial. Support from the NCA is looking positive at this stage and AFA National has arranged for the matter to be included in the agenda for the next Ex-Service Organisation Round Table (ESORT) meeting in March so that ESORT members from the other services are offered the opportunity to support this initiative.

Branch Deputy President, Max McGregor also addressed our AGM about 4 Air Defence Guards who were reportedly left behind following the evacuation of the Australian Ambassador and staff on the final C130 flight from Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). The Guards were eventually flown out on another C130 aircraft that was tasked with retrieving the 4 men.

Max and other Branch members are working to clarify the history and publishing the findings on the AFA Victoria website by 25 April 2025 (to coincide

with the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Chris Hudnott
Branch President

WANT TO KNOW MORE
ABOUT THE VIETNAM
VETERANS' BRANCH?

VISIT OUR BRANCH PAGE ON
THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION
VICTORIA WEBSITE

VALE

*It is with the greatest respect and fond memories,
we remember our colleagues who have passed on
before us.*



Lest We Forget

Air Force Association

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Andrew Blyth – Treasurer

John Delia – Director, Communications

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