



# Unveiling of the RAAF Vietnam Plaque at the Australian Flying Corps Memorial



RAAF Base Point Cook  
28 March 2010

## Introduction

Three line squadrons and a number of supporting units were committed to active service in South Vietnam, but for many veterans of that conflict, the RAAF has never really acknowledged the service of those units and personnel to the Nation in general or the RAAF in particular.

Indeed, the official record of the RAAF War in Vietnam by Professor Coulthard Clark states that the then CAS felt that without fighters being committed, there was nothing for the RAAF to learn.

Whether that viewpoint, flawed as it proved to be, stemmed from the fact that a RAAF fighter squadron was not deployed (the Sabre could only have been used in the ground attack role and there were better weapon systems already deployed by the USAF and US Army and the Mirage, being new to the RAAF and French to boot making it a difficult option to support) is immaterial. Whatever the reason, it rankled then and still does for a number of RAAF Vietnam Veterans.

## Memorials

Despite squadron plaques being dedicated at the Australian War Memorial, there is really no specific dedicated site to RAAF service (the addition of Vietnam to the RAAF Memorial in Canberra doesn't cut it!!).

In Victoria, the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association (Vic), with the agreement of the Governors of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, dedicated a plaque in the Garden of Reflection to those units and personnel who served in Vietnam. It has become the focal point when RAAF Vietnam Veterans gather for the ANZAC Day and Vietnam Veterans Day commemorations at the Shrine. But for many veterans, it still didn't "close the circle"!

## The Answer

Discussions with the RAAF Association (Victorian Division) provided an answer. They would fund and conduct a commemorative ceremony at which a plaque, dedicated to those RAAF personnel who lost their lives during that service and honouring all the personnel and units who served in Vietnam between 1964 and 1975, would be dedicated at the Australian Flying Corps Memorial at RAAF Base Pt Cook – the "Spiritual Home of the RAAF".

**The Ceremony: RAAF Base Point Cook, 28 March 2010**

So, on 28th March 2010, a crowd of some 250 veterans (many from interstate), family and friends gathered at Point Cook for the ceremony. They were joined by more than 30 members of the Melbourne Vietnamese Community (many of them also veterans) whose presence was especially significant and warmly welcomed by all who attended.



*Above: Guests await the commencement of the proceedings.*

Australian Air Force Cadets from No 4 Wing displayed the banners of the RAAF Association, RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association, No 2 Sqn, No 9 Sqn, RTFV/35 Sqn and the Forward Air Controllers Association to form a backdrop to the plaque which was “guarded” by three Cadet Officers with swords reversed.

The RAAF Air Power Brass Band provided the music accompaniment and a faultless (and haunting) Last Post and Rouse.

After a short opening address by Peter Colliver, President RAAF Association (Victorian Division), AVM Alan Reed AO delivered an excellent keynote address. The plaque was unveiled by Peter Colliver and our Patron, AVM E (Mac) Weller AM, who made the trip from Canberra to do so.

The RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association Padre, Reverend George G Ashworth OAM, delivered the dedication after which wreaths were laid by AIRCDRE Ken Watson (CDR Air Training Group), Lee Scully RAAFVVA President, John McCrystal RAAFA Vice President, Graham Henry State President No 2 Sqn Association, Graeme Chalmers National President No 9 Sqn Association and Dave Grierson on behalf of RTFV/35Sqn.

Tony Lupton MP, representing the State Premier and Bob Elworthy, State President of the Vietnam Veterans Association also laid wreaths along with Viet Long NGUYEN, Vietnamese Veterans, Mrs Be Ha JP Vietnamese Association and Tom Roberts, President RAAFA Branch Ballarat.



Above: RAAF Association (Vic) President, Peter Colliver and RAAFVVA Patron, AVM E (Mac) Weller AM unveil the plaque (below).







Once the wreaths had been laid Anthony Pahl OAM recited his special poem “New Memory for Old Blokes”; which left many an eye moist if not wet!

For many of the veterans there, having the plaque at Point Cook (the spiritual home of the RAAF) may be seen as acknowledgment (finally) by the RAAF of that service despite the fact that successive Chiefs of Air Staff/Force never saw the need (despite two of them having served there on Canberra aircraft).

For others, it completes the journey since we are all now home, thanks to the return of our two MIAs (Mike Herbert and Bob Carver – Magpie 91) in August 2009. At Last!!

The ceremony was followed by a luncheon at the Officers Mess after which many of those who attended visited the RAAF Point Cook Museum, where the forward fuselage of a Canberra, a Huey gunship (A2-377) and a Caribou attracted much interest.

A flying display by a beautifully detailed “Bird Dog’ had special significance for Mac (The FAC) Cottrell DFC, who attended along with his son and daughter and other FACs who journeyed to RAAF Point Cook for the ceremony.

**WELCOME ADDRESS**  
**PETER COLLIVER**  
**President RAAF Association (Victorian Division)**

Official Guests:

AIRCDRE Ken Watson: Representing CAF

The Honourable Tony Lupton: Representing Premier Victoria

AVM Alan Reed: AO Keynote Speaker – Vietnam USAF RF-4C

AVM E M (Mac) Weller AM: Patron RAAFVVA

AVM Hans Roser: Vietnam USAF F-4C/F-4D

MAJGEN Peter Haddad AO: Chairman, Victorian Veterans' Council

Mr Bob Elworthy: State President VVAA

Reverend George Ashworth OAM RFD: Officiating Chaplain/RAAFVVA Padre

Mr Lee Scully: President RAAFVVA

GPCAPT Mac Cottrell DFC: Representing FAC Assoc.

WGCDR (Retd) Graeme Chalmers: National President 9 Sqn Assoc

WGCDR (Retd) Dave Grierson: RTFV/35Sqn Association

SQNLDR (Ret'd) Graham Henry: State President 2Sqn Assoc

Mr Viet Long Nguyen: President Vietnamese Veterans

Ms Be Ha President: Vietnamese Assoc Vic

Mr John Geary: Representing Deputy Commissioner DVA

Mr Mike Downs: Vice President (Vic) 9 Sqn Assoc

Mr David Moles: Vice President (TAS) 9 Sqn Assoc

Mr A (Tony) Pahl OAM: Vice President (S.A.) 9 Sqn Assoc

Mr John Sambrooks: Secretary/Treasurer TSF/35Sqn

RAAFA Board Members

Branch Representatives

We are here today to dedicate a plaque in recognition of RAAF service in Vietnam and the reason that we are doing that is because the Air Force Association cares! The Association exists for four equally important and concurrent reasons:

- To commemorate significant events in Air Force history
- To Support the dependents of those who have died in service
- To support those who have served in whatever way is necessary, and
- To support those still serving and the Air Force, itself, in any way that we can

Things do not always happen as quickly as perhaps they should.

It took 28 years after WWI for the Australian Flying Corps Memorial to be erected here at Point Cook and it took 28 years after WWII before a plaque recognising that War and "subsequent wars" was added to the Memorial.

It was 30 plus years after the event before a plaque commemorating the Korean War was installed here, and here we are, today, 35 years after the event, to recognize those who served our country in Vietnam.

We may sometimes not be able to do things as quickly as we would like, but we do care.

Thank you for being here today for this important ceremony and welcome. We hope that at the conclusion of the ceremony you will be able to join us in the Officers' Mess for lunch and to celebrate the Air Force's 89th anniversary of formation.



*Peter Colliver, President RAAF Association (Victorian Division) gives the Welcome Address.*

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS AIR VICE MARSHAL ALAN REED AO

“Vietnam Vietnam”. What do those words do to you?

If you served there and you are anything like me, they will conjure in your mind a feast of memories almost like it was yesterday – although it is more than 40 years ago!

Some memories are good and others not so good. Some people have been scarred by their memories and will carry those scars to the grave. Whatever, all of us who served there have our own memories of our own experience and thoughts of that war and I could say a few things about mine.

But what I do want to say is how pleased I am to see finally and formally, recognition by the RAAF of RAAF Service in Vietnam.

It’s about time I hear you say – and it is! Forty years is long enough! So, it brings a sort of closure for all of us after all these years.

Closure after the hard time we experienced on our return. Being classed almost as war criminals when we had been doing our job to the best of our ability was not a nice feeling and one not easily forgotten. It still rankles me and maybe you too!

But it is closure too in another sense and in some ways the timing of this memorial ceremony is right. After all, we are all home now.

Bringing Mike Herbert and Bob Carver home was a magnificent achievement and we are all grateful to LTCOL Jim Bourke and his team of “Operation Aussies Home” for the magnificent job they did in bringing home those two fine young men to where they belong and the four soldiers too. Thank you, Colonel Bourke and your team.

I also want to thank DSTO. DSTO you may well ask?

I attended the Chief of Air Force briefing for retired senior officers in Canberra last month. The Chief pointed out that the scientists did contribute and contribute well. The problem in locating the wreckage had been the many reports unsubstantiated and otherwise at the time and since what happened and where and when.

So, the Chief gave the problem to DSTO who went right back to basics using only information that they could guarantee and using the Canberra flight profile. They estimated a fairly small area where they believed the aircraft would be.

Spot on – as it turned out. So, thank you also to DSTO and the scientists involved in bringing our boys back home.

It is certainly very important to us to have everyone back as we dedicate this memorial to RAAF Service in Vietnam.

The RAAF had quite a significant involvement in Vietnam.

First in – in 1964 was the recently retired and erstwhile Caribou with the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and later 35 Squadron. First in and last out! And with a well-earned reputation of getting in when others could not. “Wallaby Airlines” was well known to all who served there.

9 Squadron was next in and probably best known for their support of the Army conducting many difficult and dangerous missions, including the best-known resupply of ammunition in the worst possible weather to the beleaguered Australian Forces during the Battle of Long Tan.

Frank Riley, who was on my pilot’s course, was awarded the DFC and Cliff Dohle who had been a signaller in my crew on long nose Lincolns at Townsville, before training as a pilot, an MID. They and their crews both demonstrated heroism and undoubtedly saved the day for the Australian troops who were being badly shot up.

How pleased I was to learn that the MID awarded to Cliff had been upgraded last year to a Distinguished Service Medal. How sad I was that the announcement was just after Cliff had passed away.

The awards to 9 Squadron people were well justified and none more so than the CGM for exceptional bravery to “Snow” Coughlan. The only such award since the Second World War.

9 Squadron lost seven aircraft with six of its members killed and eight wounded in battle.

The other formed unit was, of course, 2 Squadron flying that beautiful lady of the sky – the Canberra. Last – first out!

Their accuracy with low level bombing was a delight to FACs – they could be relied upon totally to put a bomb exactly where it was asked.

2 Squadron is the only RAAF unit to be awarded three Presidential Unit Citations – two from the US, one in the Second World War and one for Vietnam and another from the President of the Republic of South Vietnam.

The RAAF did not send a fighter squadron to Vietnam. The Mirage III was our brand-new fighter then and supporting it in Vietnam would have been very difficult.

The official record of the RAAF War in Vietnam by Professor Coulthard Clark states that the then CAS felt that without fighters being committed, there was nothing for the RAAF to learn.

I think this observation is pretty harsh and unfair and I do not believe it was justified.

Although no fighter squadron was deployed, 36 Australian fighter pilots served as FACs and served with distinction fully integrated into US units. Another half dozen flew Phantoms with the USAF and I can assure you pilots from personal experience that there were many valuable lessons learned by those people.

Many other people were involved in Vietnam. 36 and 37 Squadrons flew regular support missions. 5 ACS developed Phan Rang and Vung Tau facilities. RAAF Nurses assisted many medivacs. Transport Support Flight Butterworth flew regularly into Vietnam. HQ Richmond Detachment S provided humanitarian support during the evacuation in 1975.



All were there and all served their country well. And of course, I am not referring to the crews alone.

There were few of them by comparison to those supporting them. They were the point of the arrow certainly. But the point of the arrow is useless without the shaft and the feathers to guide it. It will go nowhere without that support and the direction it needs.

Everyone who served in Vietnam was involved in keeping those crews in the air and doing their job. Whether Air Defence Guards, Photo Interpreters seconded to the USAF, tradies servicing the aircraft, clerks in the orderly room or the equipment store, no matter what role you served in, you were part of the contribution – and this recognition is for you.

We did our best to support Vietnam at that time.

Everyone who served in the RAAF in Vietnam is acknowledged today by this memorial and by this service. It is for you. Feel proud about it. I do!



*Air Vice Marshall Alan Reed AO gives the Keynote Address.*

## DEDICATION OF THE RAAFVVA PLAQUE

### THE REVEREND GEORGE G. ASHWORTH OAM RFD

#### Chaplain to the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association (Vic)

The history of Dedication is something that has taken place in every century. It was over 900 years before the birth of Jesus Christ that King Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem. And we humans have seen fit to remember that Almighty God has an important place in the lives of every generation. So, what we do here today has a very proud history. Today we remember and honour in this special plaque today and gladly and sincerely place on record our gratitude for all those people who served the country in the Conflict of Vietnam.

Let us pray:

*Almighty God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given to us the Holy Spirit that we might live lives worthy of His great sacrifice on the Cross of Calvary. We acknowledge your interest in each one of us and remember your promise – 'I will never leave you or forsake you'. We thank you for every person who served our Country in the conflict of Vietnam.*

*We dedicate this special memorial plaque to honour the personnel of these Units. We thank you for Your protection in time of danger and here place on record the service they have rendered in our Country's time of need.*

*We also remember all personnel of the Royal Australian Air Force who are serving today. Grant to them the visions of a world transformed with the courage that comes through faith and may they remain constant to the cause of righteousness and truth, though Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*



*The Rev. George G Ashworth OAM RFD delivers the Dedication.*

**NEW MEMORY FOR OLD BLOKES**  
**RAAF Vietnam Remembered**  
Written and read by Anthony W. Pahl OAM

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

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

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

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

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



*Anthony W. Pahl OAM reads his poem, 'New Memory for Old Blokes'.*

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*Written to commemorate the unveiling of the RAAF Vietnam Plaque at the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne, Victoria on Vietnam Veterans Day, 18th August 2008 and recited by the Author at the unveiling of the RAAF Vietnam Plaque at the Australian Flying Corps Memorial, RAAF Base Point Cook, 28 March 2010*





