



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

Repatriation Ceremony – RAAF Base Richmond 31 August 2009

Thanks to the initial inspiration and dedication of LTCOL Jim Bourke AM, MG and his team at “Operation Aussies Home”, who had previously located the remains of the four Australian soldiers Missing In Action (MIA) in Vietnam, and finally with the assistance of RAAF and other specialists using both modern equipment and painstaking hand by hand search, the wreckage of Magpie 91, lost in flight after completion of a bombing sortie on the night of 3rd November 1970, was located and the remains of the crew – FLGOFF Mike J Herbert (pilot) and PLTOFF Bob Carver (Navigator) recovered.

Testament to the reputation of Australian forces in Vietnam, the search teams were assisted by local villagers as well as Vietnam Government agencies. That Government also expedited the return of the remains, including a formal ceremony at Hanoi where the two caskets, accompanied by an RAAF honour guard and relatives of Mike and Bob were reverently placed aboard the RAAF C130.

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: 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.

Along with the dignitaries, honour guard and former squadron members crowding the tarmac to witness their return and resplendent in its operational paint scheme, was the sole surviving flying Canberra (now operated by the Temora Air Museum).

Official Ministerial Press Release Missing Australian Servicemen Welcomed Home

The last Australian servicemen missing from the Vietnam War were welcomed home today (31 AUG 09) at RAAF Base Richmond.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver failed to return from a routine bombing mission on 3 November 1970. They were recovered in thick jungle in an extremely rugged, remote and sparsely populated area of Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, near the Laotian border.

The two airmen were returned aboard a C130H Hercules and welcomed during a ramp ceremony.

RAAF airmen from the Federation Guard formed an honour guard while the bearer party from 2 Sqn carried the remains of their comrades from the Hercules to waiting biers.

Speaking before assembled family, veterans and dignitaries, Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science Mr Greg Combet said the repatriation was “the end of an era.”

“Australia can close this chapter of its history,” Mr Combet said. “We honour all of those who served in Vietnam and sincerely thank them for their service.”

Dignitaries attending the ceremony also included Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support Dr Mike Kelly and Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin.

During their last mission Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver flew aboard callsign Magpie 91.

A team of defence specialists completed excavating the crash site on Tuesday 21 July 09. The successful repatriation was the result of cooperation between Vietnamese authorities and the Australian government.

Statement by Air Marshall Mark Binskin, Chief of Air Force

The historic repatriation of Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver on 31 August 2009 marked the end of an era for our Air Force. Michael and Robert were the last ADF members listed as Missing in Action from the Vietnam conflict and returning them to their families has finalised our involvement with the Vietnam War.

This outstanding result was achieved through the exceptional leadership and professionalism of our Air Force men and women with a massive team effort from a large number of people from the Australian Defence Organisation. The Army History Unit, in particular Major Jack Thurgar, conducted the initial investigation into the disappearance of Canberra bomber A84-231 and succeeded in locating the crash site in April this year.

Their investigation was first rate and they found the proverbial needle in a haystack. The Defence Science and Technology Organisation provided crucial technical support in refining the area of interest for the investigation in Vietnam. Our Air Force-led team did an outstanding job of excavating the crash site (to recover the remains of the crew) under harsh conditions in thick jungle in an extremely rugged and remote area. Designated Operation MAGPIES RETURN, the planning and logistics for this operation was huge and showed unparalleled commitment to excellence and attention to detail.

The subsequent repatriation involved a large number of Defence personnel and organisations and its success significantly enhanced Air Force's reputation within Australia and internationally.

I am extremely proud of all of you; we have fulfilled our obligations in Vietnam and you have yet again shown all Australians what we are capable of — regardless of the task.

M.D. BINSKIN
Air Marshal
Chief of Air Force
21 September 2009

(The following series of copyright photographs were provided by Ms Jeanette Hayden whose late husband Trevor was a member of the duty crew that dispatched Magpie 91 on 3rd November 1970 and official Department of Defence Photographs: 31 August 2009)













