

Address 35SQN 75th Anniversary, Lyceum Room, Castle Hill RSL

Friday 15 September 2017

Richard Jones, FLTLT (Retired) – Ex-ENGO 2AD/38SQN/RTFV/35SQN

Acknowledge VIPs

CAF: AIRMSHL Leo Davies and Mrs Rhonda Davies,

CO 35SQN: WGCDR Jarrod Pendlebury and Mrs Selda Pendlebury

The organisers of tonight, and special mention of CPL Renae Halley, with whom I had most of my contact in the lead up to tonight.

Members of 35SQN

Representing RTFV/35 SQN Association:

I should also mention that this address was to be given by Don Pollock, one of the original pilots of RTFV but due to a sudden bereavement in his family he was unable to do so.

Charter RTFV/35 SQN Association is to:

- Preserve the history of the 45 year service of the Caribou, in war and peace, operated by RTFV and 35SQN in Vietnam and Australia.
- Provide members with a channel of communication and keep them informed on matters important to veterans.
- Now of course, with the reactivation of 35SQN, equipped with the C27J Spartan, membership is open to current members and future ex-members of 35SQN.

**My connection - from ATC to RAAF via the Undergraduate Scheme to 2AD,
38 SQN and 35 SQN:**

- Proud of my association with the RAAF over 60+ years both as a member and a civilian contractor.
- My wife Margaret was a primary school teacher in Richmond and taught children of RAAF Richmond personnel.
- Flown in or flown several aircraft operated during the history of 35SQN; DH82 Tiger Moth, Dragon, Dragon Rapide, Avro Anson, Dakota and Caribou. In the early 1940s my family including myself would travel between Sydney and Bega, via a refuelling stop at Moruya, in Butler Airways Dragon Rapides. Being a slow light aircraft flown at low levels in all weathers, air sickness was a common problem and I remember they had a characteristic aroma in the cabin.
- During my time at 38SQN when we were taking delivery of the Caribous I remember that they had a much nicer smell inside, more like that of a new car.

Dakota, Caribou and Trojan

Dakota: some 25 years in regular service

Caribou: 45 years in regular service

C-27J: How long?

Vietnam

RAAF Caribou unit assigned to Vietnam by request of the US in 1964 as part of the South East Asia airlift system.

Rather diffused command and control but ultimately under the Air Board, tasking by US 315 Air Commando Group within USMACV, operated from an airfield controlled by the US Army, with engineering technical responsibility to Support Command and Operational Command. Spares were supplied through the US Army including a whole Caribou nose section in one case. My nearest technical supervisor was in Australia. So I was very conscious of the need to perform well in my engineering role.

The first RTFV CO, Chris Sugden, one of nature's gentlemen, was not slow to take responsibility into his own hands if he thought it was needed. Not always endearing himself to his bosses on the Air Board.

Moved all personnel RTFV from very bad US Army provided accommodation on Vung Tau Airfield into accommodation he rented in Vung Tau township.

We officers were in a very nice old French Villa with marble floors but no hot water!

Until the formation of 1ATF with 35SQN and the addition of 9SQN Iroquois in mid 1966 we bought our own food supplies in town, supplemented with pallets of frozen steak from Butterworth and we mostly cooked our own

meals. Fortunately there were also some good Vietnamese and French eating places in town and on the coast.

AVM Ernie Hay was visiting during the tour of my predecessor, Rocky Rockliff, when he noticed a group of bats descend from a manhole in the ceiling, fly along the hall and out the window. When he asked what that was the response was Oh, that is A Flight, they go out every night. Then a second group went through a little later. Being wiser he now said: I suppose that was B Flight. A group of stragglers would go out last, they were known as Training Flight.

(Show my GI type cap with the US rank on the front) The US troops in general had no idea of our badges of rank. Warrant Officers were thought to be Colonels so they were saluted while our Officers were not recognised as such. So we had these caps made up with the US Army badge of rank on the on the front. Chris Sugden was reprimanded by a visiting staff officer for authorising us to wear non uniform clothing.

At Tan Son Nhut airfield take offs were not allowed unless all engines were operating. We had an incident where a cylinder head had blown off on one engine noted after landing there. The solution to the problem was to remove the spark plugs from that cylinder and have it idling while take-off was effected using the serviceable engine.

It was during my time in Vietnam under my CO Vic Guthrie that RTFV morphed into 35SQN. No special ceremony, same task, same people, same aircraft, same place but a different name on the door.

Vic Guthrie was a keen parachutist and offered a recreational jump for personnel on my tour into the bay off Vung Tau. There was an International Control Commission (ICC) in Vung Tau comprising a Pole, representing the Eastern Communist Bloc, a Canadian representing the Western Bloc and an Indian representing neutral countries. We were invited to a social function with them some time after the parachuting. And the Pole asked Vic Guthrie what the parachuting was all about. Vic, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, told the Pole that we were practicing for an insertion into VC territory. I could imagine that being fed back to his communist bosses as intelligence information.

On the technical side we were very fortunate to have developed, through my predecessor Rocky Rockliff, a very good relationship with Mr Jacques Loriaux, DHC Tech Rep in the country. Jacques was sent to South Vietnam by DHC to support first the US Army in service trial of the Caribou and then the deployment of US Army Caribous in country. As often seems to happen with new projects he was supposed to be there for 6 months and ended up being there for several years. He and Rocky and I maintained a close friendship ever since.

On the community support side of things we operated a Surf Life Saving Club at the Vung Tau Back Beach and mowed grass at the local town playing field.

The northern end of Back Beach was in VC territory. It was from the then secret tunnels there, which Marg and I have visited in recent years, that the North Vietnamese forces launched an assault resulting in the Battle of Long Tan, a month after I returned to Australia.

The operational and technical performance of RTFV/35SQN in South Vietnam became legendary and resulted in a few shake-ups in the US Army Caribou units because they were not delivering anything like the same effectiveness.

Today C27J Trojan

With the introduction of the Trojan into operational service you may well have some technical difficulties. The defect issues with the Caribou on early delivery flights and bringing into service were so wide spread suspicions of sabotage were even being raised. There was no sabotage just settling in issues that were overcome with learning and improvement in techniques and parts. And the Caribou went on to a long and productive life.

It is all about the people, their training, initiative, competence, determination and esprit de corps.

Thanks for inviting us here tonight. Best wishes to 35SQN with the Trojan. Carry on the tradition. Congratulations on your 75th Anniversary!!