

EXPLANATORY NOTES

CARIBOU A4-173 - THE VIETNAM YEARS

At the outset of the Australian commitment in Vietnam, the daily operations of the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (later No 35 Squadron) were recorded in fastidious detail on the Form A.51 "Detail of Operations". As the campaign dragged on, it is hardly surprising to find a reduction in the amount of information recorded.

AUG64	Each sortie is listed individually with place names shown in full. Take-off and landing times are recorded for every sortie as well as full crew names with rank, initials, service number and mustering.
AUG66	Crew initials are no longer recorded
SEP67	Sorties are grouped together with only a total flying time recorded. A separate column for Mail is added. The standard form provides a column for "Rounds Fired" but this has been omitted from this compilation as it is not relevant to Caribou operations. At a later date, another column was introduced for "MEDEVAC" but on the rare occasions that these operations were conducted, the column was not used!
JUN68	The order of the load columns on the Form A.51 changes from Pax, Mail, Freight to Freight, Mail, Pax. The original order Pax, Mail, Freight has been maintained for the entire compilation.
AUG 69	Ranks are no longer recorded with only crew surnames shown. Initials are shown only when there are two crew with the same surname. In some instances crew names are shown simply as "CO" or "OC". In such instances the compiler has inserted the name and rank of the incumbent.
71	Use of codes for place names is more common.

Information has been transcribed verbatim from the Detail of Operations forms with only minimal reformatting for clarity. It should be noted that many forms are faded to the point of illegibility in which case transcribed data is a best guess followed by a question mark. Periods of illegibility (between changes of typewriter ribbon?) are notated in the remarks column.

GAPS IN RECORDS

01-27JAN66	Detail of Operations destroyed.
APR-AUG67	Detail of Operations missing.

35 SQUADRON MISSION DESCRIPTIONS

by Jake Jacobsen

(Caribou pilot with 35SQN 1968-1969)

Over the years, little changed in the tasks performed in South Vietnam by the RAAF Caribou aircraft. The tasks included airlift of cargo, mail and passengers; the dropping of paratroops (including Australian Army SAS troops); evacuation and resettling of Vietnamese families - often with their household goods; dropping of flares for night combat operations; medical evacuation of casualties and transport of the dead to the Saigon morgue. Even live cattle were air-dropped for food. On a typical day a crew would land at as many as ten airfields ranging from defended airbases to temporary dirt strips. The RAAF Caribou aircraft were frequently under attack. Although many aircraft were hit and a number were destroyed by enemy fire, no crew member died as a result of the airlift operations in Vietnam. A number were wounded in action.

The more regular missions carried out by No 35 squadron were:

MISSION 001: This was a stand-by Mission which was used for special operations. An aircraft and crew was made available at all times to respond to short notice tasking. The types of tasks included SAR (Search and Rescue), medivac and special tasks as hot zones developed.

MISSION 002: This Mission was flown every day of the week and was not a scheduled service. Tasking for the aircraft came from Operational Headquarters in Saigon and could vary from day to day in terms of the type of work to be done and the area of operations. 002 Missions ranged from the north to the south of the country and included such tasks as ferrying fuel drums, ammunition, personnel, livestock, bodies to the morgue and supply dropping. It was an interesting and varied Mission which was very challenging and quite frightening at times.

MISSION 003/004: These Missions were known as the Australian forces Vietnam (AFV) Courier. The 003 Mission (morning) and the 004 Mission (afternoon) were flown each day for the benefit of the Australian Forces - Vietnam. The AFV Courier service was from Vung Tau to Nui Dat (Luscombe airfield, where the majority of the Australian Army was based) to Tan Son Nhut (Saigon Airport) and return moving Australian personnel and supplies. Bien Hoa, where the Royal Australian Navy had personnel, was included when required.

MISSION 005: Conducted three days per week over approximately 484 nautical miles to 11 airfields to the north of Vung Tau. The daily flying time for this Mission was about 8 hours. The scheduled route was: Vung Tau - Saigon (Tan Son Nhut Airport) - Ham Tan - Phan Thiet - Song Mao - Phan Rang (Base of RAAF 2 Squadron) - Nha Trang - Dalat - Gia Nghia - Bao Loc - Saigon - Nui Dat (Australian Army Base) - Vung Tau.

MISSION 006: Conducted three days per week over approximately 490 nautical miles to 10 airfields to the south west of Vung Tau. The daily flying time for this Mission was about 7.5 hours. The scheduled route was: Vung Tau - Saigon - Cao Lanh - Long Xuyen - Duong Dong - An Thoi - Camau - Bac Lieu - Tra Vinh - Saigon - Nui Dat - Vung Tau.

Also ongoing, one aircraft was based on detachment at the USAF Base at Nha Trang to operate six days a week, exclusively in support of remote American special forces camps around the central highlands. Change-over of crew and aircraft was accomplished during the 005 Mission. These operations were normally the most hazardous, involving supplying outposts deep in the enemy occupied territory. The airfields were primitive with a rough surface and built close to, but outside the defensive perimeter of the camps. The airfields were subject to damage by torrential tropical rains and flooding. It was difficult flying with approaches to runways through cloud-shrouded mountains. The Viet Cong made flying more hazardous by setting up firing positions in the jungle at the end of the airstrips.

MISSION 007: The monthly report for May 1969 recorded the introduction of a new regular mission on the South-East Asia Schedule. Mission 007 was a passenger service from Vung Tau to Saigon and return daily except Tuesdays and Thursdays. The service will call at Luscombe on request. The July 1969 monthly report records that the 007 Mission has been so successful that it now operates seven days a week. "Basically a US mission, this service has proved very convenient to our movements organization which reserves a permanent allocation of seats."

MISSION 008: The 008 Mission is usually referred to as a "Rescue 8". It was an ad hoc mission to assist with the recovery of an aircraft that had gone unserviceable away from base. Such a flight would carry parts, up to and including an engine and engineers as required. Although the requirement for such a task would have existed from day one, it is not clear when the 008 Mission designation was first introduced.

In late May 1971, the 001, 004, 005 and 007 Missions ceased in advance of the Squadron's establishment being reduced from seven to four Caribou. On 1 June 1971, three Caribou, A4-140, 159 and 191, departed for Australia leaving only A4-173, 179, 208 and 234 in service at Vung Tau to operate two 002 and two 003 Missions each day.