

(its wings retracted at top speed) and growing costs delayed the arrival of the much-mocked F-111, but on its arrival in 1973 it proved a marvel, capable of a speed over 2,500 km/h. More than thirty years later, the F-111 and many of the aircraft ordered in the 1960s are still flying in the RAAF.

The Vietnam War

After the French defeat in 1954, Vietnam was divided in two, and both regimes were oppressive. The leader of North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, was a Nationalist, determined to re-unite Vietnam, and turned to Communist China and Communist Russia for arms. These were readily given. By 1962, Ho Chi Minh's Viet Cong (guerilla) bands had control of nearly half of South Vietnam's countryside. America predicted that a Communist victory in Vietnam would have a 'domino' effect on the Western-aligned nations of South-East Asia – Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia; even Australia could collapse. The Vietnam war was basically a civil war that became the largest conflict fought by US forces and their allies since 1945.

By 1964, a small army of 10,000 Americans was attempting to train the South Vietnamese, and soon American forces would total 500,000 men. In 1964 a RAAF squadron (35 Squadron) flying Caribou transports arrived in South Vietnam, and two more squadrons soon joined them: 9 Squadron RAAF flew Iroquois helicopters in support of the Australian troops and 2 Squadron (Canberra bombers). The record of the RAAF was outstanding. The 'choppers' of 9 Squadron – later armed with machine-guns – flew 770,000 sorties in support of the troops, and carried out the grim task of bringing out the wounded, often under enemy fire. (The chopper unit was so effective it later became part of the Australian Army.)

After 1970, anti-war sentiment reached its pitch. Most American and Australian units had been withdrawn by late 1971. A ceasefire came early in 1973, but in 1975 North Vietnamese forces suddenly attacked, swamping South Vietnam.



In the 1960s, the RAAF introduced its own distinctive design – a flying kangaroo replaced the red circle in the centre of the roundel.

1970s

Australia reduced the size of its armed forces in the 1970s, and played little part in world affairs. SEATO was dissolved, and RAAF units left Malaya, handing over the Butterworth base to the Royal Malaysian Air Force. A small RAAF unit stayed there as part of a joint Air Defence System (Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Britain and New Zealand), but by the mid-1970s all other RAAF units were based in Australia.

The three Australian armed forces were unified (1973–76) as the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Priorities had changed. Acting as Air Command in the ADF – but still called the RAAF – the air force even lost its distinctive dark blue uniform in 1972. (The light blue uniform was never popular and the famous dark blue was restored in 2001.)

New aircraft

In 1982 Australia decided to replace its Mirage fighters with a modern single-seater fighter – the McDonnell Douglas F/A-18A, known as the Hornet, which was being widely ordered by the US services. The majority of the 57 Hornets would be constructed in Australia, to be delivered between 1985 and 1990. Another 16 two-seater versions were to be made as trainers. Nearly 20 years later, the Hornets still formed the RAAF's fighter arm. They were not to see action until the Iraq war of 2003.



Airlines

last squadron out'

When airborne it was discovered, as well as the damaged windscreen and two tyres burst, the hydraulics were out and the undercarriage had to be manually pumped up. To land at Bien Hoa the emergency extension system had to be used.

What Tommy didn't say was he was bleeding from a shrapnel wound to the leg throughout this and he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts in "preventing further damage to the aircraft and crew". The loadmaster Corporal Barry Gracie was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal for his assistance to the captain in jettisoning the cargo just prior to take-off.

On another occasion with mortars the squadron came second and lost an aircraft. On March 29, 1970 the aircraft was carrying aviation fuel to That Son 12 kilometres from the Cambodian border. At That Son the runway was on the floor of a valley making it easy for Charlie to rain down rockets and mortars from the surrounding hills and escape to his sanctuaries in nearby Cambodia.

Artillery was frequently pounding the hills during approach. It was always a "hot" turn around there ie engines never stopped turning and for that matter the aircraft wheels hardly stopped turning as the load (usually of rations or ammunition) was released.

Crew on this occasion were Pilot Officer Bert Milne (Captain), Pilot Officer Mick Calvert, Corporal Melville Church, and LAC Robert Laing.

The first mortar round hit a wing disabling the aircraft and starting a fire in one of the fuel cells. The crew made it to a ditch at the side of the airfield and then to a bunker 30 yards away. More mortar rounds rained on and around the aircraft as Charlie (Viet Cong soldiers) saw the prize of a large aircraft destroyed. A few minutes later the crew were transferred by jeep to the base command post bunker and remained there for several hours while the base continued under attack.

The aircrew learned later that the enemy penetrated the perimeter and suffered 34 confirmed (probably more unconfirmed) killed in action. From the ensuing mortars and subsequent fire the aircraft was reduced to molten metal; only the propellers were recognisable.

On one of the many occasions bullets started flying around the cockpit and cabin of aircraft a loadmaster had a lucky escape when a round passed through the ice box he was sitting on. No injury resulted and the only damage apart from holes in the aircraft was to the trusty esky; must be a lesson in there somewhere.

The "night belonged to Charlie" and a large aircraft made a good target. One aircraft was destroyed and numerous damaged at outlying airfields and fire support bases. Therefore the theory was to try to get an unserviceable aircraft back to base or at least to a secure area by nightfall. The author well remembers working frenetically on cylinder replacements, carburetor changes and the like at some obscure airfield to get the aircraft out by nightfall.

On October 6, 1968, near Da Lat, aircraft A4-210 was extensively damaged when it was taxiing near a ditch and the ditch edge collapsed.

This aircraft was originally repaired in country, however did not fly correctly and was eventually one of the two aircraft returned to Australia (A4-210 flew under its own power, A4-152 was shipped) for more extensive repairs. A4-152, when it ceases flying is to take its place in the RAAF museum.

By the end of the involvement the "score" stood something like this:

Aircraft totally destroyed/unrecoverable, three; aircraft sufficiently damaged to warrant evacuation to Australia for repair, two; aircraft with minor and major damage from ground fire, collision with objects etc, able to be repaired in country — too numerous to mention; many not even documented.

Of course there was a lot more to the squadron than operations. The operations were carried out by people, members of 35 Squadron.

Six hundred and twenty four officers and airmen served with the squadron and its predecessor Transport Support Flight between 1963 and 1972 with around 85 the maximum at any one time when the squadron was to its peak with seven aircraft.

Flying hours were at a level not previously experienced by most pilots and at the completion of a tour many had over a thousand sorties in their log book.

To the amazement of the Americans who had literally dozens of aircraft and frequently missed missions the squadron flew five missions from seven aircraft 365 days a year and only missed a mission because of extreme damage to an aircraft.

The price paid by ground crew to achieve this was in the amount of maintenance, servicing and rectification which can only be imagined and some of the miracles performed had to be seen to be believed. It was not unusual to talk to people drifting in and out of sleep.

It was fairly lonely at Vung Tau as Christmas 1971, and New Year 1972 slowly came around. No. 9 Squadron and No. 2 Squadron had gone, Nui Dat was empty, the Australian Army had all but gone; there was a half company reactionary force out at Back Beach to come to the aid of any of the small remaining detachments (including the 60 of us remaining) in the event of an emergency.

We were briefed on intelligence reports of Viet Cong infiltration to Vung Tau causing rumours in the local population that Charlie may try for one more political victory by wiping out this small, seemingly forgotten, detachment of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Because we did not know exactly when we were going home and the Australian public to all intents and purposes believed Australia was out of Vietnam some of us became paranoid that Australia



MORTARED AT THAT SON: The Squadron Engineer Officer Squadron Leader Griffin (pictured) reported that "only the propellers were recognisable" as anything other than molten metal. Official RAAF photograph.

and the Government had forgotten our small band. Mail became all the more important as the tenuous thread that indicated at least somebody knew we were there.

When we finally had an RTA (Return to Australia) date for obvious security reasons we were unable to tell the Vietnamese. When we said see you tomorrow or see you next week, knowing full well we would probably never see them again, they probably sensed something was on.

While the great deeds of the aircrew and ground crew are noble as they are, as with any war it is the more mundane daily hard slog that counts and in this the statistics speak for themselves.

By the time 35 Squadron came home (the remaining four aircraft finally took off from Vung Tau for the last time on February 19, 1972 bound for Australia) it was the longest serving RAAF unit in Vietnam, here the "Last Out" on ANZAC day comes in.

Except for the Australian Army Training Team it was the longest serving Australian unit in Vietnam. It had carried 91 million

pounds of freight in addition to mail, officially 700,000 passengers (unofficially probably more) and, in spite of numerous wounds, miraculously without loss of life.

To put it in another context in the words of an American Colonel commanding the 315th Air Command Group "during a representative month February 1965, the RAAF Caribous hauled 1010 tons with six assigned aircraft while the United States Army hauled 5095 with 42 aircraft".

The Supreme Commander Vietnam General Westmoreland, after failing to get his own transport squadrons operating with the same efficiency, in May 1966 cabled the Australian Government requesting an additional 12 aircraft Caribou squadron for Vietnam. This request was rightfully refused. Australia only had two such squadrons.

We in 35 Squadron believe we won our small part of our small war and as with the whole Australian involvement it was left to others in other places, not the least of which were Washington, Paris, and Canberra, to do the losing.



END OF AN ERA



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

THE OFFICIAL FAREWELL TO THE RAAF DHC4 CARIBOU AFTER FORTY FIVE YEARS SERVICE

As you are all aware, the time has come when we witness the retirement of the De Havilland Canada Caribou from 45 years of active service with the Royal Australian Air Force. This is now a confirmed schedule of events for the farewell function.

To mark the occasion, 38 Squadron is hosting a farewell function at RAAF Base Townsville on Saturday 7 November 2009. **We are now calling on all personnel to register confirmation of their attendance, including the names of those who will be accompanying them to the event.** For security purposes, we must have these details or access will not be permitted to the base on the day.

The following activities are planned for the day:

- **Colours Parade:** 0830 h -1000 h - A combined 35 and 38 Squadron Colours Parade, including the formal laying-up of the 35 Squadron Colours. The parade will be led by the Air Force Band. See attached schedule for further details.
- **38SQN Open day:** 1000 h – 1500 h – You will be provided the chance to touch those controls/engines/props/wheels/fuselages etc, for possibly, the last time! There will be displays from the RAAF Military Working Dogs and the Fire Section, plus there will be a range of military aircraft displays, including, of course, the Caribou, an FA-18 and the ARMY Black Hawk, MRH-90 and Chinook aircraft. There will be a significant amount of Caribou Memorabilia on display and souvenirs will be on sale throughout the day, including caps, patches, stubby coolers and a Caribou commemorative port (see the memorabilia attachment and order form). A variety of food and drinks will be available for purchase. This is strictly an alcohol free event.
- **'Hangar Bash':** 1900 h – Until Late - In true Caribou style, 38SQN will host a semi-formal function within the main hangar of the SQN, Hangar 75. The 'Hangar Bash' will provide the perfect setting for members and guests to catch up with buddies and reminisce about the 'good old days'. Caribou memorabilia, both videos and still, will be on display around the hangar, with the Air Force Band in the background providing entertainment. There will be a \$20.00 cover charge per person (children

Thursday, 19 February 2009
016/2009

RETIREMENT OF THE DHC-4 CARIBOU

The Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP, today announced the Government has accepted the reality that it will be necessary to bring forward the retirement of Australia's remaining thirteen DHC-4 Caribou aircraft to December 2009.

"The Government has been left with little choice but to retire the Caribou and has reluctantly agreed to do so despite the fact that poor planning by the former Government has denied us the opportunity to produce a replacement aircraft before 2013," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"After 45 years of tireless and distinguished service with the Royal Australian Air Force, the Caribou fleet is suffering badly from a range of ageing aircraft issues, and contains asbestos parts which I am determined to weed out of the Defence Force."

The Royal Australian Air Force took delivery of its first Caribou in April 1964. The Caribou has a proud 45-year history of supporting Australian Defence Force operations, throughout the South West Pacific and in South East Asia, including active service in Vietnam, humanitarian relief in Kashmir, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea and also in support of peacekeeping operations in the Solomon Islands and East Timor.

Despite its outstanding track record, the Caribou is now well beyond its sustainable life of type. The Caribou fleet suffers from corrosion, fatigue and obsolescence issues that make them increasingly difficult and costly to maintain.

"Air Force is struggling to achieve four to five serviceable aircraft at any one time," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"In fact, it is a tribute to the outstanding work of 38 Squadron aircrew, technicians and support personnel that the Caribou has been able to operate as long as it has.

"The reality is that a decision should have been taken a long time ago on acquiring a tactical airlift capability to replace the Caribou. The Government has been left with no other option than to rectify yet another shortcoming we have inherited in transition planning across our entire Air Force fleet," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

Project Air 8000 Phase 2 plans to deliver a Tactical Battlefield Airlift capability for the Royal Australian Air Force to replace the Caribou in 2013.

"Options for bringing forward the schedule on this project are being considered as part of the White Paper process," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

As an interim measure, a leased fleet of five additional Hawker Pacific B300 King Air aircraft will undertake light air transport tasks. These aircraft will be phased into the Townsville-based 38 Squadron as the Caribou is progressively retired toward the end of 2009. Three King Air 350 aircraft, currently operated by Army, will also be transferred across to 38 Squadron.

"The interim King Air lease will help Air Force minimise the adverse workforce issues that result from allowing gaps to develop in transitioning aircraft fleets," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"It is important that we honour the debt of gratitude we owe to the men and women who have supported the Caribou for so long by providing a means for them to maintain their skills and streamline their transition to a more modern and capable replacement aircraft."

The King Air is a modern aircraft with digital avionics, advanced displays and navigation systems and turbine engines, that will assist in transitioning 38 Squadron aircrew and technicians to the more modern aircraft types being considered under Project Air 8000 Phase 2.

"Our nation is extremely proud of the magnificent service that the Caribou has provided to the Royal Australian Air Force over the past five decades. While there may be some who are saddened to hear of the Caribou's impending retirement, even the most vocal supporters of the Caribou will agree this decision is long overdue."

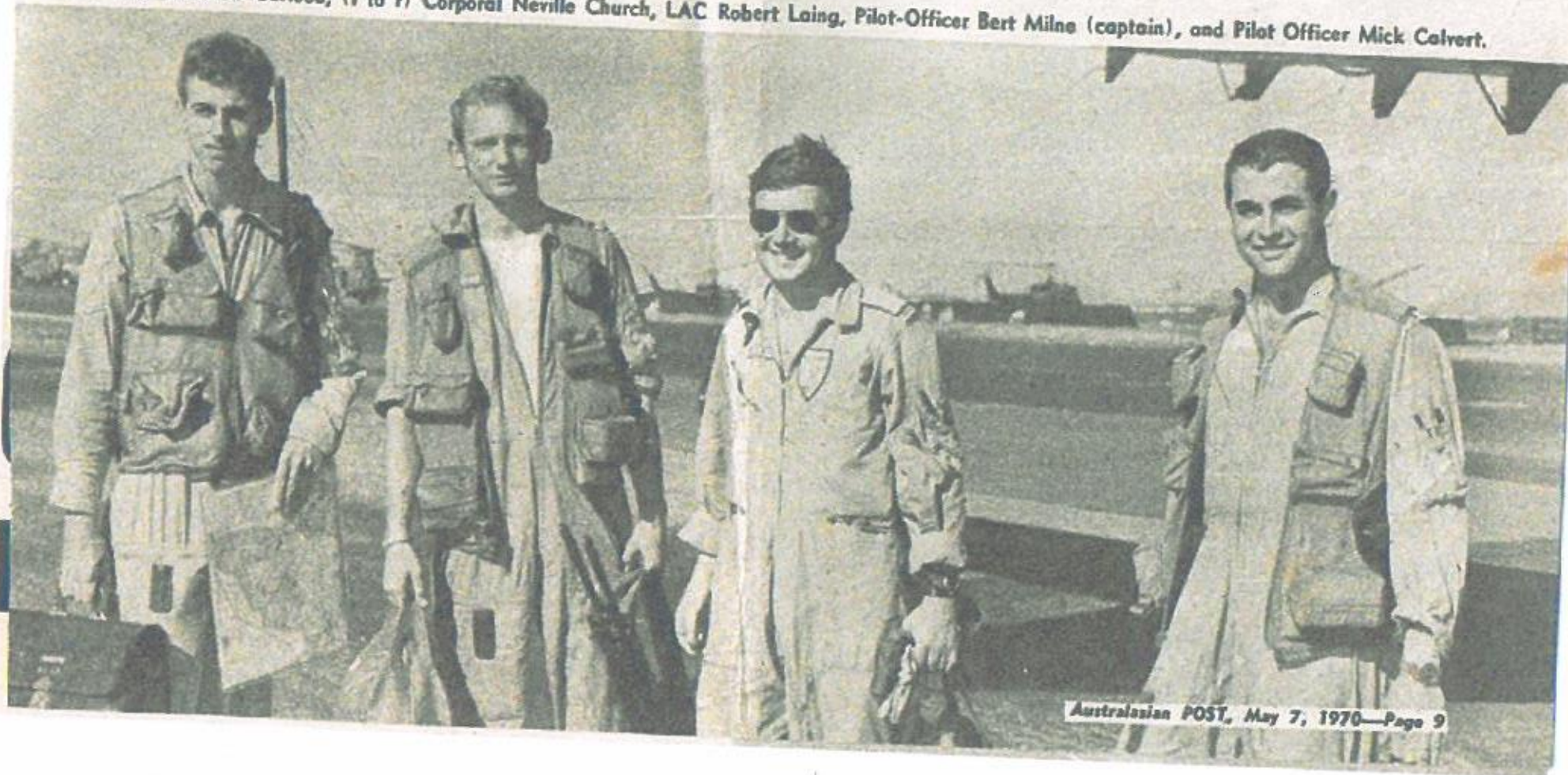
"The men and women of 38 Squadron have been waiting for many years to know what the future holds. Today's decision gives reassurance to them that the Government is very aware of both the challenges they face in trying to sustain such an ageing aircraft and the career management uncertainty that has been unnecessarily forced upon them after so many years of empty promises and inaction," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

★ MIDDLE-of-the-night mortar fire from Viet Cong positions overlooking the South Vietnamese Army training base at That Son, 98 miles south-west of Saigon, recently destroyed an RAAF Caribou transport aircraft of the No. 35 squadron. The Caribou was also parked close to a fuel dump which was gutted in the bombardment. The aircraft was just a

jumbled mass of molten and fused metal with the propellers the only parts recognisable. In its six years of operations in South Vietnam, No. 35 Squadron has lost only one other Caribou aircraft, and that was not due to enemy action. A number of other Squadron aircraft, however, have been damaged as a result of enemy ground fire, but all of them have been repaired for further duty.

One of ours cops the lot

★ CREW who lost their Caribou, (l to r) Corporal Neville Church, LAC Robert Laing, Pilot-Officer Bert Milne (captain), and Pilot Officer Mick Calvert.



Australasian POST, May 7, 1970—Page 9

Dignified retirement for Vietnam warbird

A decommissioned Caribou with a colourful past including two crashes in Vietnam will be removed from the airfield at RAAF Amberley and take its place in the annals of Australian aviation history thanks to its purchase by the Queensland Air Museum.

The museum paid \$550 for A4-173 and the aircraft will be tracked under police escort to its new home in Caloundra some time in coming weeks. 173 was among the second of two batches of the aircraft diverted directly to active service in Vietnam on their delivery flight from Toronto, Canada.

The aircraft arrived at Vung Tau on August 29, 1964, and was one of six Caribou in service with RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) until February 1972.

173 was damaged on May 7, 1965, when it crashed in a

landing accident at Hai Yen on the Camau peninsula.

It was delivering a load of medical supplies and construction equipment to the fortified settlement, which had recently been attacked by Viet Cong, when its nosewheel clipped the edge of the runway on landing.

In his book *The RAAF in Vietnam*, from which much information for this article has been sourced, author Chris Coulthard-Clark quotes one of the pilots on this flight who stated: "We rediscovered the principle that an undercarriage designed to retract forward causes considerable alteration to the airframe when it is forced to retract rearwards."

None of the crew was injured in the mishap but 173 lost a wing and sustained damage to its undercarriage and one engine. Ground crew who were flown in to repair 173 worked in the

open and stayed within the settlement each night as the area was under enemy attack, and the aircraft, Coulthard-Clark states, was left to its chances.

It limped back to Vung Tau under reduced power, but the complete repair of 173 was to be further hampered when a US supply plane dropped a case of ammunition through one of the downed aircraft's wings, requiring a new wing to be flown by helicopter to the site. A new wing was supplied by US sources so when 173 eventually took to the air again it displayed a mix of RAAF and US Army markings.

173 was to fly with the new wing, which was six to eight inches longer than RAAF standard and had no lights on top until the aircraft was decommissioned more than 20 years later.

Repairs to 173 were not completed until the September, and in the interim 38SQN, then based at RAAF Richmond, loaned another Caribou, A4-208, to assist in transport operations. This aircraft would later come under mortar attack at Katum near the Cambodian border, sustaining shrapnel damage in 111 places, smashing the windscreen panes and wounding the two pilots.

208 now forms an artificial reef at the bottom of the Brisbane River.

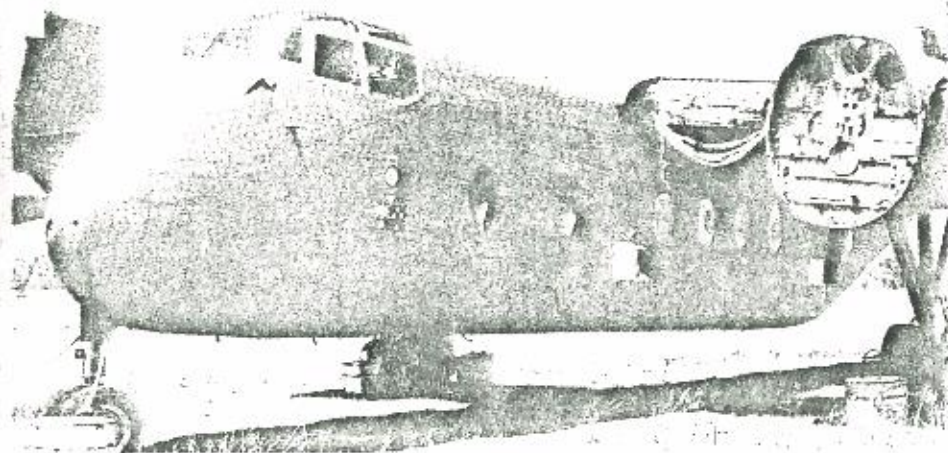
In June 1966 the Caribou unit in RTFV became an accredited squadron, named 35SQN, making 173's second crash the squadron's first aircraft casualty. On August 16, 1966, the aircraft was extensively damaged on touchdown in Ba To, delivering building materials to the Special Forces camp in Quang Ngai province, in similar circumstances to its first crash. The aircraft landed short and damaged its portside wing and undercarriage—the opposite side to damage sustained in the previous crash, but again no crew was injured.

Repairs were more urgent this time, however, as the camp was under direct threat of enemy attack including mortar fire. Coulthard-Clark reports that 173 needed repairs or replacement of the wing, flaps, engine, propeller, undercarriage, and the nose section.

Ten days later it flew back to base with its undercarriage chained into position, the flight earning WgCDR Melchert, the Commanding Officer, the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On the day of its departure the Ba To airfield was attacked with a ferocity that would have ensured 173's destruction.

It took six months of repair work at Vung Tau to bring 173 back to serviceability, and



ABOVE: A4-173, currently an airfield hulk, will be restored by Queensland Air Museum to reflect its distinguished history in active service in the Vietnam War.

WgCDR Melchert's final duty before handing over command in March 1967 was to test fly the aircraft.

173 was among the final four RAAF Caribou still in service in Vietnam, which took off from Vung Tau for the last time on February 19, 1972.

After a formation fly-past over Sydney the aircraft landed at Richmond on February 26 to join 38SQN.

According to Coulthard-Clark's research, in seven and a half years active service in Vietnam the Caribou unit, as RTFV and 35SQN, flew nearly 80,000 sorties over 47,000 flying hours,

and transported more than 667,000 passengers, five million kilos of mail, and 36 million kilos of freight.

38SQN relocated to RAAF Amberley in 1992 and soon after it was discovered that 173 no longer met RAAF specifications.

Nothing indicates how 173 came to be missed when the RAAF retrofitted its Caribou with sturdier nose landing gear support beams, service specifications which were amended during the Vietnam era after the USAF attributed a string of mishaps to the undersized beam.

Mr Cliff Robinson, president of Queensland Air Museum, says 173 is an important part of Australia's aviation history. "173's Vietnam service history is so important that the machine must not be allowed to rot," he said. "It's probably the most significant one we've got." The museum is in the process of building a new 60m x 30m hangar where the Caribou will be housed during its restoration, a project expected to take a decade.

"It will be 10 years at least, depending entirely upon parts," Mr Robinson said.

"We'll need to acquire the outer wings, engines, tail plane, and internal fittings and we're wide open to donations of parts that are no longer of use to the Caribou still flying.

"We've got what we call a 'starter kit' and we'll go from there, because we don't have buckets of money to splash around."

The museum has 30 to 40 active members, mostly ex-pilots and engineers, including former members of Pathfinder Force and Fleet Air Arm. It exhibits about 16 historic aircraft.

Addendum XI

An Essay; A Man Cannot Go to War and Stay the Same Man

Like the song goes, I was only 19 when my husband went to Vietnam.

I married young to an air force man. We had a baby 11mths old, when my husband went.

Thinking about it years later I don't think I realised what going to War meant!!

Our son was neither walking or talking when his Dad left.

Two days after my husband left I had a miscarriage.

We didn't even know I was pregnant.

I had no family around, luckily the lady in the flat next to me knew and cared for our son, as I spent a couple of days in hospital. Not one soul came near me.

We didn't have contact like they do today, we could go weeks not knowing what was happening, then letters would come in a batch.

That wasn't the way back then. You were left on your own.

The only time I heard from Defence was a letter to say my husband would be heard on radio on such and such date.

I still have the letter stored, as I do all his letters....

When my husband came back he was not the same man. He was different, he had hardened, less tolerant, less understanding. Its hard to describe.

Nine months after he got home we had another son...To this day I believe "Agent Orange" has affected our son..Life went on and we had ups and downs. !!!!!!!

Then the welcome home March organising started, the men started to talk about their time in Vietnam and as they would often meet to our place. I would hear stories.

The wives were very proud to march behind our men in Canberra the day of the March..

More years went past and my husband and I stayed together in our own ups and downs, our sons grew and they went into the defence force as well.

I remember sewing the badges on our eldest son uniform to go to Cambodia and thinking "my god, its starting over again" thankfully he didn't go, he went to Timor instead.

My other son did a few years in the Army then transferred to air force, he served in the Middle East.

My husband at about 60, always had pain in his back hips and legs.

I learnt that when we went out for a picnic or travelling, I would do exploring on my own, whilst my husband sat at the top and waited for me.

He physically could not manage.

He passed away at 67 from Renal Cell Cancer. It was put down to Agent Orange.

I can't express enough about wives then and now who look after their men who have been to war and come home damaged.

Its not only the wives, its children as well.

After my husband passed away I had to try to make a new life.

I was very lucky to find something close to my heart.

A Veteran Support Centre.

I was able to grow and learn as I helped others.

Which to this day, I still am blessed to be able to do.

Patrick Gordon Mills' Service

Pat passed away in November 2020. Pat's daughter Sharon Winks said "Dad was always very proud of his service and enjoyed catching up with mates and others who served at Anzac Day events as well as the many reunions and other commemorative events held by organisations such as yours. He also loved reading the newsletters."

Sharon would like to share his Service details from his eulogy:

At the age of 18 dad joined the Airforce which took him to Richmond Air Base in Sydney and to mum. Mum and dad met at an old time dance held in the Riverley Ballroom in Parramatta in 1958. Dad was a dashing young Airforce man and mum a young working woman. He was 20 and she was 15.

Dad spent most of his life working and was especially proud of his time serving. As most of you would know he served in the Vietnam War and we found the following Citation for Meritorious Service that we would like to share with you. It was for an event that happened on 5th of February 1965.

The citation reads -

'This airman has shown considerable resourcefulness, tenacity and courage at ARO 5th Vietnam, the crash site of Caribou A4-185. Besides assisting in the salvage of this wrecked aircraft he demonstrated how the dropping zone could be improved to allow for successful aircraft operations. This involved operating a bull dozer close up to the defence perimeter where he was prominently and constantly exposed to the risk of enemy fire. His efforts did in fact permit the subsequent successful operation of a Caribou aircraft into and out of this area. He has been a great credit to the service.

In response Colonel/Commander Fleming USAF stated,

'Leading Aircraftsman Patrick Gordon Mills has displayed a high degree of initiative and ability. His courage and professional skill, demonstrated while exposing himself to possible hostile fire have greatly improved aircraft operations.'

Patrick Gordon Mills' Service continued.....

Dad deployed in the early years of the war and worked with Transport Flight Vietnam also known as the Wallaby Airlines. They worked out of camp runways that were dirt – not bitumen - to support the Caribous. Some of these runways were as short as 1200 feet and were often nearly unusable due to the heavy rains in Vietnam.

The following is another story from this time:

On 18 November 1964 Leading Aircraftsman's Pat Mills and Charles Lee were the groundies for a delivery from Da Nang to A Camp near the border of Laos.

On landing one wheel of the Caribou sank onto the soft edge of the runway resulting in the prop hitting the ground, disabling the aircraft. All on board scrambled to safety however the plane was now blocking the runway. A runway that was needed for more landings. Using some Aussie ingenuity, namely an axe, a chainsaw and a borrowed American grader, dad and Charlie promptly chopped up the plane and dragged it off to clear the runway.

Pictures of dad cutting the tail off this plane are in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

For us this was a great example of dad just getting on with the job that had to be done, something we saw a lot in his life.

Dad returned from Vietnam to Australia on Anzac Day to a country that wasn't always welcoming of those returning home. This couldn't have been easy.

Dad also served in Malaysia for three years during the Malay Conflict and he and mum lived in Penang. A world away from Baulkham Hills.

Dad was an airframe fitter and was an instructor at the Wagga base teaching new recruits and when we lived in Sale he headed the ground crew for the RAAF Roulettes. We lived backing onto the runway so got very used to listening to planes take off and land. Mum could identify them all by sound!!!

Vietnam War Service

Help 

About Fields 

Veteran Details

Name	MILLS, Patrick Gordon
Service	Royal Australian Air Force
Service Number	A18721
Date of Birth	20 Sep 1937
Place of Birth	TWEED HEADS NSW AUSTRALIA
Rank	Corporal
Mustering	Airframe Fitter
Honours	None for display

Unit History

Unit Name	Start Date	End Date
RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam	21 Sep 1964	23 Apr 1965
No. 79 Squadron	02 Jun 1966	25 Aug 1966
No. 79 Squadron	23 Feb 1967	20 Apr 1967
No. 79 Squadron	05 Jun 1967	29 Jun 1967

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Generate a certificate for this Service Record that can be printed for display

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