

Commander Air Lift Group's speech to members of the RTFV and 35SQN Association.

February 2012

On behalf of Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Geoff Brown, I thank you for the opportunity to address you at this significant dedication service.

Today is our opportunity to celebrate and commemorate the service by members of the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam, and No. 35 Squadron, during the Vietnam War. Specifically, it is the 40th anniversary since the completion of nearly eight years continuous deployment by RAAF Caribous to Vietnam, marking Wallaby Airlines famously as the 'first in, last out' for our Air Force.

And let us not forget that this year also marks the 70th anniversary of the formation of No. 35 Squadron.

These anniversaries give us time to reflect not just on what has changed in the decades, but also what we hold in common.

In 2012, Air Lift Group is continuing to face increases in our operational tempo—through our commitment to supporting Australian and Coalition Forces in the Middle East, as well as peacekeeping activities in East Timor and the Solomon Islands, while supporting Australian national tasking both here at home and abroad.

Air Lift Group is also faced with greater diversity today than perhaps ever before. As Commander Air Lift Group, I oversee a range of capabilities from the new KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transports and C-17A Globemasters, through to our C-130 H and J Hercules, our Special Purpose VIP Aircraft and the King Air light transport aircraft.

To cope with these demands, Air Lift Group is undergoing fundamental changes, the likes of which are similar to what the

RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and 35 Squadron experienced in your deployment to the Vietnam War. We are evolving not just with the aircraft and technologies we fly, but also in our operational philosophy.

So what does my reflection of the new generation of Air Force capability have to do with us all today?

The answer lies in the legacy that you established within the Royal Australian Air Force during your time in Vietnam - the steadfast foundations of exceptional military aviation service, that we, the RAAF, today proudly stand on, and build on, to provide the 'best small Air Force in the world'.

The list of achievements by the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and No. 35 Squadron are exceptional, and even after four decades it is acknowledged worldwide that the RAAF Caribous punched well above their weight, both in the amount of cargo and passengers carried, and your operational, affect during your years in Vietnam.

That you managed to do so without loss of life — even in spite of accidents and attacks by enemy forces — is truly remarkable. Your achievements, beyond doubt, reflect your incredible dedication to service and have specifically influenced and shaped the future generations of Air Lift Group and in the broader sense, the Royal Australian Air Force.

And so as we reflect upon the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and 35 Squadron's achievements today, I leave you with this practical example of what you have enabled us in Air Lift Group to do.

February 2012 marks the ninth anniversary of our C-130 Hercules being continuously deployed to the Middle East Area of Operations. Originally sent there to support Coalition forces that were to operate in Iraq, today they are a vital part of the international effort to rebuild the nation of Afghanistan.

While the physical conditions that our C-130 Hercules face in the Middle East are quite different from what the Caribous experienced in Vietnam, our people continue to display that resilient 'can do' approach to getting the job done through their professionalism, ingenuity and selfless service.

As it was with you 40 years ago, their Coalition partners hold our personnel in the highest esteem. And like Vietnam, we are grateful that our unique approaches, built on your experiences to conducting tasking, have ensured that all of our squadron personnel have returned safely back to Australia.

So, thank you, the members of RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam and 35 Squadron for being exactly who you were.

We, the Air Force of today, will always remember and honour you.