

INQUIRY INTO THE REFUSAL TO ISSUE ENTITLEMENTS TO, WITHHOLDING AND FORFEITURE OF DEFENCE HONOURS AND AWARDS

The outcome desired from this Submission by the Vietnam Veterans Branch, Air Force Association Victorian Division/RAAF Vietnam Veterans Sub-Branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Victorian State Branch is as follows:

“To seek recognition by the Australian Government of the authorization made by the then Government of the Republic of Vietnam in 1974 to issue the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, for services in Vietnam from 08 February 1962 to 28 March 1973 to Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command and **its subordinate Units.**” The issue approval was subsequently reauthorized by the Republic of Vietnam Congress to include all allied (foreign) personnel who served in South Vietnam during the final humanitarian/evacuation operations undertaken, extending the approval period to 30 April 1975.”

The National Macquarie Dictionary includes among meanings for the word subordinate, “subject to or under the authority of a superior.” Royal Australian Air Force Transport Flight Vietnam/No. 35 Squadron operated from August 1964 for some years in South Vietnam under the direct operational command/control of the U.S. Military Assistance Command as such a Unit, and meets the requirements for the Award grant

In 1975, Detachment S of the RAAF operated aircraft involved in relief/humanitarian aid/evacuation operations flying between Australia and South Vietnam. Their work was coordinated by the U.S. Aid Organization for the Republic of Vietnam Ministry of Social Welfare. RAAF Service personnel engaged in these operations also meet the eligibility criteria for the Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm.

While I have no specific information about MACV command of the other RAAF Units serving in Vietnam during the set period for the Award, it is considered probable some specific entitlement may also exist for these Units.

The Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross and Unit Citation was established by the South Vietnam Government Decree No. 74-b/QT dated 15/08/1950, and Decree No. 96/DQT/HC dated 02 May 1952.

United States HQ Department of the Army General Order No. 8 of 19/03/1974 confirmed acceptance of and authorization of the RVN Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm, for HQ United States Military Assistance Command and its subordinate Units for services in Vietnam from 08 February 1962 to 28 March 1973. However, in April 1975 President Thieu and the Congress of the Republic of Vietnam reauthorized new Orders clarifying the May 1974 approval for the VCOG Unit Award, to an **individual Award**. This approval applied to all U.S. Service personnel, and personnel from every Nation allied

with the United States. who served in country with Units subordinate to the U.S. Army Vietnam, and Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

The Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm was therefore approved for award to every individual member of every U.S. and Allied Nation who fought/served in Vietnam over the period 08 February 1962 to 30 April 1975.

The Australian Government has previously recognized and approved individual Republic of South Vietnam military awards including specific Unit Awards, of the RVN Gallantry Cross. Such past approval has included acceptance of recommendations made by the Honours & Awards Tribunal for the Award issue, following their review.

The U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam held operational control over all U.S. Forces in Vietnam, from 1962 to 1975. Its subordinate Commands included the U.S. Army Vietnam; 7th Air Forces; 3rd Marine Amphibious Force and the U.S. Naval Forces Vietnam. In May 1964, the Australian Government agreed to contribute assistance to the United States in South Vietnam, including three (3) Caribou transport aircraft from the Royal Australian Air Force. MACV agreed the RAAF aircraft on arrival in Vietnam, would become part of its Airlift System. RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam was subsequently formed at Butterworth Air Base, Malaysia on 20 July 1964.

On 08 August 1964, the RAAF Caribou aircraft landed at a U.S. Army Air Base located at Vung Tau, South Vietnam. Operational control of the Flight and aircraft was then passed on from the OC RAAF Butterworth to the American Commander MACV, General W. Westmoreland. He then delegated this authority to his Air Component Commander, the CO of the 2nd Air Division, Vietnam.

RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam was then integrated into the South East Asia Airlift System operated by the U.S. Air Force. The Flight/Aircraft were then assigned to the U.S. Air Force 315th Troop Carrier Group (Assault), which later became the 315th Air Commando Wing. Operations were then carried out under the direct operational control of the 2nd Air Division, as the U.S. Air Force component of Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

Relevant information contained in this Submission has been obtained from the Official History of Australia's involvement in South East Asia Conflicts, titled "The RAAF in Vietnam 1962 – 1975" by Chris Coulthard-Clark. The History was first published in 1995 by Allen and Unwin, in association with the Australian War Memorial. Particular chapters in the book are titled "First Arrivals" and "Transport Operations."

In June 1966, RTFV was raised to the status of a full Squadron and retitled as No. 35 Squadron, RAAF. The USAF Common Service Airlift System underwent major changes that year, and No. 35 Squadron was incorporated into a new formation – the 834th Air Division. The reorganization transferred the aircraft/personnel of the 315th Air Commando Wing, including the RAAF Caribou aircraft/personnel.

On 15/12/1965 at the request of the Republic of Vietnam Government the 2nd Air Division, USAF and the Commander, Military Assistance Command Vietnam recommended the 315th TCG for the RVN Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Award. Unfortunately, due to shifting circumstances with USAF Units in Vietnam, the Unit Award did not proceed, and was eventually made for the Group's service in late October 1966. The RAAF No. 35 Squadron thus was not included in the Unit Award, as it had been incorporated into a new USAF formation.

It is relevant to note that in September 1971, RAAF No. 2 Squadron was included in the RVN Gallantry Cross Unit citation, when the award was made to the USAF 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, "and all subordinate Units then part of the Wing, including No. 2 Squadron."

Official records from the Vietnam War note that RTFV/No. 35 Squadron RAAF, demonstrated during their Vietnam service an exceptional standard of performance in all Operational areas, with the service unmatched in the country by either the United States transport aircraft/personnel or the RVN Transport Squadrons. The Flight/Squadron is proud of its record and history in Vietnam, including the fact that it was the "First In and Last Out."

The Government of the Republic of Vietnam clearly intended for "subordinate Units of Military Assistance Command Vietnam" to receive recognition and the Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm. While a foreign award, the Australian Government has previously approved acceptance, and it is considered unreasonable to continue to exclude RTFV/No. 35 Squadron RAAF and other eligible RAAF Units from receipt. The Tribunal when undertaking a previous entitlement Review of the Battle of Long Tan awards, at "6. Unit Recognition" included comment at 6.1 "From about March 1967, there appears to have been an inclination to accept foreign Unit Awards when they were formally offered (including No. 2 Squadron RAAF)."

At the time of the Review, continuing at 6.2, the Tribunal reported on modification of the Foreign Award Process by the Government Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence Related Awards. Comment included notation that while change was waived on the need for a formal offer, "it didn't waive the need for proof of an intent to make an Award."

Acceptance by the U.S. Government/Department of Defence and all Federal Agencies of the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross award outlined, has resulted in their acknowledgement that all U.S. Service personnel who served in Vietnam under the command of Military Assistance Command Vietnam & U.S. Army Vietnam, including the stated subordinate Units, are eligible and approved to wear the RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm award, regardless of service or component.

There is conclusive U.S. Military/Vietnam Unit Veteran sources confirming the President and Congress of the Republic of Vietnam in 1975, extended the award of the RVN Gallantry Cross with Palm, as an individual award to all U.S. and foreign Service

nationalities (including Australia) as “an individual award.” As outlined in the Submission, in April 1975 the Government of the Republic of Vietnam then reauthorized the Award issue to include all foreign military personnel who served during the humanitarian/ relief duties undertaken during the final evacuation operations in South Vietnam.

President Thieu, in Paris, France, is reported to have subsequently confirmed that the individual issue did not, nor was intended, to devalue the prestige of the prior individual RVGC awards made. He reaffirmed this in 1976 when interviewed about the dispute among Vietnam veterans concerning the Gallantry Cross Medal and Unit ribbon entitlement, with comment that all who served in Vietnam in support of the Republic during the Vietnam War were entitled to the RV Gallantry Cross with Palm. At this time despite exhaustive research, I have been unable to source original RVN Government documents supporting the above.

In closing, may I reaffirm that the action and outcome sought from this Submission is:

“ Acceptance and approval from the Australian Government for eligible Vietnam veterans from RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam/No. 35 Squadron and other eligible RAAF Vietnam veterans, to officially accept and wear the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, for which “proof of intent for issue” cannot be in question.”

Attachments:

“Common Myths about the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry”

The American War Library <http://www.americanwarlibrary.com/thecross.htm>

HQ Department of the Army (U.S.) General Order No. 8, 19/03/74

Pentagon Military Catalogue of Heraldry extracts “Vietnam Gallantry Cross.”

“Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm – Issue Regulations”

<http://www.amervets.com/replacement/vcog.htm>