



## 50 Years and Counting.

Number 19 Radio Apprentice Course commenced when, on the 11th January 1965, 35 young men left their families and headed for the RAAF's School of Radio at Laverton.

19 Course had 27 graduating on 11 August 1967, with 5 others transferring to 'thicksville' and graduating as Telstechs etc.

Over the years there have been several reunions - in 1992 at Laverton for the graduation of the last Radio Apprentice Course, at the Gold Coast in late Dec 2004 for our 40th anniversary, at Tuross Head in 2008 because it sounded like a good idea, and recently in Melbourne for the 50th anniversary of the course starting.



16 members gathered for the weekend in Melbourne. On Friday night, 8 of us had dinner at the Crystal Jade restaurant in Chinatown - the food was wonderful.

MC, Phil 'Tubster' Laird entertained the stayers over a few lemonades in the foyer of the Rydges afterwards.

On Saturday the group gathered at RAAF Williams for a tour of Laverton.



Rick Toholka (red top) pointing out his bedroom with (L-R) Julian de Ross, Jim Legg and Sam Houlston looking on.



We were privileged to have WGCDCR Garry Mckee, a graduate of 29th Radio Apprentice Course as our tour host. Garry gave us a wonderful tour of the base including, the 'new Radschool Building' (now Headquarters Training Force Element Group), the old apprentice squadron (now bare fields), the canteen, Officers' Mess (now both a combined O's and SNCO's mess) and the rest of the base.

Over several hours Garry gave us an update on the RAAF and we gave him a history lesson on what the real Apprentices did. Garry's group lived in 'luxury' in the brand new apprentice block next the New Radschool Building when he joined, none of this old blocks with no doors to the rooms for the 29 course youngsters.

This was followed by a visit to the excellent RAAF Museum at Point Cook – see [HERE](#).

On Saturday evening we had a wonderful night in the Melbourne Rydges with a slideshow from the 60s, interleaved by the occasional true story from the past, and many of the 'lads' being advised to wipe the b/s from their lips.

Once again the gathering retied to downstairs for some more "lemonades".



On Sunday some made a trip to RMIT and our old haunts there. This was followed by a wonderful BBQ at Paul and Sue Hewitt's place. All in all a wonderful weekend and superbly organised by Paul Hewitt, who also kindly hosted 3 couples over the weekend.

19 Course is planning a 55th Reunion in Jan 2020 which will be a 4-day cruise. Mark your diary accordingly.

Below are the blokes who made the effort to be at this one – and until next time, when we will do it all again.

You can click these pics for a better copy which you can download/print.

Sampling a few of Carltons Crownies – purely for scientific reasons of course...





**L-R:** Dave Lugg, Allan George, Kevin Smith, Arnie Vereschildt and Rob Norton.

Where they lived for 2½ years.



**L-R:** Chris Robins, Arnie Vereschildt, Rick Toholka, Scraggs Norton, Paul Hewitt, Sam Houlston, Nobby Smith, Ron Evans, Jim Legg, Julian de Ross, Phill Laird, Allan George, Suds Purcell, Garry Thomsen, Dave Lugg.



L-R: Chris Robins, Bruce Purcell and Sam Houlston.



L-R: Scruggs Norton and Arnie Vereschilt.  
That yella belly was this big – true!!



Preparing to provide the troops with a history lesson – together with photographic evidence.



L-R: Allan George and Paul Hewitt.



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**L-R:** Dave Lugg, Phil Laird, Julian de Ross, Chris Robins.  
At the entrance to RMIT.



**Memories!**  
Returning from the morning “jog” to CPE and checking out the “huts” opposite the oval.  
Central Band building in the background.





**L-R:** Rob "Scruggs" Norton, Kevin "Noddy" Smith.  
See!! RAAF food had no effect on us!!

Years ago!!



This photo was taken late in 1966 at Big Mountain during one of the "bonding" camps.



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L-R: Barney Jones, Allan George.



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L-R: Garry Thomsen, Paul Hewitt.

**If my body is  
ever found dead  
on a jogging  
trail, just know I  
was murdered  
elsewhere and  
dumped there**

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Garry Thomsen checking out his old office  
in the "new" Radschool Building.

Garry was a SGT 'Groundie' instructor. He taught quad radar etc. He was there from Aug 69 to Apr 76 when he was commissioned. He says "I entered the old Radschool as an LAC in 1969 and worked in the ground radio / teleg workshop. I was promoted and taught various courses including Quad radar. I watched the new Radschool building being built and moved in the day it opened. - whenever that was. I was promoted again and taught more courses then was commissioned and left in 1976.

I knew much more about electronics when I left than when I entered."





## UNVEILING OF THE RAAF VIETNAM PLAQUE.

Australian Flying Corps Memorial:  
RAAF Base Point Cook  
28 March 2010

Three line squadrons and a number of supporting units were committed to active service in South Vietnam, but for many veterans of that conflict, the RAAF has never really acknowledged the service of those units and personnel to the Nation in general or the RAAF in particular. Indeed, the official record of the RAAF War in Vietnam by Professor Coulthard Clark states that the then Chief of Air Staff (CAS) felt that without fighters being committed, there was nothing for the RAAF to learn. Whether that viewpoint, flawed as it proved to be, stemmed from the fact that a RAAF fighter squadron was not deployed (the Sabre could only have been used in the ground attack role and there were better weapon systems already deployed by the USAF and US Army and the Mirage, being new the RAAF and French to boot making it a difficult option to support) is immaterial. Whatever the reason, it rankled then and still does for a number of RAAF Vietnam Veterans.



Despite squadron plaques being dedicated at the Australian War Memorial, there is really no specific dedicated site to RAAF service (the addition of Vietnam to the RAAF Memorial in Canberra doesn't cut it!!). In Victoria, the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association (Vic), with the agreement of the Governors of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, dedicated a plaque in the Garden of Reflection to those units and personnel who served in Vietnam. It has become the focal point when RAAF Vietnam Veterans gather for the ANZAC Day and Vietnam Veterans Day commemorations at the Shrine. But for many veterans, it still didn't "close the circle"!







Discussions with the RAAF Association (Victorian Division) provided an answer. They would fund and conduct a commemorative ceremony at which a plaque, dedicated to those RAAF personnel who lost their lives during that service and honouring all the personnel and units who served in Vietnam between 1964 and 1975, would be dedicated at the Australian Flying Corps Memorial at RAAF Base Pt Cook – the “Spiritual Home of the RAAF”.

So, on 28th March 2010, a crowd of some 250 veterans (many from interstate), family and friends gathered at Pt Cook for the ceremony. They were joined by more than 30 members of the Melbourne Vietnamese Community (many of them also veterans) whose presence was especially significant and warmly welcomed by all who attended.



Australian Air Force Cadets from No 4 Wing displayed the banners of the RAAF Association, RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association, No 2 Sqn, No 9 Sqn, RTFV/35 Sqn and the Forward Air Controllers Association to form a backdrop to the plaque which was “guarded” by three Cadet Officers with swords reversed. The RAAF Air Power Brass Band provided the music accompaniment and a faultless (and haunting) Last Post and Rouse.

After a short opening address by Peter Colliver, President RAAF Association (Victorian Division), AVM Alan Reed AO delivered an excellent keynote address. The plaque was unveiled by Peter Colliver and AVM E (Mac) Weller AM, who made the trip from Canberra to do so.



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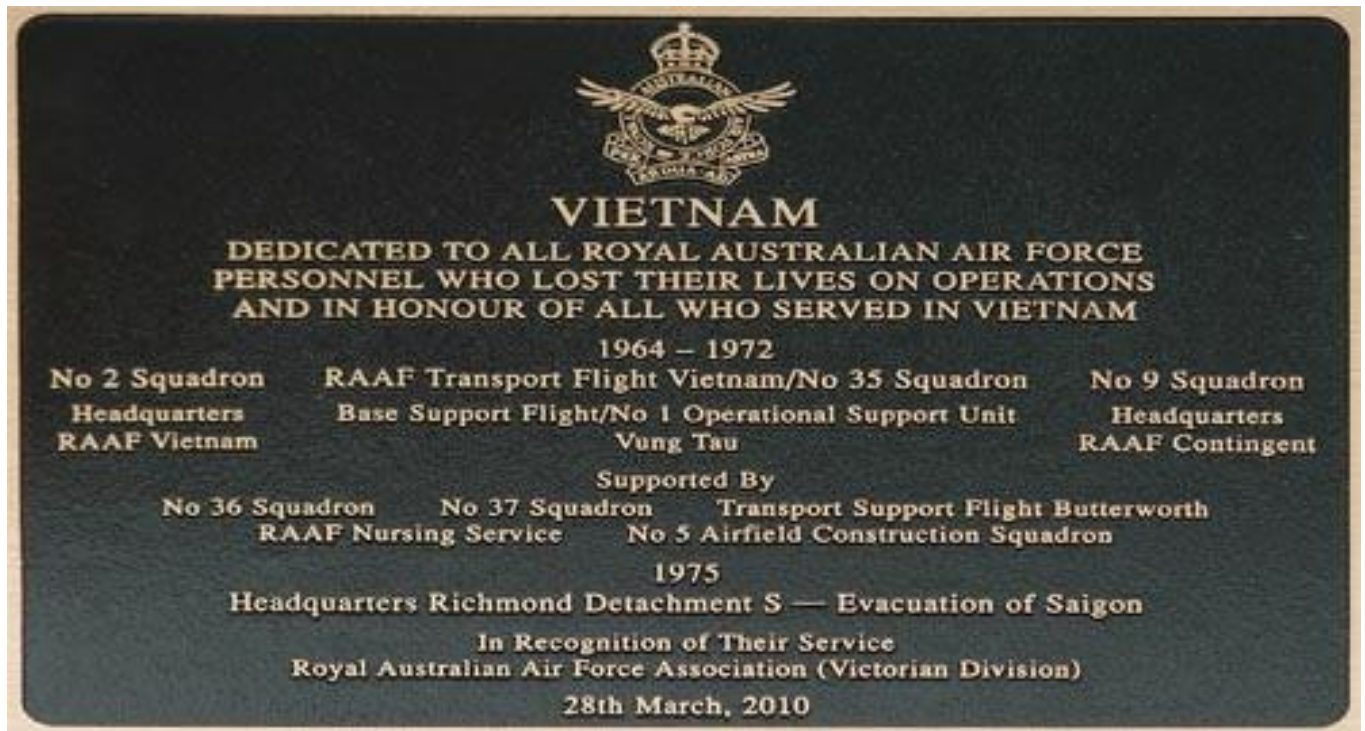


Bing and Bob St John (ex-RTFV-35Sqn) at the Ceremony.



RAAF Association (Vic) President, Peter Colliver  
and RAAFVVA Patron, AVM E (Mac) Weller AM unveil the plaque.





The RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association Padre, Reverend George G Ashworth OAM, (below) delivered the dedication after which wreaths were laid by:

- AIRCDRE Ken Watson (CDR Air Training Group),
- Lee Scully RAAFVVA President,
- John McCrystal RAAFA Vice President,
- Graham Henry State President No 2 Sqn Association,
- Graeme Chalmers National President No 9 Sqn Association, and
- Dave Grierson on behalf of RTFV/35Sqn.

Tony Lupton MP, representing the State Premier and Bob Elworthy, State President of the Vietnam Veterans Association also laid wreaths along with Viet Long NGUYEN, Vietnamese Veterans, Mrs Be Ha JP Vietnamese Association and Tom Roberts, President RAAFA Branch Ballarat.



Once the wreaths had been laid Anthony Pahl OAM recited his special poem "[New Memory for Old Blokes](#)"; which left many an eye moist if not wet! For many of the veterans there, having the





plaque at Pt Cook (the spiritual home of the RAAF) may be seen as acknowledgment (finally) by the RAAF of that service despite the fact that successive Chiefs of Air Staff/Force never saw the need (despite two of them having served there on Canberra aircraft). For others, it completes the journey since we are all now home, thanks to the return of our two MIAs (Mike Herbert and Bob Carver – Magpie 91) in August 2009.



The ceremony was followed by a luncheon at the Officers Mess after which many of those who attended visited the RAAF Museum where the forward fuselage of a Canberra, a Huey gunship (A2-377) and a Caribou attracted much interest. A flying display by a beautifully detailed “Bird Dog’ had special significance for Mac (The FAC) Cottrell DFC who attended along with his son and daughter and other FACs who journeyed to Pt Cook for the ceremony.

Dave Grierson, ex Caribou driver, has produced a small (silent) film covering his personal reminiscences of RTFV in 1965. Click the pic below to watch it.



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**1st woman:** Hi, Wanda! **2nd woman:** Hi, Sylvia! How'd you die? **1st woman:** I froze to death. **2nd woman:** How horrible! **1st woman:** It wasn't so bad. After I quit shaking from the cold, I began to get warm and sleepy, and finally died a peaceful death. What about you? **2nd woman:** I died of a massive heart attack. I suspected that my husband was cheating, so I came home early to catch him in the act. But instead, I found him all by himself in the den watching TV. **1st woman:** So, what happened? **2nd woman:** I was so sure there was another woman there somewhere that I started running all over the house looking. I ran up into the attic and searched, and down into the basement. Then I went through every closet and checked under all the beds. I kept this up until I had looked everywhere, and finally I became so exhausted that I just keeled over with a heart attack and died. **1st woman:** Too bad you didn't look in the freezer---we'd both still be alive.

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