



RAAF Aircrew Commemorative Day

On Sunday morning 3rd November, 2019, a group of men and women gathered at the Queensland Air Museum at Caloundra to commemorate the RAAF aircrew men and women who had lost their lives while defending our nation.

You can click most of these pics to get the HD version which you can download.



The morning was hosted by the Vietnam Veterans Association, Sunshine Coast Branch and was initially held to honour the two 2 Squadron men, Pilot Officer Robert Carver (Nav) and Flying Officer Michael Herbert (Pilot), who lost their lives while on a mission over Vietnam back on the 3rd November, 1970. Their Canberra (A84-231) was lost while heading back to Phan Rang after completing a bombing mission in the Danang area. The reason why the aircraft was lost is still unknown, it was flying at 20,000ft, well above the range of anti-aircraft guns and there were no known North Vietnamese missile sites in the area.

The bodies of Robert Carver and Michael Herbert remained lost in the Vietnamese jungle for 39 years until in July 2009 the ADF found the crash site. The remains of the two men were then returned to Australia.



Over time, the commemoration event was subsequently changed to include all RAAF aircrew who had paid the ultimate sacrifice.



The numbers of those attending were down a little from last year, possibly due to the forecast weather. Rain was originally forecast but the National Guessing Service got it a bit wrong, the bad weather didn't eventuate and the day ended up fine and beautiful.



That old "Depot Doggie", Mal Sayers, the Secretary of the VVAASC, was the MC for the morning.



Mal first introduced Cameron Elmes, the President of the Queensland Air Museum (QAM) who welcomed everyone to the ceremony, but unfortunately, he wasn't all that well and had to leave early. Mal then introduced Mick Howe (below), the President of the VVAASC who reminded everyone of the reason behind the event. Mick served in Vietnam from May 1965 to June 1966 with the Army.





Mick spoke of that heroic and wonderful woman, Valerie Andre (right), a veteran of the French resistance, a neurosurgeon, an aviator and the first female member of the military to achieve the rank of General Officer as Physician General.

Valerie was born in April 1922 in Strasbourg, France. With an early interest in medicine, Valerie André received a doctorate from the University of Paris Faculty of Medicine in 1948 and already a qualified parachutist and pilot, joined the military and went to Indochina (Vietnam) with the rank of captain. France had become involved in their war in Indochina in 1946. Assigned to the hospital at My Tho, she was directly transferred to the staff of the French women's infirmary in Saigon. Her skills were quickly recognized and she was soon working as an assistant neurosurgeon at the Coste Military Hospital. While in Indochina, she realized that the most difficult part of her duties was retrieving the wounded, who were often trapped in the jungle. She returned to France to learn how to pilot a helicopter, then flew one to Indochina.



In 1950, after returning to Indochina, she was to fly over 129 helicopter missions into the jungle in a Hiller 360, rescuing 165 soldiers and on two occasions parachute jumped into the jungle to treat wounded soldiers who needed immediate surgery. As a pilot and surgeon, she would fly to an assigned combat area and, once there, triage casualties. Sometimes, she would do the surgery on site and would heal both the French and the Vietnamese. The Hiller's limited engine power sometimes presented a challenge. The engine's 178 horsepower had to lift the aircraft, one pilot and one or two casualties. "We were happy when we had to carry skinny ones!" she said. Locals gave her nicknames. One was "The woman who comes down from the sky." The other one was "Quekat" — Vietnamese for "Mrs. Ventilator."

In 1952, she became CO of the helicopter squadron at the Gialam air base in Tonkin province with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. She left Vietnam in 1953 to serve as a research physician in aviation medicine, a position she held for the next five years. In 1976 she was promoted to the rank of Médecin General, thus becoming a general officer, the first female general in the history of France. In 1983 she became the founding member of the French National Air and Space Academy.



Now 97 years old, Valerie lives in Paris and is credited with pioneering the use of the helicopter in medical evacuations. Over the years she had flown a total of 3200 hours. Among other decorations, Valérie André was awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit.

Truly a remarkable women.



Arthur Fry, the Honorary Padre for the VVAASC, led everyone in prayer for those that had paid the ultimate sacrifice. Arthur read out the names of the Airmen from the 3 services who had lost their lives while serving in Vietnam.

In all, a terrible total of 521 people lost their lives while serving in Vietnam and of that total, 5 were members of the Navy's Helicopter Flight Vietnam. Members of Australia's Fleet Air Arm served with the US Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company based at Vung Tau and with 9 Squadron, also at Vung tau. The first Naval contingent of pilots and support personnel arrived in Vietnam on the 16th October, 1967. These personnel were quickly integrated into the 135th which was designated as an Experimental Military Unit or EMU. On the 22nd February, 1968 Navy suffered its first fatality when LCDR Patrick John Vickers (right) died as a result of wounds received when his aircraft was hit by ground fire.



The co-pilot immediately flew the helicopter to Blackhorse, landing on the hospital pad within five minutes, but notwithstanding this prompt action, LCDR Vickers died without regaining consciousness. Blackhorse Base Camp was home to the US Army's Armoured Cavalry Regiment and was about 30 klm north of Nui Dat.

Other Navy Aviation personnel who lost their lives while serving in vietnam are:

Anthony Casadio	21 st August 1968		O'Brien Phillips	21 st August 1968
Antony Huelin	3 rd January, 1969		Noel Shipp	31 st May 1969

Throughout their service in Vietnam, members of the RAN Fleet Air Arm provided tactical airlift and gunship support to Australian and allied forces.



Mall then called on those that wished to lay a wreath to so do.



Annette Fry, representing the Partners of Veterans Association (PVA).



“Billy” Bunter representing Legacy



Brianna McEvoy, representing children of Vietnam Veterans.



Gail Myers representing the WRAAF.



Jake" Jacobson, representing Wallaby Airlines – 35 Sqn.



Mick Howe, representing the VVAASC.



Peter Crowder, representing the Aircrew Association.



Mal Sayers representing the QAM.



John Dunne – representing 9 Sqn.



After the wreath laying, everyone stood for the Last Post.

Everyone was then invited over to the hangar for refreshments and to look over the vast display of aircraft.



Back in June 2018, the RAAF handed over keys to Orion A9-760 to the QAM at a ceremony held at Maroochydore airport. The Orion was flown into Maroochydore Airport from Edinburgh where

it was partially dismantled before being transported to QAM by road. The airport at Caloundra was not suitable for an Orion operation.

It was finally delivered to QAM early this year and now the huge task of putting it back together begins.

This particular aircraft is particularly famous for its role in the rescue of yachtsmen Thierry Dubois and Tony Bullimore who were competing in the Vendee Globe single-handed around the world race in 1997. A9-760 was the first Orion to join the search and its crew made the first sighting of the missing yachtsmen.





Just some of the huge number of aircraft on display – if you've never been, put it on the list.



Crissi and Steve Wessels.



“Jake” Jacobson and Bree McEvoy