REPORT TO THE MINISTER
ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

BY

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL

ON

VIETNAM CAMPAIGN RECOGNITION

FOR RAAF SERVICE AT UBON, THAILAND

25 JUNE 1965 TO 31 AUGUST 1968

9 July 2004
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>i – iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE TASK</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSULTATION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INITIAL PURPOSE AND INTENT AT UBON</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strategic Environment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Initial Deployment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Tasks and Command, Control and Coordination</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW PANEL FINDING</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE DEPLOYMENT PURPOSE CHANGES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Laotian Crisis Passes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Joint US/Australia Bilateral Presence Evolves</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Air Threat Emerges</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And Allied Air Defence is Upgraded</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW PANEL FINDING</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBON SERVICE AND THE VIETNAM WAR</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN AIR CAMPAIGN IS PLANNED AND ASSISTANCE SOUGHT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Defence Consideration</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Previous consideration of service at Ubon was most notably undertaken by the Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75 (SEA Review), conducted by Mr Justice Mohr. The RAAF Ubon Reunion Recognition Group (URG) claims that they have uncovered additional material evidence that was not considered by the SEA Review. They claim that this new information supports their claim for further recognition of service at Ubon from 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 by the award of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal (VLSM).

The Minister for Employment Services and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, the Honorable Mal Brough MP, sought to clarify whether or not this new material had in fact been considered by the SEA Review in coming to its conclusions. If it had not, would it have impacted on the findings and recommendations of the SEA Review?

In this context, the Department of Defence engaged a consultant to examine the question. The consultant found that:

- The URG submission to the SEA Review did include a claim for award of the VLSM;
- The SEA Review Secretariat prepared a consolidated list of issues raised in submissions for consideration in the Review, and that list contained the URG request for VLSM award;
- Inexplicably, the SEA Review did not take account of, nor consider, the claim for award of the VLSM when it reached its conclusions and made its recommendations on RAAF service at Ubon; and
- Had the Review taken the claim into account, it is unlikely that its consideration would have impacted on the findings of the Review as far as that review went.1

As a consequence of these inconclusive findings, the Minister commissioned an independent panel to review the claims of the URG. The panel comprised Air Marshal Doug Riding AO DFC (Ret’d) as Chairman, Rear Admiral Philip Kennedy AO RAN (Ret’d) and Mr Ces White as members.

THE TASK

The Minister asked the Review Panel to establish whether the additional information presented by the RAAF Ubon Recognition Group provided sufficient evidence for amending the regulations governing the award of the VLSM to cover Ubon service during the period 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968.

1 Consultant Report to Director Honours and Awards dated 5 May 2004
CONSULTATION

The Panel first met on 8 June 2004 when the Director of Defence Honours and Awards provided members with background material for the review. The Panel then invited representatives of the URG to present their claims and this occurred at a meeting in Canberra on 15 June 2004 attended by Mr Mal Barnes President URG, Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully AO (Ret’d) and GPCAPT John Jacobsen. Their presentations were comprehensive and very detailed; the main points being:

- The recent discovery of the document JPC 110/64 ‘Aid to Vietnam’ was the first indication that Sabres at Ubon may, if not required for air defence of Ubon, be used in other offensive roles including ground attack ‘in operations including the whole area of Laos and North Vietnam’. This removed the previous embargo curtailing Sabre operations to Thai airspace.


- The VLSM is their ‘lawful and appropriate campaign medal’ but they acknowledge that many ex-RAAF personnel particularly those in operational roles believe the Vietnam Medal should be awarded.

- The USAF considered that the RAAF air defence role at Ubon vital to the war effort.

- The Rules of Engagement for 79 Squadron and the integrated air defence command and control arrangements introduced in 1965 demonstrate the clear connection between the RAAF Contingent’s tasks and the Vietnam War air campaign.

A full transcript of presentations by the URG representatives is at Annex A. After the meeting they said that they were pleased to have been invited to put their case personally and that this was received in a friendly atmosphere.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The Review Panel examined the Department of Defence’s stance on the URG claim and the material presented by the URG and concluded that three aspects of the URG claim required investigation through an examination of all available official documentation relating to the RAAF presence at Ubon. These aspects were:

a. the initial and evolving intent of the Government and the Department of Defence in deploying the RAAF Contingent to Ubon and maintaining it there;

b. the nature of the tasks assigned to and carried out by the RAAF at Ubon; and
c. the authority of the legitimate superior command elements that directed the activities of the RAAF elements and established the operational purpose of those activities.

The period of contention over recognition for service at Ubon is 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968. However, the Review Team decided that it was essential to revisit the uncontroversial period 1962 to 1965 to establish the Government’s intent at the time, to determine the deployed force’s early mission, role and tasks, and to understand the early command and control arrangements for the RAAF at Ubon. This included an examination of Australia’s involvement in and force declarations to SEATO standing contingency plans.

With an understanding of Australia’s evolving strategic and military policy over this early period, the panel would then be able to comprehend the nature of events that led to the radical change in circumstances that occurred on and after 25 June 1965. The Panel examined Defence Committee, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Joint Planning Committee reports, Departmental files and Cabinet deliberations and decisions during 1962 to 1966 that dealt with requests by the United States for additional commitment of Australian forces to the military campaign in Vietnam. This examination included the new material presented by the URG. Other historical reference material was also examined.

The Review Panel took the view that by taking a holistic approach it would be able to understand the purpose, tasks, activities and command and control of the RAAF force at Ubon. This in turn would allow the Panel to draw conclusions and be in a position to answer, with full authority, the question as to whether there was a relationship between Ubon service and the Vietnam campaign. This answer would enable the Review Panel to make a sustainable recommendation to the Minister upon which he could make a decision. The Panel felt that the longstanding Ubon service controversy could then be laid to rest with transparent justice.

**INITIAL PURPOSE AND INTENT AT UBON**

**The Strategic Environment**

A general understanding of the geo-strategic scene in Asia especially South East Asia is necessary to comprehend the complex, escalatory events in which the RAAF contingent at Ubon was enmeshed between 1962 and 1968.

After the Korean War a number of strategic factors including de-colonisation by France, the Netherlands and Great Britain together with the spread of global communism led to serious political and military instability in Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya and Indonesia.

Allied responses led to the creation of the Far East Strategic Reserve (FESR) and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), and forces were sent to the region to provide strategic presence and military strength. Australia was concerned that the perceived communist threat, characterised by the ‘Domino Theory’, could spread communism from China through Indo-China to Thailand, the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia. To confront this threat with strategic depth Australia adopted a defence policy called ‘Forward Defence’.

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As a SEATO member Australia had made declarations of forces to SEATO War Plans that prepared for credible contingencies faced by member states. SEATO Plans 5, 6 and 7 were standing war plans of the SEATO Council and these addressed the following contingencies:

- **Plan 5.** This was a plan to counter communist insurgency in Laos. This Plan provided for deployment of SEATO forces into Thailand as a contingency.\(^2\)

- **Plan 6.** This was a plan for limited war to counter aggression by the Peoples Republic of China and North Vietnam in South East Asia.

- **Plan 7.** This was a plan to assist the Government of South Vietnam to counter Communist insurgency.\(^3\)

**The Initial Deployment**

Responding to the Laotian crisis in 1962, the Cabinet met on 5 May 1962 and concluded:

> ‘Noting that the US Administration had decided, as a precautionary measure, to send a combat force to Thailand and on the assumption that the Thais themselves would be willing to fight to defend their frontiers, [Cabinet] decided that, if the Thai Government were to request us to supply military assistance, Australia, in accordance with its obligations under SEATO [Plan 5] and acting pursuant to these obligations, and if possible with other members, would send a military contingent to Thailand.’\(^4\)

> ‘Factors considered important by Cabinet were:

(a) The action, which must be justifiable in our future relations with Asian countries, should be a SEATO action. Even if all members do not agree to contribute contingents, the participating members should act as SEATO powers in performance of SEATO obligations.

(b) Our objectives would be to build up the effectiveness of SEATO [under Plan 5] and to assure Thailand that its territorial integrity would be maintained.

(c) It is desirable to inform the United States without delay and without equivocation that Australia approves the decision taken by the United States and is willing, upon request from the Thai Government, to provide a small contingent.

(d) [Not relevant].

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\(^2\) DoD file 249/7/47 folios 25-26

\(^3\) DFAT file TS696/8/4 Pt 6 December 1964

\(^4\) Cabinet Decision (without memorandum) 240 “Possible Stationing of Australian Forces in Thailand” dated 15 May 1962 – DoD file 249/7/47 folio 54.
Whilst it is desirable to have wider participation, Australia would be prepared to send a contingent even if the United States and Thailand were the only other members with forces in Thailand.  

Subsequently in late May 1962, and as result of advice from the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the Prime Minister approved the deployment of 79 Squadron as part of a RAAF contingent to Ubon.  

Early Tasks and Command, Control and Coordination

The RAAF Contingent built up progressively from 31 May 1962. It consisted of the Command Element, 79 Squadron and Base Squadron Ubon. The squadron was tasked for air defence duties and the Base Squadron was to provide airfield services for all SEATO air forces using the base. RAAF Ubon was under Australian national control, with the Officer Commanding responsible to the Air Board for operational employment of the force. 79 Squadron was deployed with an air defence capability only and could be armed when necessary with AIM-9B air-to-air missiles and 30mm cannons.

The directive to the Officer Commanding stated that the Contingent was to cooperate with the Thai armed forces and the forces deployed by other SEATO countries in maintaining the territorial integrity of Thailand. By agreement with the nations concerned, the Commander United States Military Assistance Command Thailand (COMUSMACTHAI), who was also Commander United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV), was appointed Coordinating Authority for all the operational activities of all foreign forces in Thailand, including the RAAF Contingent. Under this arrangement he could require consultation, but he did not command or control the RAAF Unit or its aircraft, this authority being retained by the Air Board. The circumstances in which the Officer Commanding could commit the RAAF Contingent to the use of force were given in the Directive in the following terms:

‘The RAAF is not to be committed to the use of force except:

a. in self defence,

b. in the air defence of Thailand when so instructed by the Air Board, or

c. if requested by the Thai authorities, through COMUSMACTHAI or his nominated deputy, to intercept aircraft attacking with weapons Thai Territory, in the event of attack without warning, when prior reference to the Air Board is not practicable.’

REVIEW PANEL FINDING

The Review Panel finds that the initial reason for the deployment of the RAAF Contingent to Ubon was to assist Thailand defend itself should the crisis of Viet Minh insurgency in Laos worsen. The deployment was made under Australia’s obligations under SEATO and was a contribution under SEATO Standing Plan 5.

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5 Ibid.
6 DoD 249/7/47 File No.1folios 181-182
7 DoD file 249/7/48 folios 243-254
THE DEPLOYMENT PURPOSE CHANGES

The Laotian Crisis Passes

In early 1963, The Defence Committee Report to Cabinet on Australia’s assistance to Thailand noted that:

‘The dispatch of the squadron to Thailand was a precautionary measure and the objectives Cabinet had in mind at the time have been substantially secured. There is now no immediate threat to Thailand so that, in effect, the squadron is being retained there to meet United States wishes’.

It went on:

‘On balance, then, it is considered that the RAAF Squadron should be withdrawn from Thailand. However, the attitude of the United States to the withdrawal was complex, and US State Department sources advised that they would prefer the squadron to remain for the time being. This thinking seemed to be influenced by a feeling that SEATO forces in Thailand were related to the military situation in Laos and a Viet Minh assessment that SEATO interest in the area was waning’.

The Committee concluded ‘that:

a. There were sound military reasons for continuing the deployment of the RAAF Sabre squadron at Ubon but it needed to be considered in the context of financial pressures on the Defence Vote;

b. On balance, for the reasons stated above, the squadron should be withdrawn from Thailand;

c. The most suitable time for withdrawal would be June 1963; and

d. The United States authorities should be informed that Australia intends to withdraw the squadron unless they have strong reasons to justify retaining it in Thailand.’

To understand the Departmental thinking at the time it is instructive to consider the Defence’s Notes on their Submission to Cabinet. The purpose of the Submission was to seek approval to withdraw the RAAF squadron from Thailand by June 1963, and to propose examination of alternative military assistance by way of special logistic aid as part of the US Special Logistic Aid to Thailand program.

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8 DoD file 249/7/55 folios 210-228
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
In placing the complex circumstances of the issue before Cabinet, Defence noted that:

‘Although the US would not place inhibitions in the way of our withdrawal, the State Department would like us to stay until the United States had decided to withdraw their Air Forces. Although the Pentagon is apparently keen to withdraw, the State Department has been concerned at the fact that the withdrawal may lead to quickened efforts by the Communists to seize further initiatives in Laos, where the situation has been gradually deteriorating.’

Defence advice to Cabinet went on:

‘The United States obviously wishes to get as good a result as they can out of the Laos situation because time gained here improves the chances of swinging the pendulum against the Communists in South Vietnam, where the US is heavily committed. SEATO planning for intervention in Laos is a dead duck, but the US have told us they have a national contingency planned for Laos. The status of this plan or its content has not been disclosed, but we would guess that it is a plan which would secure border areas near South Vietnam and Thailand should the Communists bring off a successful coup.’

It concluded:

‘The situation and US intentions are very difficult to assess. Putting these considerations aside, the important thing to come out of this deployment is our relationship to the United States. It is significant that this is the first bilateral deployment we have made with the United States since the war [began] in South East Asia, an area of prime importance to us’.

In developing its case for withdrawal of the squadron to be put to Cabinet, the Defence Committee Report of 28 March 1963 noted that:

‘Since Cabinet’s decision of 15 May 1962 to send a military contingent to Thailand, in pursuance of our obligations under SEATO’ [and the consequent RAAF deployment to Ubon in late May 1962,] ‘the British and New Zealand air elements sent to Thailand during 1962 have been withdrawn. The US ground forces have also been withdrawn, and the United States air element has been reduced to half a squadron.’

In concluding its case, the Defence Committee observed:

‘It remains for Cabinet to consider whether this partially unilateral approach [to withdrawal] is a good way to handle the United States in this vital area. In terms of the alliance with the United States, there are good reasons for settling our withdrawal on the basis that we will stay until the time has arrived for our joint withdrawal, providing that the host government is satisfied with our presence. Generally there are good broad political reasons for us not to opt out of this joint deployment with the United States.’
A Joint US/Australia Bilateral Presence Evolves

Thus, the RAAF Contingent remained at Ubon, and the original purpose of the RAAF Contingent's deployment under SEATO Plan 5 ceased being relevant to its presence after May 1963. The political purpose clearly became one of providing a joint military presence with the United States, and the military purpose was to demonstrate an armed air force presence in South East Asia to support the United States military endeavours in assisting Laos and South Vietnam resist the Communist insurgencies that were supported by North Vietnam.

An Air Threat Emerges

This situation pertained until August 1964 when a change in operational policy was considered necessary following a build up of Chinese Communist air strength in South China and in the North Vietnamese Air Force (NVAF).\(^{12}\) In early 1965 the NVAF acquired IL-28 light bombers that had the capability to attack north east Thailand and as far south as Saigon in South Vietnam.\(^{13}\)

And Allied Air Defence is Upgraded

As a result of the build-up of Communist forces, the USAF and RTAF formulated new rules of engagement for an integrated air defence system in Thailand at a conference urgently convened to respond to the threat. An invitation was extended for 79 Squadron to be included into the new integrated air defence system.

This integrated system’s formal title was the ‘Thailand Air Defense/Tactical Air Control System’. Background papers leading to the establishment of this system stated, inter alia, that:

‘The USAF Mainland Southeast Air Defense Sector has been established as part of the Pacific Air Defense Network. While the USAF has overall responsibility for the operation of the network, the air defense systems of several nations are incorporated as parts, of which the geographical area of Thailand is a major part. As a means of increasing effectiveness, the Thailand Air Defense/Tactical Air Control System will be integrated and incorporated into the PACAF network as a part of the USAF Mainland Southeast Asia Air Defense Sector. It is agreed that Air Defense of Thailand will be exercised in conjunction and coordination with the USAF Mainland Southeast Asia Air Defense Sector in accordance with the appropriate operations plans/orders.’\(^{14}\)

In putting the proposal for 79 Squadron to be included in the integrated system to the Defence Committee, the Chief of Air Staff (CAS) commented, inter alia, that the RAAF Rules of Engagement up to that time did not ‘really tie the RAAF into the air defence system until a serious situation occurs and the Australian Government gives approval.’ CAS sought approval for subsequent negotiations to be undertaken on the basis that 79 Squadron could be included in the new air defence system, and the Minister approved this. The critical aspects of this integration were that 79 Squadron would now start to

\(^{12}\) Cas Minute to Chairman Defence Committee dated 24 March 1965. DoD file 249/7/55 folios 279-284
\(^{14}\) Department of Air file 564/1/95 folio 46 para 2.b.
undertake ‘live’ operational intercepts and be placed on the highest feasible state of readiness for the squadron ie, at five minute alert.\textsuperscript{15}

Full details of the revised task, role, and alert status of the RAAF Contingent as agreed by USAF and RTAF authorities are as follows:

‘Task and Role of RAAF Contingent

1. The task of the RAAF Contingent is to co-operate with the Thai Armed Forces and the forces deployed by other SEATO countries in maintaining the territorial integrity of Thailand. The RAAF Contingent will not be committed to the use of force except:

(a) In self defence.

(b) In the air defence of Thailand when so instructed by the Air Board; or

(c) If requested by the Thai authorities, through COMUSMACTHAI or his nominated deputy, to intercept aircraft attacking Thai territory or forces within Thailand, in the event of attack without warning when prior reference to the Air Board is not practicable.

2. No 79 Squadron RAAF can be included in the RTAF/USAF integrated air defence system for Thailand, but Australia reserves the right to withdraw the Squadron should that be necessary to meet a more serious threat elsewhere.

Alert Status No 79 Squadron RAAF

3. Aircraft of No 79 Squadron RAAF concurrently based at UBON, are to be employed as follows:-

(a) Two aircraft at alert five (5), seven days each week, daylight hours only.

(b) Aircraft are to be armed with 30mm cannon and Sidewinder air-to-air missiles.

(c) The RAAF agrees to accept the authority of the Director of Combat Operations at the Air Operations Center (AOC) or his nominated deputy for scramble and intercept purposes with the following conditions:

(i) When the Commander RAAF UBON considers Base weather conditions are approaching marginal for Sabre aircraft landing he will advise AOC of possible need to divert aircraft subsequent to a scramble.

(ii) When Base weather conditions are becoming marginal for take-off, Commander RAAF UBON will advise AOC and request cancellation of alert status until weather is again suitable.

\textsuperscript{15} DoD file 249/7/55 folios 244-267.
The Rules of Engagement, appended hereto, as ratified by the Commander Second Air Division and the Royal Thailand Air Force are acceptable to the Royal Australian Air Force.

4. No 79 Squadron is to commence the alert status in accordance with the above conditions, as from 25th June 1965.

5. The RAAF reserves the right to review the alert status after a trial period and to submit amendments to the above conditions if it becomes necessary.\(^{16}\)

In regard to paragraph 5, the Squadron remained at alert state five (5) during daylight hours until it was withdrawn in 1968.

**REVIEW PANEL FINDING**

The Review Panel finds that the initial reason for deployment was no longer relevant by early 1963 with the passing of the Laotian crisis, and the RAAF Contingent remained at Ubon at the behest of the United States to jointly and bilaterally confront the spread of communism in South East Asia, although still under the cloak of SEATO.

**UBON SERVICE AND THE VIETNAM WAR**

**AN AIR CAMPAIGN IS PLANNED AND ASSISTANCE SOUGHT**

To understand how the new role and tasks for 79 Squadron were decided, it is necessary to review departmental advice and Government decisions made in December 1964 on providing additional aid to Vietnam. The catalyst was a United States request for an Australian contribution to support an air campaign they intended to launch against North Vietnam, the purpose of which was ‘to take stronger action to support the Republic of Vietnam in its struggle to preserve its independence’.\(^{17}\)

**Department of Defence Consideration**

On 8 December 1964, Deputy Secretary (B) Department of Defence tasked the Chairman of the Joint Planning Committee\(^ {18}\) to examine, in conjunction with the Joint Intelligence Committee, cabled information from the Australian Embassy in Washington that the United States would make a firm request for further Australian military aid to South Vietnam. The US was concerned over the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, and there were indications that the US would take stronger action in South Vietnam after the presidential elections. In summary, military operations proposed by the US were:

- Air strikes against selected targets along the North Vietnamese infiltration routes down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos, and
- Air strikes against selected targets in North Vietnam.

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\(^{16}\) DoD file 67/541 folios 26-29

\(^{17}\) Report by COSC ‘United States Proposals for Further Action in Vietnam’. 16 Dec 64, DoD file 248/4/100 folios 93-103

\(^{18}\) Ibid folio 13, Deputy Secretary (B) Minute of 8 December 1964
The cable concluded by stating that ‘the decisions to carry out these measures are stated by the US authorities to be firm.’

DEPSEC B specified that the JPC ‘should cover the practicability of meeting the expected American request for contribution of additional assistance and the role of the Australian Sabre squadron at Ubon.’ While considering the US request, the Committee also considered the importance to Australia’s national interests in South East Asia in providing such assistance. The following brief excerpts highlight this importance:

‘Communism is exerting a relentless pressure in the area backed by very strong military forces. Increasing communist led insurgency in the strategically important areas of Laos and South Vietnam endangers indirectly the entire South East Asian mainland…’ and

‘Developments in South East Asia, such as the possible loss of South Vietnam and of bases in Malaysia, could threaten the allied forward defence posture but it will be in our national interests to preserve the position in South East Asia for as long as possible.’

It was against this background of the need to defend mainland South East Asia and the impending US air campaign that the JPC, Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee in turn considered what additional Australian assistance might be provided. In its Report the JPC noted:

‘The possible use of the Australian Sabre Squadron at Ubon has also been considered.’

It went on:

‘Air Aspects.

23. The scale of air effort currently suggested indicates that this is well within the capacity of the United States air forces and naval air units in the area. The possible use of the Sabres at Ubon has been raised and with a small increase in manpower they could be employed in the air defence role at a high state of alert. If the Squadron was not required in the air defence role it could participate in operations including ground attack over the whole area of Laos and North Vietnam envisaged in the United States proposals.’

The reports of both the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee contain the same or similar wording as the JPC Report.

19 DFAT file TS696/8/4 Pt 6 Dec 64, Joint Planning Committee Report 110/64
21 COSC Report, DoD file 248/4/100 folios 93-103
22 Ibid. Para 22.
Department of External Affairs Position

While Defence was preparing its position on a contribution to the planned US air campaign, the Department of External Affairs was considering the issue in preparation for Cabinet deliberation. The Secretary was briefed as follows:

‘The RAAF Squadron at Ubon could be made available for air defence and strafing purposes, but some anti-aircraft and perimeter defence forces there would be desirable.’23

It is noteworthy that, because of an expectation of North Vietnamese retaliation against the air campaign, protection of the Ubon air base by ground force was seen as necessary to protect the Contingent. From this need the RAAF Airfield Defence Guard mustering was established and the first flight of ADGs was deployed to Ubon.

Whole of Government View

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that, at the highest official level, the Departments of Defence and External Affairs recommended the option of offering the Sabre squadron at Ubon for air defence at a high state of alert and other tasks as a contribution to the prospective air campaign against North Vietnam.

A NEW TASK FOR THE CONTINGENT

As a result of these deliberations, 79 Squadron was assigned to an operational air defence role in the air campaign and this was planned to occur on 1 February 1965 with the following provisos24:

a. Australia reserved the right to withdraw the Squadron should that be necessary to meet more serious threat elsewhere,

b. No increase in unit resources could be provided and the degree of unit participation was limited to its current capacity, and

c. The Rules of Engagement agreed to by the RAAF in regard to RAAF aircraft employed in the Thai Air Defence System stipulated that RAAF aircraft were only to be employed on operations within Thailand’s national boundaries.

The USAF authorities did not immediately accept the offer to include 79 Squadron in the system because of these provisos.25 However, on 2 June 1965 the Deputy Commander US 2nd Air Division at Udorn sent a message to the Commander RAAF Contingent Ubon saying, inter alia, that: ‘Your generous offer to place [79 Squadron] on air defence alert has been accepted’. The Minister for Defence approved the new role and tasks for the Squadron including rules of engagement,26 and despite its geographic limitations, 79 Squadron was absorbed into the integrated air defence system on 25 June 1965.27

24 Department of Air file 564/1/95, folio 103, 9 June 1965
25 Ibid, folio 70
26 DoD file 67/541 folios 12-13
27 Department of Air file 564/1/95, folio 98.
The geographic limitations on the squadron remained an impediment to the full exploitation of its operational capability until withdrawal in 1968. Despite several attempts to extend the area of operations over Laos to allow search and rescue top cover missions as requested by the USAF, and to permit more effective air defence operations, the Department of External Affairs consistently refused to support the extension because of perceived Thai sensitivities. Had 79 Squadron not been withdrawn in 1968 for re-equipment with the new Mirage III fighters, this objection would arguably have disappeared when the Thais committed substantial forces to the land campaign in South Vietnam.

THE ‘ROLLING THUNDER’ AIR CAMPAIGN

USAF Deploys in Force to Thailand

In March 1965, the Chief of the Air Staff wrote to the Chairman of the Defence Committee advising that the USAF was to deploy 18 Phantom strike fighters and 1000 personnel to Ubon by 13 April 1965, the first of three squadrons of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing to be based there. 28

Deployment of USAF F-4C Phantom squadrons to Ubon and Udorn air bases continued over the next twelve months, joining the F-105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber squadrons already deployed at Korat and Takhli air bases. This massive increase of USAF air power in Thailand enabled the US to mount Operation ROLLING THUNDER, a sustained campaign of air attacks on targets in North Vietnam and against the Viet Cong supply routes down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The Air Campaign Commences

In accordance with the air campaign plan, air strikes commenced against targets in North Vietnam and Laos. These attacks were divided into Phase One operations, in the form of reprisal raids for specific Viet Cong activities, and Phase Two operations, which were directed at selected interdiction targets in North Vietnam. Up to this time raids against Phase Two targets were mounted from bases in South Vietnam and from aircraft carriers of the US Seventh Fleet in the South China Sea.

The Enemy Threat Increases

As a consequence of this increase in offensive air operations against North Vietnam, the possibility of enemy action against allied air bases in Thailand increased. Ubon was well within range of enemy air attacks though the risk was assessed to be slight. Sabotage attacks against Ubon by long range enemy ground patrols or by clandestine parties were considered much more likely. Assessments at the time indicated there were about 1200 insurgents in the UBON region.

Ground Defence Response

To counter the threat of ground attack, RAAF Airfield Defence Guards played a major role in the ground defence of Ubon airfield with the USAF Air Police from the beginning of the USAF build up until the RAAF departed in 1968. Their area of operations

28 Ibid folios 75-81.
comprised the whole airfield, its aircraft and installations, and patrols in depth outside the airfield perimeter. Unlike the RAAF ADGs, the USAF Air Police were constrained to operate inside the perimeter.

**Air Defence Response**

Although the probability of enemy air attack was considered unlikely, the RAAF/USAF/RTAF Integrated Air Defence System was fully manned and RAAF Sabres maintained an air defence alert at Ubon. The CAS wrote to the Chairman of the Defence Committee on 24 March 1965 advising, inter alia, that ‘while the operations by RAAF aircraft in the Air Defence role will be confined to the boundaries of Thailand, the fact that RAAF aircraft are being employed in the defence of an air base from which offensive operations are being launched against North Vietnam could be regarded by North Vietnam and Communist China as being similar to participation in the actual offensive operation’. 29

On 26 July 1965, in the face of the deteriorating tactical situation on the ground in the Republic of South Vietnam (RVN), the President of the United States wrote to the Prime Minister of Australia with another request for additional Australian forces to the war. 30

The Defence Committee considered the current level of Australia’s contribution to the RVN, options for additional forces and recommended to the Minister for Defence increased force commitments. 31

In reviewing the deployed air forces overseas, the Report noted at Ubon Thailand one Sabre Squadron of eight aircraft. 32 It then identified and discussed a possible RAAF contribution to Vietnam as follows:

‘Making 79 Squadron at Ubon available for operations in support of the USAF in the general area. This squadron is now part of the Air Defence System of Thailand, in conjunction with the United States Air Force and the Royal Thai Air Force, and maintains two aircraft at 5 minutes alert during daylight hours for defence against enemy aircraft flying over the physical territory of Thailand.’ 33

**NEW AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM FOR MAINLAND SE ASIA**

In mid 1966, the US established the Mainland South East Asia Air Defence Region (MSEAADR) under 7AF OPLAN 427-66. The purpose was to provide an air defence system that was responsive to the increasing air threat and provide the capability to defend the MSEAADR from attack. It combined the National Air Defence Systems of Thailand (South East Asia-West) and the Republic of Vietnam (South East Asia-East) as components of a single integrated air defence system with common doctrine and standardised procedures and communications directly responsible to Commander in Chief Pacific Air Forces (CINCPACAF). 34

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29 DoD file 249/7/55, folio 284
32 Ibid. Para 28 of Defence Committee Report
33 Ibid. Para 30(a) of Defence Committee Report
34 Department of Air file 564/1/95 folio 213, 8 August 1966
Allied Forces Vulnerability Exposed

In advising the Department of Defence on the operational employment of 79 Squadron in the air defence of mainland South East Asia, the Department of Air noted:

‘The current tactical situation in MSEAADR is that very large US military forces with corresponding large assemblies of equipment and base facilities are now deployed in South Vietnam and Thailand, while the Communist China Air Force (CCAF) with their offensive capability still intact are improving their air defence capability by installing new radars, building new air bases and deploying more anti-aircraft weapons. While current intelligence assessments do not provide any basis for increasing the CCAF’s ability to mount air attacks against the MSEAADR, the allied military installation(s) now established in Thailand and South Vietnam present much more attractive targets and their defence against air attack is vital to the current allied operations.’  

A New Air Defence Plan Evolves

OPLAN 427-66 listed 79 Squadron under ‘Augmentation Forces – Thailand’. The Concept of Operations stated:

‘The governments of Thailand and South Vietnam have agreed to conduct air defence of their respective countries in conjunction with and in coordination with the MSEAADR.

RTAF, VNAF, RAAF and US Defence Forces shall retain their respective national chains of command for manning, command, supply and support.

Overall air defence operations will be conducted thorough a single control agency.

Operations throughout each respective national Tactical control/Air Defence System will be performed in accordance with PACAF publications as a standard source of reference.

The MSEAADR will operate on a 24-hour basis.

Interceptor operations will be performed in accordance with existing national operation procedures and will be governed by ROE established by appropriate authorities. RAAF Rules of engagement will apply to all RAAF fighter and interceptor aircraft.

Air Defence Interceptors are to maintain alert commitments as determined by the Commander 7th Air Force and host country air force’.  

Participation of 79 Squadron in the new combined air defence region was approved by the Minister for Defence subject to the Squadron fulfilling its role within present agreed conditions of operation ie, air defence duties only within the territory of Thailand. The new combined air defence plan was implemented, and 79 Squadron operated under it until 26 July 1968 when the squadron was released from its air defence task.

36 Ibid
79 SQUADRON WITHDRAWAL

On 16 July 1968, Department of Air, sent a message\(^{37}\) to Headquarters 7th Air Force in Saigon for the Commander, General Momyer USAF, requesting release of 79 Squadron from alert status at Ubon with effect 26 July 1968.

In a message reply\(^{38}\) on 18 July 1968, the Commander US 7Air Force released 79 Squadron from alert status at Ubon effective 0001 hrs local 26 July 1968.

On 2 August 1968 79 Squadron flew out of Ubon. By 31 August 1968, the Officer Commanding RAAF Contingent and Base Squadron Ubon were withdrawn.

SUMMARY

From the foregoing the Review Panel concludes that:

The RAAF Contingent was sent to Thailand in June 1962 under the aegis of SEATO Plan 5, a plan to counter communist insurgency in Laos.

The Contingent consisted of the Command Element, 79 Squadron and Base Squadron Ubon.

The original role of 79 Squadron was air defence of Thailand and Base Squadron Ubon’s role was to support the squadron and provide airfield support services to SEATO air forces using the airfield.

Operational air defence command and control was coordinated through COMUSMACTHAI.

The ROE allowed the use of force against aircraft attacking Thai territory with weapons without warning.

In early 1963 the Laotian crisis passed and the Australian Government considered withdrawing the RAAF Contingent, following withdrawal of UK and NZ air forces and US ground forces deployed under Plan 5.

But it decided to leave the Contingent in place to provide a bilateral joint US/AS military presence to confront the spread of communism in South East Asia.

In response to a perceived air threat from North Vietnam in August 1964, the USAF and RTAF developed an integrated air defence system for Thailand with fighters on air defence alert and new ROE. The RAAF was invited to join.

This new Thai air defence system was part of the USAF Mainland South East Asia Air Defence Network which was in turn part of the Pacific Air Defence Network.

\(^{37}\) Department of Air file 566/2/311 folio 23

\(^{38}\) Ibid folio 33
The RAAF/USAF and RTAF agreed new RAAF Roles, Tasks and ROE, significantly broadening the original, to mount an air defence alert and allow use of force against aircraft attacking forces in Thailand, and before the attackers used their weapons.

The context of this new air defence tasking had its genesis in December 1964 when the US signalled its intention to mount an air campaign against North Vietnam and the Communist supply routes through Laos.

In response to a request to assess what additional assistance Australia might provide to South Vietnam, one of the additional forms of assistance in the air campaign suggested by the Department of Defence was the employment of 79 Squadron at Ubon in the air defence role at a high state of alert. This was supported by the Department of External Affairs who also suggested that perimeter defence forces at Ubon would be desirable, given the likelihood of an enemy retaliation to the air campaign.

US Operation ROLLING THUNDER commenced on 2 March 1965 with attacks against North Vietnam and Laos with reprisal raids for specific VC activity and on interdiction targets in the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply routes.

As a result, the perceived enemy threat against allied bases in Thailand increased, with air and ground attacks possible.

The likelihood of air attack was considered slight but would be catastrophic if carried out. Allied air defence forces were maintained at the highest sustainable level of air defence alert.

On 25 June 1965, 79 Squadron commenced the highest sustainable armed air defence alert of Alert State Five daily from dawn to dusk with the new ROE in effect.

The ground threat from insurgents was considered more likely, and the RAAF sent a flight of Airfield Defence Guards to protect the RAAF Contingent at Ubon.

On 26 July 1965 President Johnson requested additional Australian forces for the war.

Expanding the role of 79 Squadron was considered but not taken up primarily because of Department of External Affairs’ concern about deniability. In this context, the RAAF Sabres were a unique type of aircraft in the air campaign, and as they could only have come from Ubon in Thailand, this would have created political difficulties at the time for the Thai Government. As a consequence 79 Squadron’s support for the air campaign remained in the air defence role.

In mid 1966 the US established a more comprehensive air defence plan (OPLAN 427-66) for Mainland South East Asia because of concern about the continuing vulnerability of vital equipment and bases in Thailand and South Vietnam to enemy air attack.

The Minister for Defence approved 79 Squadron’s participation in this plan.
79 Squadron was listed under ‘Augmentation Forces’ in OPLAN 427-66.

Overall air defence operations were conducted through a single control agency.

PACAF publications were the standard source of reference for all operations.

The Mainland SEA air defence region operated on a 24 hour basis.

79 Squadron operations were subject to RAAF ROE including geographic constraint.

Alert states by all air defence forces were determined and ordered by the Commander 7th Air Force in Saigon and the host country air force.

79 Squadron operated under this plan until its withdrawal on 26 July 1968.

To give effect to the withdrawal, which was necessary because of the Mirage III re-equipment program, Department of Air requested Commander 7th AF Commander’s approval to release of 79 Squadron from its alert status.

7th AF approved release with effect 0001hrs local, 26 July 1968.

REVIEW PANEL FINDING

The Review Panel finds that the purpose of the warlike service at RAAF Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 was the Australian contribution to the air campaign waged against North Vietnam. This contribution was an element of Australia’s national effort to assist the forces of the Republic of Vietnam to repel aggression.

PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION OF URG CLAIMS

The Review Panel decided that for completeness in its conduct of the Review it would examine and test the Department of Defence’s publicly stated position on the Ubon service in question, and the declared bases upon which the Department formulated its views.

In February 2004, the Minister met the URG in Brisbane. At that meeting representatives of the Department of Defence gave an introductory briefing that summarised the departmental position on the claim by the URG for recognition of Ubon service through the award of the VLSM. This briefing, in opposing the claim by the URG, concluded that:

- ‘[The Ubon] deployment has been the subject of three comprehensive reviews;

- None had recommended the VLSM to accompany any new or existing awards; and

- To extend eligibility for the VLSM to include service in Ubon would ultimately raise expectations from those personnel stationed in surrounding areas, but who did not serve within the Vietnam area of operations, including Australia.
As a result of an exhaustive examination of the archival evidence available, the Review Panel felt that it was able to critically assess this view and its underpinning authorities. That assessment, in accordance with the principled approach taken by the Panel to the Ubon recognition question, is made in the context of determining whether Ubon service from 1965 to 1968 deserves recognition by award of a Vietnam War campaign medal.

In its introduction, the Department recognized the CIDA articulation of the principles governing awards, noting that the rules try to balance the conflicting desire to provide recognition against the need to ensure that honours and awards are not used beyond the purpose for which they were meant. The Review Panel endorses the CIDA principles, but disagrees with the Department’s conclusion that Ubon service has been the subject of three independent comprehensive reviews to test the validity of claims for recognition through award of a Vietnam campaign medal.

The reviews quoted were:

a. The CIDA Report - 1993-94;

b. The SEA Review – February 2000; and

c. Review of Veterans’ Entitlements (Clarke Review) 2002;

CIDA REPORT

The CIDA Report received submissions on claims for Defence and Defence-related awards and came to judgments based on consideration of those submissions. With no documentary references in the Report concerning the RAAF Contingent in Thailand, it would appear that no research was done to test the claims.

CIDA observed that the RAAF Contingent was based at Ubon as part of Australia’s obligations under the South East Asia Treaty Organization and that the Australian Government made its commitment to Ubon on the same day it decided to enter the Vietnam War. In its deliberations on the submissions made to it, the Committee treated all Ubon service from deployment in 1962 to withdrawal in 1968 as the same service without identifying any variation in purpose or tasking, noting that the role for which the RAAF Contingent was equipped throughout the period was air defence.

It declared that the roles and tasks of the Contingent were limited to the defence of the Ubon air base and Thailand’s borders, and support of USAF operations from Ubon. It concluded that the Contingent never entered the designated area of operations for the Vietnam War, nor did it become involved directly in actual fighting or combat activity.

CIDA further recognized that Ubon was a major operational base for USAF strikes into Laos and Vietnam, and this made the base a real target for insurgency retaliation. It noted that Ubon had an active command and control air defence system and there were rules of engagement covering the conflict on land and in the air, and that these ROE applied to everyone serving at Ubon. The Committee also took evidence about the significant level of North Vietnamese sponsored terrorist activity in northern Thailand.

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CIDA was persuaded that the direct involvement of Ubon air base with the tactical air war in Vietnam, and the level of real enemy threat against the base, were such that would ‘today’ attract an award of the ASM. The Committee also noted that the National Headquarters of the RSL was of the view that the RAAF personnel serving in Ubon should be granted the Vietnam Medal and the Returned from Active Service Meal because of the nature of the support they provided to Australia’s engagement in Vietnam. Finally, the Committee:

‘noted that the area of operations to which the Vietnam Medal relates has been defined and established for over a period of 25 years. In light of this, the Committee does not agree to extending the Vietnam Medal to those who served in Thailand.’

CIDA recommended that service of Australian personnel who served at the Royal Thai Air Force base at Ubon be recognized through the Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp ‘Ubon’.

**Review Panel Comments on CIDA**

Based on the documentary evidence to hand, the Review Panel takes issue with a number of the findings of CIDA.

**Reason for Deployment**

First, the Committee only infers a link between the Australian Government’s commitment to Ubon and its decisions to enter and increasingly support efforts to support South Vietnam in the Vietnam War. Although the Government’s original purpose in deploying the RAAF Contingent to Ubon was as a contribution under SEATO Plan 5 to counter a communist insurgency in Laos, by 1963 that contingency had ceased, and the RAAF remained to demonstrate bilateral support to the United States in confronting communism in South East Asia. As the Review Panel has shown, the purpose and tasks of the Ubon Contingent from 1965 until 1968 were an integral part of the air campaign against North Vietnam.

**Roles and Tasks**

Second, perhaps because of a lack of accurate information provided in submissions, the roles and tasks of the Contingent are inadequately identified and defined. In fact, the role of air defence for 79 Squadron was clear and consistent throughout the five years of the deployment, but the Contingent also had the operational role of base ground defence. In both the air and ground defence roles, the mission and tasking of the Squadron varied significantly from the original, and particularly for the period 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968.

In 1965 the US massively increased the scale of its air strike operations against North Vietnam, and in response the North Vietnamese deployed Il-28 bomber aircraft and had the potential for the first time to strike allied forces in South Vietnam as far south as Saigon and in north-east Thailand.40 The heightened air threat from North Vietnam and the lack of allied low altitude radar coverage in the region meant that if the enemy chose to exploit this weakness it was estimated that the bases in South Vietnam and north-east

40 Berger Ibid p.227
Thailand would receive little or no warning. Given the closely parked, unrevetted aircraft and their proximity to ordnance and fuel storage, even one or two enemy aircraft alone could have triggered a holocaust under then prevailing airfield conditions. Because command and control, radar and communications systems were equally vulnerable, the creation of an adequate air defence system became a matter of urgency for the allies in 1965 and thereafter.

During 1965, round-the-clock air defence alert was maintained by 12 F-102 interceptors at Tan Son Nhut near Saigon, at Don Muang near Bangkok and during daylight hours by 79 Squadron at Ubon. By the end of 1966, Allied air forces on air defence alert had grown significantly both in South Vietnam and Thailand with four F-102s at Udorn, two F-102s at Don Muang on five-minute alert, and 79 Squadron with two aircraft on five-minute alert during daylight hours to cover north-east Thailand, not just for the Ubon air base. 79 Squadron thus was part of an integrated air defence system that covered all of north-east Thailand against an identified enemy air threat from North Vietnam and not, as CIDA states, a solely Ubon-centric air defence system.

Over the same time, the ground threat from insurgency increased significantly in north east Thailand, and in 1965 the RAAF raised a new mustering of Airfield Defence Guards (ADG). A Flight of ADGs was deployed at Ubon in the face of this threat to increase base security, with authority to undertake armed patrols outside the base perimeter to protect against mortar and rocket attack.

Area of Operations

Third, CIDA asserts, from the submissions made to it, that ‘there [was] no suggestion that the RAAF Contingent ever entered the designated area of operations for the Vietnam War, nor did it become involved directly in actual fighting or combat activity.’

The Review Panel was unable to locate official Australian documentation that identified the ‘designated area of operations for the Vietnam War’ quoted by CIDA. But it did determine that the United States’ designated area of operations for award of the US Vietnam Service Medal included all of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos as well as North and South Vietnam. The Review Panel also noted that the geographic criterion for the Australian Vietnam Medal speaks of ‘service over land, on inland waters or off the coast of Vietnam.’ This latter criterion cannot purport to define the designated area of operations of the Vietnam War, though it does to a large extent define the area of the land campaign and the airborne and seaborne support provided to land operations by the RAAF and the RAN. It does not in any way define the area of operations of the air campaign against North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And it is in the context of this area that the RAAF operations at Ubon should be considered.

What is clear and indisputable is that the USAF air campaign against North Vietnam was launched from five major bases in north-east Thailand: Ubon, Udorn, Korat, Takhli, and Nakhon Phanom, and that 79 Squadron, based at Ubon, was an integral part of that

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41 Ibid p230.
42 Ibid p230.
43 Ibid p230.
44 Ibid. p231.
45 ‘A complete Guide to all United States Military Medals 1939 to Present’ – Col Frank Foster and Lawrence Borts – p93
46 VM Royal Warrant
47 Berger Ibid p80.
campaign. The squadron provided, with the United States Air Force, air defence of allied forces and bases in Thailand, against an identified enemy, and was located in the operational area of the Vietnam War air campaign.

**Combat Operations**

CIDA found that there was no evidence to suggest that any element of the RAAF Contingent ‘engaged in actual fighting’ and the Review Panel confirms this retrospective fact. However, the Panel does not agree with the CIDA assertion that the RAAF Contingent ‘did (not) become involved directly in … combat activity’.48

In the air defence role, 79 Squadron maintained two Sabres on air defence five-minute alert state continuously during daylight hours, each armed with two Sidewinder AIM-9B air-to-air missiles and two 30mm HE cannons. The pilots also carried 9mm pistols for self-protection if forced to eject over territory where communist insurgents were suspected of being located. On many occasions, these aircraft were scrambled by the air defence system against unknown targets, with authority to intercept and, if necessary destroy, aircraft attacking Thai territory or allied forces within Thailand.49

In the opinion of the Review Panel, these activities constituted combat activity, in the same way that an infantry platoon on patrol completed its task without engaging the enemy, or a destroyer in a fleet completed an alert period without detecting or engaging hostile aircraft or firing a naval gunfire support mission; a not uncommon circumstance during army and navy combat operations in the land campaign in South Vietnam.

In the ground defence role, the ADG Flight of the RAAF Contingent conducted armed patrols outside and inside the base perimeter at Ubon against an identified threat, and in the view of the Review Panel, this similarly constituted combat activity.

**Review Panel Comment on CIDA Review Findings**

The Review Panel found that CIDA misunderstood the nature of the tasks undertaken by the RAAF Contingent and did not appreciate the degree to which 79 Squadron was integrated into the allied air campaign in the Vietnam War. For both these reasons it erred in not declaring the operational activities of the Contingent to be combat activities. This was later rectified in the SEA Review. It is worth recalling here the long accepted principle noted in the SEA Review that:

‘The award of a campaign clasp [or medal] is recognition that a man has taken part in operations or in a campaign and not that he has necessarily been under fire.’50

Finally, while appearing to be tempted in the end to allow the award of the Vietnam Medal, not least because it had been recommended by the National Headquarters of the RSL, CIDA chose an administrative convenience to deny that award by stating:

‘the area of operations to which the Vietnam Medal relates has been defined for over a period of 25 years. In the light of this, the Committee does not agree to extending the Vietnam Medal to those who served in Thailand.’

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48 CIDA p58.
49 SEA Review Ch6-4.
50 SEA Review. Ch1-2.
In the view of the Review Panel, this simply perpetuated an injustice done to these veterans when the original service requirements articulated in the Royal Warrant for the Vietnam Medal were drafted. This issue will be revisited later in the Report when the question of campaign medals is addressed.

**SEA REVIEW**

One of some eight hundred written submissions that the SEA Review received was a claim by RAAF personnel who served at Ubon that their service was warlike and that they should be awarded the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements. A specific aspect of the claim was for recognition of Ubon service as part of the Vietnam War campaign by the award of the VLSM campaign medal. Unfortunately the Review overlooked addressing this part of the claim, so its considerations and recommendations focussed solely on the nature of service claim.

The SEA Review conducted archival documentary research\(^{51}\) to verify as far as possible the claims made by the veterans, and hence its considerations were more soundly based than would appear to be the case in the CIDA Review.

Justice Mohr found that the CIDA Review and the 1997 Defence/VA Review erred in not addressing the fundamental question of the nature of Ubon service in the context of the then current classifications of commitment of peacetime, non-warlike, warlike and war. He concluded that peacetime and war could be safely excluded, leaving the choice between non-warlike and warlike.

The SEA Review noted a marked change in 1965 when the allied Vietnam War campaign escalated with the US deployment of greatly increased military commitment to Thailand to commence Operation ROLLING THUNDER, the aerial bombing assault against North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. As a consequence, the threat to the security of allied forces in Thailand both from air and ground attack increased. The Defence Committee in Australia saw the probability of air attack as slight, but the serious consequences of such an attack prompted the United States Second Air Force Commander (responsible for all air operations in Thailand) to request the Officer Commanding RAAF Ubon to undertake air defence alert tasks at ‘Alert State Five’ from dawn to dusk every day.

The SEA Review noted that the Australian Government decided to accede to this request, and amended the RAAF Contingent’s Task and Role Directive and Rules of Engagement to reflect the new armed alert state. Significant changes were:

\(^{51}\) Oral statement by RADM Philip Kennedy AO RAN (Rtd) and Mr Ces White, members of the SEA Review.
The inclusion of 79 Squadron in the RTAF/USAF integrated air defence system for Thailand,

Approval of interception and the use of force against aircraft attacking Thai territory or allied forces within Thailand,

The requirement to maintain two Sabres fully armed with Sidewinder missiles and 30mm cannon on Alert Five during daylight hours, and

Operational control was vested in COMUSMACTHAI [who was also COMUSMACV].

The removal of the words ‘with weapons’ was seen as very significant by the SEA Review because it now allowed the squadron to attack an enemy aircraft before it released its weapons.

The SEA Review also noted that as a result of the ground threat against Ubon increasing, the RAAF deployed Airfield Defence Guards to increase base security through armed patrolling inside and outside the base perimeter to counter terrorist incursion and missile/mortar attack.

Justice Mohr concluded that for RAAF service at Ubon:

a. In the period May 1962 to June 1965, service continue to be classified as non-warlike operational service and that personnel be eligible for the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements;

b. In the period 25 June 1965 until the Squadron was withdrawn on 31 August 1968 danger was incurred and casualties were clearly forecast; and

c. Service in this later period should be classified as warlike operational service and that personnel be eligible for the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements.

Review Panel Comment on SEA Review Findings

The Review Panel agrees with the SEA Review’s conclusions and recommendations, as far as they go. But it is unfortunate that the SEA Review, by administrative oversight, did not address that part of the claim by the veterans regarding recognition of their service’s purpose by award of a Vietnam campaign medal. Had the Review done so, the evidence of role, tasks, activities and command and control for the period 1965 to 1968 would have led it to conclude that those changes were made in the context of Defence Committee, Chiefs of Staff Committee and Cabinet consideration of options for additional contribution to the Vietnam conflict. It would then have seen that RAAF Contingent Ubon was an active participant, rather than an interested bystander, in the Vietnam War air campaign. In the event, it concluded only that RAAF Ubon service during that period was warlike, but did not relate that warlike service to its purpose.

The Government accepted the recommendations of the SEA Review, and awarded the AASM to those who served in Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968. As observed above, no recommendation was made specifically on a campaign medal award, and thus none was awarded.
THE CLARKE REVIEW

The third comprehensive and independent review quoted by the Department as not having supported a campaign medal for Ubon service was specifically tasked by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs to examine claimed eligibility for entitlements by veterans under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA). The Clarke Review did not accept submissions on claims for the award of medals, and when these were received they were forwarded directly to the Department of Defence.

On the claims received that sought declaration of qualifying service for RAAF personnel who served in Ubon from 1962 to 1965, the Review concluded that such service was not warlike and recommended no change to the eligibility provisions of the VEA.

Review Panel Comment on Clarke Review

The Clarke Review’s conclusion and recommendation regarding this period of Ubon service is irrelevant to the task before this Review Panel, and does not support in any way the Departmental views on award of a Vietnam campaign medal for service in Ubon from 1965 to 1968.

REVIEW PANEL FINDING

The Review Panel finds that the previous independent reviews were not comprehensive on the question of recognition of Ubon service from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 by award of a Vietnam campaign medal. The CIDA Report was seriously flawed in critical areas, the SEA Review did not address the question because of an administrative oversight, and the Clarke Review was irrelevant to the question.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE POSITION

In its Speaking Notes used to set the scene at the Minister’s meeting with the URG in February 2004, the Department looks beyond the immediate issue of award of the VLSM, and uses the previous independent reviews to make much of its case against recognition of Ubon service as part of Australia’s national effort in the Vietnam War.

Honours and Awards Principles

Introducing the subject, the Department quotes the CIDA principle of awarding only one medal to recognize a single type of service, except in major conflicts including, in the contemporary sense, major warlike operations when a campaign medal would also be struck. It then argues that if a campaign medal was established each time an operation was declared, it would erode and make insignificant the AASM and ASM as general service medals for minor warlike and non-warlike operations. It would also devalue the

52 Department of Defence “Speaking Points re RAAF Personal (sic) Posted to Ubon and the Vietnam Logistic (and) Support Medal”. Undated but presented at a meeting in Feb 04 between the Minister and the URG.
meaning of campaign medals, which are established to recognize service in major warlike operations.

The Review Panel recognizes and agrees with the principle and the Department’s sentiments, and is of the view that the question of recognising Ubon service by award of a Vietnam War campaign medal depends on the demonstration of sufficient relevance of the service to the campaign.

The Department then declares that criteria for the award of medals are a matter of policy, not law, and each case is considered on its merits. Despite the CIDA principles, the Department states that it is always difficult to determine an entitlement for one operation on the basis of another as all are declared under separate military assessments. This results in different types, levels and nature of activities to be conducted and different rules of engagement.

**Contemporary Application of CIDA Principles - The Afghanistan War**

As the Department raises the issue of contemporary operations, it is of interest to test the recent deployment of force elements of the ADF to the conflict in Afghanistan against these difficulties. Two areas of operations were specified under OPERATION SLIPPER; a service award was struck to recognize ADF personnel who served in that operation, and an Afghanistan campaign award is about to be approved because the conflict was deemed to be major and warlike.\(^{53}\)

One area was Specified Area One with roles and tasks directly focused on attacking the Taliban Government and its forces and al-Qa’ida terrorists. Presumably the conditions of service there were made on the basis of the military threat assessment resulting in the type, level and nature of activities to be conducted and appropriate rules of engagement.

Specified Area Two was around the island group of Diego Garcia, a UK possession located over 2,150 nautical miles from Afghanistan in the Indian Ocean, hosting a major US base for Pacific Command (PACOM) air and naval operations and logistics support. An Australian Hornet fighter squadron was deployed there to provide air defence of the base and its forces, including USAF B-52s that were a major part of the air campaign against the Taliban and al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan.

It is not unreasonable to assume that a totally different military threat assessment would have been made for Diego Garcia and that a totally different type, level and nature of activity and rules of engagement determined. Nonetheless, with the AASM award to RAAF personnel of 75 Squadron who served there will go recognition of their warlike service in support of the conflict in Afghanistan by the award in the near future of the Afghanistan campaign medal.

**Parallels with Ubon**

When the circumstances of 75 Squadron’s deployment to Diego Garcia are examined, there are interesting parallels and differences with the RAAF Contingent at Ubon. Like 79 Squadron, 75 Squadron’s role was air defence; its task was to defend US bases and forces; and its aircraft and crews armed with air-to-air missiles and 20mm cannon maintained a high level of air defence alert. It was, unlike Ubon, totally remote and

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\(^{53}\) Determination by Minister for Veterans’ Affairs dated 7 December 2001.
inaccessible from any of the enemy forces under attack in Afghanistan, but it was vulnerable to possible but improbable air attack by terrorists if they were successful in hijacking a civilian international airliner and using it in a 9/11 style suicide attack. As at Ubon, the risk of an air attack may have been considered low, but the consequences of it happening were so great that Australia agreed to send 75 Squadron with its air defence capability to prevent it. Unlike Ubon, there was no manifest threat of insurgency by enemy surface forces so no Airfield Defence Guards were deployed, and the aircrew did not carry personal weapons. And in retrospect, like at Ubon, it is clear that no air attack occurred, but again like Ubon, the squadron’s high-alert aircraft were scrambled against unknown targets. Unlike Ubon shortly after the Contingent was withdrawn, no surface force attacked the base with rockets, mortars or ground attack.

In addressing this apparent overall similarity, the Department may argue that, unlike the Ubon deployment, the purpose of the Diego Garcia deployment was in every respect considered in the context of Australia’s involvement in the Afghanistan War campaign and was from the outset so declared, and conditions of service were determined before deployment.

That may be so; however, it is forty-two years since the Cabinet of the Australian Government decided to deploy the RAAF Contingent to Ubon under Plan 5 of the SEATO Council to meet a perceived threat from North Vietnam to member state Laos. On the same day, Cabinet decided to commit Australian land forces to the aid of South Vietnam in defeating the Viet Cong insurgency that was directly supported by North Vietnam. Even at this initial stage there was a link between the deployment of the RAAF Contingent to Ubon and the intensifying conflict in South East Asia that became the Vietnam War.

The Review Panel notes that over those forty two years the Department and the Government have obviously refined and improved their bureaucratic processes and decision making for the commitment of forces to conflict. One would be entitled to expect now a tidier commitment outcome in every respect before any force deployment.

**Nature of Service in Ubon**

In putting its view of the nature of service in Ubon, the Department notes that in 1962:

‘as part of SEATO, (Australia) deployed a RAAF Sabre fighter squadron [RAAF Contingent] to Ubon in Thailand to improve that country’s deficient air defences and to maintain its territorial integrity’.

However, it fails to ask the obvious and important question of why the deployment was necessary and what circumstances prevailed that led the Government to make the commitment. As noted previously, Cabinet made the decision to send the RAAF Contingent to Ubon under the aegis of SEATO Plan 5, the standing SEATO plan to counter communist Viet Minh insurgency in Laos, to bolster the air defence of Thailand and to activate the Ubon air base as a SEATO airfield for allied air operations. In 1963 that purpose no longer prevailed and the Contingent remained to demonstrate a joint bilateral commitment with the United States to confront the spread of communism in South East Asia.

The Department then states as fact that:
‘In 1965, the RAAF’s commitment to the air defence of Thailand was raised to meet the increased threat posed by the United States Air Forces escalating efforts in the Vietnam conflict’.

The Review Panel assumes that the Department is not suggesting that the USAF was the threat. It is clear that in 1965 in response to the increasingly successful insurgency by the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnam’s military and logistic support to the VC in the South, the US massively increased its air power in the region, particularly at Ubon, Udorn, Korat and Takhli in Thailand. Its purpose was to mount a sustained aerial bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As a consequence the US Government perceived an increased threat to allied forces in north east Thailand from the North Vietnamese Air Force and insurgency forces in the region. This threat drove the heightened security response by the Allies, including Australia at Ubon, with 79 Squadron placed on the highest sustainable air defence alert for the Squadron, and the Contingent’s newly deployed Airfield Defence Guards began armed patrolling inside and outside the air base’s perimeter.

Area Constraint and Task of 79 Squadron

In attempting to dismiss any connection between RAAF Ubon service and the Vietnam War, the Department then argues that:

‘although the USAF operated out of Ubon as part of its activities in Vietnam, the RAAF were constrained to operate only within Thai airspace for security of the Ubon air base.’

Again, in forming its argument against recognizing RAAF Ubon service as an integral part of the allied air campaign in the Vietnam War, the Department errs in fact in relation to the task of the Contingent.

The Contingent’s task was to provide armed aircraft on the highest sustainable state of air defence alert to defend north east Thailand and the allied forces within Thailand against possible air attack from North Vietnam. To argue that its task was to secure only the Ubon air base ‘to meet the increased threat posed by the United States Air Force’s escalating efforts in the Vietnam conflict’ misunderstands and undervalues the importance and scale of the service of RAAF Contingent personnel after June 1965.

The Rules of Engagement allowed the use of force:

1. if a squadron aircraft was attacked in the air, or the Contingent, its personnel or equipment, was attacked on the ground, and

2. if tasked by the air defence controller to intercept aircraft attacking Thai territory or forces within Thailand on the ground or in the air, and if successful in intercepting such an attacker to destroy it.

54 Department of State Telegram from Secretary of State Mr Dean Rusk. 27 March 1965.
This last point is important when considering the practical application of the absolute territorial constraint to 79 Squadron’s air defence operations. The Laotian border was only 30 nautical miles to the east of Ubon and 60 nautical miles to the north, with the potential air threat in that north east sector from North Vietnam just 160 nautical miles away. If an enemy air attack was detected in this sector and intercepted, then given the tight airspace and the nature of an air combat engagement between say a flight of attacking MiG-17s and a section of two defending Sabres, the Sabres may not have been able to always avoid violating the border without incurring potentially fatal risk.

Department of Defence Summary on Nature of Service

The Review Panel disagrees with the Department on several critical issues raised in its summary on the nature of service at Ubon from 1965 to 1968.

First, the Department asserts that:

‘Ubon was not part of the Area of Operations for Vietnam and the deployment of the RAAF Sabre Squadron was not part of the Vietnam War effort’.

But the evidence shows that service at Ubon was in the area of operations of the Vietnam War air campaign and was part of the Vietnam War effort.

This is clearly demonstrated by the threat of enemy air attack from North Vietnam against allied forces in north east Thailand, the threat of Communist insurgency terrorism against allied forces on the ground in the same region, and the air defence and ground defence tasks that the RAAF Contingent undertook. The air defence tasks were at the direction of the US/RAAF/Thai South East Asian Air Defence System under the authority of the Commander 7th Air Force in Saigon who commanded all USAF operations in the Vietnam War. The ground defence tasks, coordinated with the operations of the USAF Air Police, protected the air base from ground attack by North Vietnamese insurgents and Communist terrorists.

Second, the Department argues that Ubon service was:

‘rather … an ongoing part of the Defence (sic) of Thailand as part of Australia (sic) SEATO Commitments.’

Even a cursory reading of the Cabinet and Departmental documents relating to the Ubon deployment reveals that the original commitment under SEATO and its purpose became moribund as early as March 1963. The commitment of the Contingent transformed into a joint allied political commitment with the United States to help counter the threat from North Vietnam against Laos and South Vietnam. From then until the withdrawal of the Contingent in 1968, SEATO was used by the United States and Australia only as a convenient cloak to accommodate the sensitivities of the Thai Government of Thailand over the presence of allied air forces operating in Thailand engaged in the Vietnam War.

56 Cabinet Submission 609 and Decision 705 (FAD) and supporting Departmental Papers – DoD file 249/7/55 folios 210-228
Third, the Department states:

‘that it is true that the RAAF’s commitment to the air defence of Thailand was raised to meet the increased threat posed by the USAF escalating efforts in Vietnam’, but concludes that

‘nonetheless whilst the USAF was committed to the Vietnam conflict the RAAF Sabre Squadron was not.’

In fact, the RAAF Contingent and 79 Squadron were committed not only to the air defence of Thailand but also to the air defence of allied forces operating there in the Vietnam War. As pointed out above, the commitment was not raised to meet the threat posed by the USAF, but to meet the threat of enemy air attack by North Vietnam against Thailand or allied forces in Thailand in the air or on the ground.

Fourth, the Department notes:

‘an anecdotal suggestion of local support arrangements under which logistic personnel, posted to support RAAF Ubon aircraft, may have assisted in support of USAF aircraft.’

By direct written and oral statement to the Review Panel, the URG has asserted this not as anecdotal suggestion but as fact. The Department goes on to argue that such support does not affect the purpose, role and tasks for which the deployment was ordered.

In fact, part of the original Australian force commitment to Ubon under SEATO Plan 5 was for the Contingent’s Base Squadron to provide all airfield services including air traffic control, crash and fire services, and aircraft refueling to allied aircraft using the airfield. In 1965, when the USAF expanded its presence from a few hundred personnel and a control and reporting radar unit to over three thousand airmen and three F-4C Phantom strike fighter squadrons, they brought with them these airfield services as well. The USAF and RAAF elements providing those services merged to jointly provide support to all air operations at Ubon, though obviously the weight of the USAF element predominated.

Fifth, the Department asserts that any support provided to USAF aircraft at Ubon by RAAF personnel:

‘does not suggest a risk or role commensurate with those posted to support the Australian effort in [South] Vietnam.’

The question of risk to or role of servicemen at Ubon is irrelevant to the risk faced or the role performed by those service personnel supporting the Australian effort in South Vietnam. It is a matter of fact that all roles of all units involved in the Vietnam War varied widely, as did the degree of risk faced by units and individuals. The question is whether the RAAF Contingent’s declared warlike operational service was part of the Australian effort in the Vietnam War, not the degree to which it was similar to service by Australian servicemen located in or who visited South Vietnam or its littoral waters.
Sixth, the Department argues that:

‘activities that served to allow redeployment of other assets to the Vietnam effort do not in themselves mean those activities supported the Vietnam effort.’

The Review Panel agrees with the Department’s basic statement in isolation but questions it in the context of Ubon service and the Vietnam War. The RAAF and USAF air defence forces shared responsibility for the air defence of north east Thailand and the allied forces operating there in the Vietnam War. Common to both were the task, command and control, the enemy, the region, and the air defence rules of engagement. To the extent that Australia shouldered some of the air defence load albeit with a geographical constraint, it relieved the USAF from carrying it all. But it was the same duty.

Seventh, the Department then briefly addresses the JPC Report 110/1964 that addressed ‘Aid to South Vietnam’. It notes that:

‘Reference (by the URG) has been made to the JPC Report 110/1964 as “new evidence” proving service at Ubon was Vietnam War related and thus justifying the award of the VLSM’.

Focusing on that part of the JPC Report that canvasses options for additional support to South Vietnam, it noted: possible wider use of 79 Squadron in Laos and North Vietnam; the use of HMAS SYDNEY for the transport of forces and equipment; and the possible use of two RAN vessels from the FESR as escort for the SYDNEY.

The Department then concludes that in the context of the award of the VLSM the wider use of 79 Squadron was not adopted, while the HMAS SYDNEY and RAN escort options were. Consequently, the Department argues correctly that intent to employ 79 Squadron in this wider role does not justify campaign award entitlement.

Regrettably, in homing in on the VLSM claim of the URG and its supporting arguments, the Department lost the opportunity to look more deeply into the JPC Report. Had it done so it would have noted the JPC’s consideration of ‘Air Aspects’ and discovered that the first option considered was:

‘The possible use of the Sabres at Ubon … in the air defence role at a high state of alert. If the squadron was not required in the air defence role it could participate in operations including over the whole area of Laos and North Vietnam envisaged in the United States proposal’.

The Australian Government made the air defence contribution after consideration by the JPC, the Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The reference to options for additional support including ‘possible use of 79 Squadron in Laos and North Vietnam’ are irrelevant because they were never taken up.

The Department then quotes from the previous independent reviews in support of its case; however, the Review Panel has found previously that these inquiries, for a number of reasons, do not sufficiently support the Department’s case to give it credibility.

57 JPC Report 110/64 p11, para 23, DFAT file TS696/8/4 Pt6 Dec 64
Given its narrow focus on the URG claim, the Department then addresses the implications of awarding the VLSM for Ubon service 1965-68. If the Review Panel were to recommend that the VLSM should indeed be awarded for that service, then these specific implications would need to be addressed. However, the Review Panel’s interest is in coming to a principled conclusion and recommendation on the relevance of declared warlike service at Ubon to Australia’s national effort in the Vietnam War, and whether that relevance deserves recognition by award of a Vietnam campaign medal. Once that conclusion has been reached, the implications of awarding or not awarding will need to be addressed after the Minister decides on the matter.

Finally, and in conclusion, the Department defends its position of opposing the URG claim by asserting that:

‘This [Ubon] deployment has been the subject of three comprehensive reviews, none of which have [sic] recommended the VLSM to accompany any new or existing awards.’

**REVIEW PANEL FINDING**

The Review Panel finds that the Department of Defence’s conclusion, that warlike service at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 was not a direct operational contribution to the Australian effort in the Vietnam War, is unsustainable given the available evidence and the Review Panel’s analysis of the three previous reviews.

**THE APPROPRIATE CAMPAIGN MEDAL FOR WARLIKE SERVICE AT UBON 25 JUNE 1965 – 31 AUGUST 1968**

Given the Review Panel’s unanimous view that RAAF warlike service at Ubon during this period was part of the Vietnam air campaign, it then becomes necessary to determine which of the two campaign medals would be appropriate.

**URG Claim**

Careful note was taken of the URG’s assertion that the VLSM was the appropriate medal but also that a number of their members did not agree, believing that the Vietnam Medal was the only suitable award that reflected the nature of their warlike operational service. Indeed this was the preferred choice of Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully AO (Ret’d), the last Commanding Officer of 79 Squadron, as indicated in his statement to the Review Panel.

The URG’s claim for the VLSM has been viewed by the Review Panel as being related to a perception that the RAAF Contingent acted only in a non-combat role in support of USAF forces. In addition, a certain amount of pragmatism may also be influencing the URG claim; in their view it may be easier to justify than the VM.

The Review Panel believes that pragmatism should not be allowed to over-ride the principled requirement to satisfy the well-defined intention for each of the campaign medals. In addition, as demonstrated by the Review Panel, with aircraft tasked to provide armed air defence at a high state of alert, and armed ADGs providing security on the ground, the role of the Contingent assuredly involved combat operations.
The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal

The VLSM was conceived twenty-five years after the Vietnam Medal was struck following prolonged pressure to recognise service personnel who had given essential and direct logistic support to Australian Forces in Vietnam. Examples were the indispensable support of HMAS Sydney, RAAF Hercules transport aircraft and a variety of other forms of support. Without these logistic and other ancillary forms of support, Australian forces in South Vietnam could not have fulfilled their operational roles.

The Vietnam Medal

The Review Panel examined the Royal Warrant that establishes the Vietnam Medal. It opens:

‘ELIZABETH THE SECOND … of Australia,

To all to whom these Presents shall become,

GREETING:

Whereas We have given consideration to the need for recognition of the service of members of the Australian Armed Forces … in assisting the forces of the Republic of Vietnam to repel aggression.

And whereas We are desirous of recognizing this service to our Commonwealth of Australia;

We do by these presents for Us and Our Heirs and Successors institute and create a new medal.’

REVIEW PANEL FINDING

The Review Panel finds that the service by the RAAF Contingent at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 does not satisfy the purpose of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal, but does completely satisfy the purpose of the Vietnam Medal as declared by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Royal Warrant.

Unfortunately, the explanatory conditions for the award of the medal only recognize service in and the area of operations of the land campaign of the Vietnam War. This is unsurprising given that the only Australia force engaged in the air campaign of the Vietnam War, the RAAF Contingent Ubon, has never been publicly recognized as such. Thus the award conditions do not recognize the air campaign of the Vietnam War, and therefore do not recognize its area of operations that extended well beyond the borders of South Vietnam and its littoral waters into North Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, and that most of this air campaign was conducted from airfields in Thailand, including Ubon.

If the Minister accepts the findings and recommendation of the Review Panel, then a mechanism must be found to amend the explanatory conditions for the Vietnam Medal. When this is done, the starkly anomalous lack of recognition of the RAAF’s warlike service at Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, as a direct operational contribution to the Vietnam War, can be rectified by the award of the Vietnam Medal.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Review Panel finds that the initial reason for the deployment of the RAAF Contingent to Ubon was to assist Thailand defend itself should the crisis of Viet Minh insurgency in Laos worsen. The deployment was made under Australia’s obligations under SEATO and was a contribution under SEATO Standing Plan 5. (Page 6)

The Review Panel finds that the initial reason for deployment was no longer relevant by early 1963 with the passing of the Laotian crisis, and the RAAF Contingent remained at Ubon at the behest of the United States to jointly and bilaterally confront the spread of communism in South East Asia, although still under the cloak of SEATO. (Page 11)

The Review Panel finds that the purpose of the warlike service at RAAF Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 was the Australian contribution to the air campaign waged against North Vietnam. This contribution was an element of Australia’s national effort to assist the forces of the Republic of Vietnam to repel aggression. (Page 19)

The Review Panel finds that the previous independent reviews were not comprehensive on the question of recognition of Ubon service 1965 to 1968 by award of a Vietnam campaign medal. The CIDA Report was seriously flawed in critical areas, the SEA Review did not address the question because of an administrative oversight, and the Clarke Review was irrelevant to the question. (Page 26)

The Review Panel finds that the Department of Defence’s conclusion, that warlike service at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 was not a direct operational contribution to the Australian effort in the Vietnam War, is unsustainable given the available evidence and the Review Panel’s analysis of the three previous reviews. (Page 33)

The Review Panel finds that the service by the RAAF Contingent at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 does not satisfy the purpose of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal, but does completely satisfy the purpose of the Vietnam Medal as declared by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Royal Warrant. (Page 34)
RECOMMENDATION

The Review Panel recommends to the Minister that the Vietnam Medal be awarded to personnel who served on the posted strength of the RAAF Contingent Ubon, 79 Squadron and Base Squadron Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968, and that a mechanism be found to amend the explanatory conditions of the Vietnam Medal.

Air Marshal D.J.S. Riding AO DFC (Ret'd)
Chairman

Rear Admiral P.G.N. Kennedy AO RAN (Ret'd)
Member

Mr C.R.L. White
Member

9 July 2004

Annex A: Transcript of Presentations to the Review Panel
TRANSCRIPTS OF PRESENTATIONS MADE TO

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL ON UBON CAMPAIGN RECOGNITION

BY

THE RAAF UBON REUNION RECOGNITION GROUP (URG)

ON

TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 2004

Enclosures:

- Opening Address by Air Marshal D J S Riding AO DFC (Ret’d)
- Opening Response by Mr Mal Barnes, President URG
- Statement by Air Vice Marshal Peter Scully, AO (Ret’d)
- Statement by GPCAPT John Jacobsen URG
I thank you gentlemen for coming in today. If I could just give you a quick resume of why we are here as a Review Panel. Minister Brough established this review panel and it’s an independent review panel and we are to consider the recognition for Air Force personnel stationed at Ubon during the Vietnam War.

There’s been a number of reviews most notably the 1999-2000 review of service entitlement anomalies in respect to South East Asian service in 1955 to 75. Since then your RAAF Ubon Group has provided additional evidence that supports your claim for further recognition as far as the award of the VLSM.

The Minister recently sought via a review by Ces White on my right to determine whether or not this new evidence had been considered by the SEA Review and if not, whether it would have impacted on the review’s findings. Mr White was unable to come to absolute conclusions on either of these issues, so the Minister has tasked this panel to establish whether the additional information presented by your group, provides sufficient evidence to amend the regulations governing the award of the VLSM to cover the Ubon service from the 25th of June to the 31st of August 1968. And we have been given nominally three weeks to do the job.

We spent four days last week reading into much of the official documentation that’s been gathered over time, mostly by Ces and also the directorate, to give us some feel for the background of the official documentation and how we’d address this issue of Ubon initial deployment and the subsequent evolution of consideration for our Australian presence at Ubon. We feel like we’re still getting there in the context of understanding based on official documentations because we’re still digging it up. No sooner do we pick up one bit of paper and read it than we find yet another question so we have to go chasing more documentation and that process is still in train. But we think that we’ve had some success and feel like we’ve got the background of the SEA Review. I’ve got the personal background of being in Ubon, but we’ve got from the official documentation which was where we tried to constrain our look at the subject and our developing ideas. on the subject. Now with you being present able to give us your perceptions and any evidence you have from your perspective that support your claim.

We are actively trying to avoid coming to early conclusions in this because we believe that what we need to be able to do is to take an independent impartial examination of this issue, and do it exhaustively, so that after we draw a line underneath it, whatever our recommendation is, that’s what we would hope the minister and everyone else will say: “OK the independent umpire, the independent panel has looked at it and that’s what they’ve concluded, so we conclude that”. I don’t know that maybe we’re dreaming and I guess from your point of view it’ll depend on the answer we come up with. As to whether you accept that or not, I just want to stress that what we are attempting is to be exhaustive in this and try and come to a conclusion on RAAF service at Ubon 65 to 68, necessarily taking account of why we went there in the first place, what we were doing when we first went there? What changed over time if anything in terms of Australian government consideration and the mission purpose, roles and tasks and activities of the contingent at Ubon and come to a conclusions on that.
Clearly, a fundamental change in the role and activities of the RAAF at Ubon occurred during 1965 and the new alert-status continued until the final withdrawal in August 1968. On the evidence now presented, including the request from President Johnson to Prime Minister Menzies in December 1964, the subsequent flurry of activity by the Joint Planning Committee, Chiefs of Staff Committee and Defence Committee and the confirmation by the Prime Minister that “We intend to continue to support you and you can be assured of our wish to do whatever lies in our physical capacity”. It seems to me that any reasonable person would conclude that the increased tempo and enhanced operational control arrangements of the RAAF Contingent was a direct result of the Australian Government’s wish to provide support for the United States in the escalation of activities in Vietnam and neighbouring states – support for the Vietnam war. I can see no other plausible explanation.

I was the last Officer Commanding RAAF Ubon and had close and routine contacts with the senior USAF commanders. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that the RAAF presence there was solely for the purpose of supporting the USAF Operations from that base in their prosecution of the wider Vietnam war, a war in which Australia was a full partner. That the USAF was genuinely concerned about the threat of hostile air attack was emphasised when I was summoned to an emergency intelligence briefing at which was revealed that there has been recent movements of enemy IL-28 aircraft closer to the North Vietnam border. The USAF had no aircraft at Ubon tasked for the air defence role and relied on the RAAF Sabres for that mission. There were, of course, USAF aircraft assigned for air defence at other bases in Thailand at the time, but local commanders made it very clear to me that our role was a vital one for them.

When I advised the senior USAF commander (Colonel Patillo, Commander 8th Tactical Fighter Wing) of the RAAF’s intention to withdraw, he expressed genuine concern and advised me that he would have to divert valuable strike forces to the air defence role. Additionally, he expressed specific concerns about the withdrawal of our ground defence personnel who, unlike Americans, were permitted, indeed encouraged, by the Thai authorities to conduct armed patrols outside the Base perimeter. The Base was attacked by insurgents after the RAAF’s departure.

There is no doubt that the USAF thought the RAAF personnel at Ubon were supporting their efforts in the war.

I would like to make some comment about equity. It has been noted by those who served at Ubon that the Government has made special arrangements to ensure those RAAF personnel who served at Diego Garcia during the Afghanistan campaign are afforded proper recognition for their contribution to the overall conflict. This is to some degree analogous with the situation at Ubon, although those who served might feel justified in thinking they were somewhat closer to the action than their latter-day colleagues. While agreeing with this latest Government decision, it does, nevertheless, serve only to exacerbate the grievance felt by those at Ubon for the lack of similar recognition given to them – in addition to the realisation that many other personnel have been given this recognition for what might be perceived as a lesser supporting activity. The Vietnam War has attained a special place in veterans’ psyche and indeed in the overall perception of most Australians. I can understand why many of those who served at Ubon – particularly those who served nowhere else – feel disappointed that their service has not yet received full recognition and I believe their grievance has considerable justification.
The stated object of the Recognition Group’s endeavours is for the award of the Vietnam Logistics and Support Medal (VLSM) for the period of Jan 1965 to Aug 1968. During our discussions, questions were asked why the VLSM and not the Vietnam Medal. It seems to me that the lesser objective is being sought because of purely pragmatic reasons – having been told that it is just too hard to proceed otherwise. I can understand why some members from Ubon might not agree with this thrust. While not wishing to make too much of this aspect I would simply observe that if the Sabres has been deployed as an air defence element to an airbase in Vietnam, they would have been performing and identical role to the one they performed in Ubon. There were no enemy attacks on bases in or out of country and so actual operations would have been very similar. The only difference to the qualification for the award of the Vietnam Medal was a line drawn on a map – not an actual contribution performed by the personnel involved.

I would like to remind members if the Review Committee that there are no real financial implications for Government in a favourable decision as entitlements under the Veterans’ Affairs Act are already in place. Indeed there appears to be a strange anomaly in that the AASM has been awarded to personnel who have not as yet been entitled to a campaign medal.

Finally, I note that during a Parliamentary debate on this matter there appears to have been unanimous support for appropriate recognition form both Opposition and Government Members. That the bureaucratic processes have prolonged the issue for over 10 years seems remarkable. Nevertheless, I am aware of some strongly-held personal views and perhaps too much weight has been given to these thus far. I can only hope that the present exhaustive objective analysis might well inform a decision which could correct this long-standing anomaly.
Mr Barnes

Yes I’ll be doing most of the speaking I guess…I wish you well with your endeavors in archives to find things. I’ve been doing it for 20-odd years and I know. But basically what you’ve just said steals my first point. We were not sure of the terms of reference. The only evidence we had was correspondence from the minister that I have seen which asked you people to purely review the service from 65 to 68 for further recognition via the way of the VLSM.

The correspondence I’ve had from the Minister, he has stated that he is willing to consider any new information, particularly any information that supports a claim that the RAAF Ubon aircraft were tasked to support the Australian National effort in Vietnam, or that Personnel were required by government policy to directly support the Vietnam effort.

Now he made that clear at our meeting in Brisbane. We went to the meeting in Brisbane with this new evidence and we feel that the evidence we had does come under those guidelines that either the aircraft were tasked to support the effort or that personnel definitely fell into government policy of that era to support the war effort.

The government consistently mentions the fact that the Australian system of Honours and Awards must be maintained and also made that point clear in the Brisbane meeting. We agree with that. We also agree that by not rectifying our service anomaly the government is not maintaining the integrity of those awards and honours.

The Minister has no doubt given the department time to brief you on their views. We note that he hasn’t asked Defence as such to get involved in this meeting as they were in the Brisbane one. He’s left it purely to you as the independent panel to take it further. We at the outset will state that we’ve been fighting over years a lot of personal opinion of people in the department. This point was raised at the South East Asian review. In fact I think it was Maxwell who was from Veteran Affairs stated that on two occasions to Judge Mohr that he had personal opinions on Ubon service and his personal opinions did over ride his thinking. Now you three obviously have personal opinions. Doug yourself you were in Ubon and know the story. Rear Admiral Kennedy… Navy chap, I don’t know what your thoughts are and Ces I don’t know all that well. But personal opinions, everybody has a personal opinion about what they did in their service and what it was all about. Personal opinions I guess in this stage can’t be allowed to cloud the facts. And as you say, if you’re looking at that evidence fairly exclusively personal opinions do get overridden.

Now we claimed the VSLM is our lawful and appropriate campaign medal because of a number of reasons. There are many Ex-Ubon people including some very senior people who consider that the Vietnam medal should have been granted. I personally – here I go getting back to personal opinions – but I personally disagree with that way of thinking because we weren’t in country. We didn’t provide any direct combat role as such, but we most assuredly provided a direct support of the war effort. And if you read the Royal warrant for the support medal and also the government’s “It’s an Honour” web site, it says that the VSLM was created in 92 to recognize service of ADF personnel who served in support roles during the Vietnam war. We provided recognition to ADF personnel who played a vital role in supporting the Vietnam campaign in difficult or potential dangerous situations but who did not qualify for the Vietnam Medal. Now that in one way says it all.

It is a medal for supporting the war effort who didn’t qualify for the Vietnam Medal for various reasons; they weren’t in country or whatever.
The Royal warrant is slightly ambiguous in its wording. It states that it’s an Australian medal for recognizing members of the Australian Armed Forces who rendered service in support of Australian armed forces operations in Vietnam. Now that little sentence has thrown a lot of people for and against us by saying “Operations in Vietnam”. It doesn’t particularly say that your operations of support had to be in Vietnam. The regulations to the medal come out further and have an area of operation etc. The Royal warrant says: It is for service in support of Australian armed forces operations in the war effort. Both the CIDA Committee and the 2000 South East Asian review came to similar findings on Ubon. The 94 CIDA committee conceded that the Ubon air base was directly involved in the tactical air war in Vietnam. It noted suggestions from the RSL and from other people that because of the nature of the support we provided in a strange engagement, the Vietnam Medal should be issued. The reason it wasn’t considered was the CIDA committee purely stated that 25 years had lapsed, the area of operations had been established. There wasn’t reasoning to go back and redress the situation. The South East Asian review also agreed that the involvement of our service especially after 65 was because of the escalation of the Vietnam War effort.

The South East Asian review as you realize classified our service as war like and stated that appropriate medals be granted. Unfortunately we feel that they emitted to spell out the exact medal issue like they did to FESR recommendations. When you look at the report FESR recommendations were very simple that said A, B, C, D. Ubon was appropriate medals and this is where the department has had second looks at their recommendations and not issued the appropriate medals. ADF service of that era from round about Korea and onwards, 90% of those service operations have two medals of some description, be it an ASM or a AASM with a campaign medal of some description being a general service medal, being the Korean medal, being the INTERFET medal right up to today. And it was in fact, it was a government consideration when they introduced the AASM 45-75 that to obtain the AASM’s 45-75 you had to have a campaign medal from the Korean War, Malayan emergency, Vietnam War for the support medal. And then they later changed that ruling back to and they’ve used the AASM 45-75 now in a similar way as they’re using the current AASM, which is an Australian medal for war like service. But the 45-75 one when they first brought it into the scene was to be recognition for people that had firstly one of those campaign medals. Ubon service is back to front, we didn’t have a campaign medal, we got the AASM in 45 first and now we’re seeking the campaign medal. But it was a pre requisite that you had to have one of those campaign medals before you got the AASM 45-75.

Now both of those reviews in that time span came to their conclusions about our service being linked to the Vietnam War without our latest evidence being presented. I only dug that out myself very late in 2002 I think it was. So the 94 CIDA committee certainly didn’t have it and from my understanding the South East Asian review also didn’t have it to consider. So that document that forms the basis of our new evidence is a fairly crucial piece of paper and we don’t feel that the piece of paper and the summary of it can be sort of degraded in any way. Because on the same page of that report which is the joint planning report 1964 the support roles of the HMAS Sydney and the Ubon sailors were considered by the people of the day, the Defence personnel of the day to be Vietnam war operations. So by any standard of equity we feel that the same campaign medal should be issued.

We made suggestions of how this could be done in Brisbane. The Minister was reluctant to change the area of operations to make a retrospective area for Ubon as part of the Vietnam War. We disagree with that slightly because areas of operations always have and always will be changed at later dates. And in fact the Vietnam area of operations was changed. The initial area of operations only included the land and was later changed to
encompass the Navy with their 100-mile market time area off shore, which was the American understanding of the enemy’s capability. Now that’s an important thing, the American understanding of what the enemy had out to sea 100 nautical miles. If you look at Thailand as we know, the Americans used the whole country for their war effort. And anybody in the United States service has recognition for the Vietnam War when they service in Thailand.

The next suggestion we made in the Brisbane meeting was if they were reluctant to change the area of operations was simply a clause of VSLM regulations, which seemed to be the way the Minister and his people were thinking. We actually suggested one and you probably have a copy of that in the correspondence you have, where we purely said that service at Royal Thai Air Force base Ubon in the certain dates for a period of 21 days be recognized by this medal. And we said that specifically because there are other areas in Thailand after the South East Asian review we were of the understanding that our clasp to our AASM would be “Ubon” and in actually correspondence it says “Ubon”. But later I think some Army people got on the scene and the class was changed to “Thailand” because we had the Engineering in Mukdahan and other places, which virtually rode on our back through that review and picked up their AASM 45-75, because when you look at the role of the engineers building runways in Mukdahan convinced what the RAAF was doing, you have to question what the AASM is for.

So we came back to that suggestion of just amending one clause in the VLSM regulations. Now if you do that, the regulations themselves are quite specific. They don’t allow for any flow on. The minister told me that he wasn’t concerned with flow on. He said that’s my problem, I’ll worry about it. We tried to mention flow on because we were trying to make sure that we didn’t create too many problems for them and open a can of worms. The flow on effect, the regulations are quite specific what you had to be doing. If you put the clause in to include Ubon area in it, it then ties it up quite neatly and your Army people at Mukdahan can’t really jump on the bandwagon again and claim it, because if the clause was read. I think we said. Serving members of RAAF in support of American operations from Ubon, which tied it in fairly neatly. Now we suggested a period of 21 days service instead of the one day or the 30 day purely because most the rotations of your technical people from Butterworth and junior pilots in those days did a 14 day turn around, so most of them did multiple tours or some of them did 28 days, so the period of around about 21 days encompasses everybody. It excluded the C130 pilots that were doing the mail runs and supply runs and also that then excludes anybody that come into Ubon for various staff visits or what have you and it also puts a time limit to that. Instead of having the VSLM for everybody else as one day it also puts a time span that you had to be supporting the war effort for a number of days. We suggested to keep a lot of Vietnam Veterans happy and people that actually served in Vietnam that you could put a class to the medal. We don’t mind whether the medal came in its own right or it came with a class. And if a class is to be considered, we go back to the thinking of clasp “Ubon” rather than the clasp “Thailand” to completely define the area that we’re talking about for this medal, because it’s one that’s now going to be considered to be giving to ADF personnel outside the actual war area.

Getting back to the area of operations. Defence stated even at the South East Asian review that every operation must have an area of operations. Well Ubon has none for a start. The FESR people also until the South East Asia review weren’t recognized as being part of the Malaysian emergency, so after their recognition in the South East Asian review, Defence then put the area of operation which is the 12 nautical mile limit which upset quite a lot of Navy people, but that was something. So area of operations can and do change. Our particular thoughts on that, it doesn’t matter if it’s an area of operations change or just a clause in the regulation. Our main thrust in this whole case that we’ve been putting together is for recognition of what RAAF personnel actually did at Ubon.
during the war. We know we weren’t a major part of the war effort, we realize that. No one’s going to stand up and claim they’re a Vietnam War hero or anything else, because they know they weren’t. But we were most definitely a supporting role of war effort and we feel that to correct not only RAAF history, but 79 Squadron history, the correct campaign medal and recognition must be awarded to those people that served there.

I’ve got a private members motion that you may or may not be aware of, which actually the reason for this panel for being formed in the first place, was we had the Minister stand up in the house and actually get it rolling and Minister Brough then stated that he would undertake to have a review of us and get us going, but I’ll just quote one thing from it from Lorry Ferguson MP. He stated in it that only die hard self interested partisans now deny that the real task of the RAAF Ubon deployment was to provide air and ground defence for US aircraft and personnel engaged in missions that originated from Thai soil. The truth is that Ubon was all about the Vietnam War and their medals should acknowledge this fact. And it goes on and I will table it for you later. “And all members of parliament from both sides of the house that spoke on that minute motion all spoke in favour of it”. No one opposed it, they all spoke in favour of it so we do have support of quite a number of parliamentarians.

I’d like to generally revert back to the paper that we had attached to the submission we put in at Brisbane. One called: Employment of Air Defence of High State Alert. I presume you’ve all seen that? If not, I can certainly leave more copies. But it basically goes through – and this reiterating a lot of what I said in Brisbane, but it’s worth stating.

Mr White
Is it in your original submission?

Mr Barnes
It’s in the original submission to Brisbane yeah.

AIRMSHL Riding
Let’s disregard what’s been said before.

Mr Barnes
Well there’s a couple of points I’d like to just raise on it. In that paper we stated and Defence has stated to us on quite a number of occasions and it is on quite a lot of official records that the RAAF Ubon was to be employed in the air defence role and that was to be its only official role. Now that is quoted quite often. The directives to the OC in June 65 state that it to be included in the integrated air defence system and this is to be your only official role. Now this was after the Joint Planning Committee’s report came out. You’ll find in your records that the RAAF was asked to join the air defence system in Thailand a number of times in the earlier years. The government always said no, because either there was no perceived military threat at the time or for various other reasons, but we never officially in the earlier years joined an air defence system in Thailand as such. And in fact if anything untoward happened the Commanding Officer had to get back to Canberra to get approval to do anything. It’s not until after the Joint Planning Report again that we joined a complete system. And that of course caused the situation to change in 64-65. United States concepts in Thailand in that period was simply that Thailand was virtually a safe haven for their operations. Thailand’s principal role in that era was to provide safe bases for their operations into Vietnam. And naturally a pre requisite of that idea was to have a complete air defence system they can rely on.

I’ve got here also the USAF Rules of Engagement, which clearly state for their operations in Thailand. And if you read through their Rules of Engagement which is typical of the
United States of course. Everything is to protect the United States installations, equipment and everything in its forces firstly, and then other friendly aircraft and personnel. And they were sent to Canberra for consideration by the Joint Planning Committee also.

The Joint Planning Committee in considering all that they would have obviously had the American Rules of Engagement. They would have obviously also had the agreement for what is called the Tactical Air Defence Tactical Control System which clearly also states out that the idea was to provide security and safety for friendly traffic operating within Thailand. And that Thailand’s role was to provide protection for USAF and friendly forces for operations in the North Vietnam and Laos. Against what? Once again it is again it was against retaliatory attack from the enemy. Now the enemy’s a large word when you look at Thailand, because as you’re all aware you had your Communist insurgency. You had various CT elements within Thailand itself. You had people coming from Laos and you also had the main threat of your air retaliatory attack from either Communist China or North Vietnam.

And all of this is behind a scene of America’s idea for the escalation of the war. And President Johnson’s letter to Australia to ask for further help from Australia. Now when the Joint Planning Committee looked at the roles that they could do, they looked at a main combat role according to what America wanted was for some troops on the ground. So they offered the use of the Battalion as a direct combat role. They had enough naval power in their own right to look after the seaboard. So once again the Joint Planning Committee stated, well we could use the city for troop transports getting things up there like they did earlier in Malaya. It was a role a reason to get the troops up there. Sydney, plus escorts to protect the Sydney and within that little realm you also have the small Australian Army Sydney ship’s Squadron as they were called which was about 70 personnel which did administrative work going up and down to assist the Army that was onboard. So the Army’s role was purely seen as a combat role. The Navy’s role was seen as a supporting role and they state in that Joint Planning Committee the USAF or the United States Army Air Force and Naval aircraft were sufficient to do anything they needed within the area. So they looked at what role 79 Squadron sailors could play. They came up with two roles in actual fact. They came up with the Air Defence role of the High State of alert. Or if not required in that role, which was basically their principal thinking, they could then be used in ground attack over Laos and South Vietnam.

We know the reason behind why the secondary role wasn’t taken, because A: We were to remain in Thailand’s east base for political reasons only. The loss of Saber aircraft which were on the edge of being phased out and personnel, plus the fact that aircraft could only physically be seen as coming from Ubon and therefore that created a political nightmare. So the best reasoning which they were asked to join before was the Air Defence system. The air defence system was important because America was about to embark on the escalation which was the phase two escalation which included the stepped up bombing of North Vietnam. They themselves were fairly short of aircraft and personnel, so the idea was to utilize everybody they could in whatever role they could. Now the Government of Australia looked at the air defence role and basically said, well that’s all we can get them to do within Thailand. There is a later report at about a 66 Chief of Staff notes when I’m looking at using them in Laos where they said. A demonstration of that way would not, because we couldn’t publicly say that the Sabres came from Thailand, that demonstration would not publicly be seen as a support for the United States efforts in Vietnam, and that was rejected along those lines as long as the attrition rate also.

Now if you look at that actual report, it was the Joint Planning Committee in consultation with the Joint Intelligence Committee then endorsed by the Defence Committee and the Chief of Staff’s Committee. He had four top echelons of Australian military thinking looking at it how they could make contributions to the American request for help in the
Vietnam war. So when looking and when considering it they obviously looked at all those operations as a Vietnam War scenario. Had they just decided just to purely join the air defence system in Thailand with 79 Squadron, you’d think that the hierarchy would purely just direct the OC of Ubon to undertake that role. It wouldn’t be considered on that actual application. By considering that application they were looking at it as a war effort.

So the government of the day when considering that was looking at Vietnam war contributions. The Joint Planning and Joint Intelligence agenda was to look at a request for additional Australian contributions in Vietnam. The Defence Committee reports put the Ubon section under additional Australian Assistance aid to Vietnam. The Chief of Staff report even goes one further and puts Ubon’s sort of role under Possible Australian Contribution to Phase Two Operations.

Now Phase two operations for the Vietnam War operations, they were nothing to do with air defence of Thailand per se. The air defence system is the only official system we joined and signed the agreement to uphold was the authority for the RAAF to join in the Joint Planning Committee contribution was the authority for the RAAF to join that air defence system. It was also the authority for the RAAF to be close under USAF Command and Control and I guess it was also the authority that changed our rules of engagement. So in my way of thinking our official role which was the only one we were allowed to be doing was a Vietnam War operation.

In 1966 the USAF enhanced that Air Defence agreement for Thailand with the 427-66 the integrated system for all of South East Asia which the RAAF was put down as augmentation forces. There are reports on official records that the system never got up and was never running because Thailand had problems with communications. But if you go past those initial reports, you’ll find that CETO itself endorsed 427-66 as the only viable Air Defence Agreement for the whole area. It used specific regulations and rules, the RAAF was using it, and in fact the OC of Ubon came down to Bangkok when those meetings were being held to give his opinion on what was happening in the theatre at that time. And that 427-66 USAF agreement combined the Air Defence systems of Thailand and Vietnam into one single Air Defence System. Because the allied military installations that were growing in Thailand and presented a much more attractive target and their defence against an air attack was vital to all allied operations.

In the final directions to the OC in June 65, it stated that number 79 Squadron can be included in the USAF Royal Thai Air Force integrated Air Defence System. Further signals on firewalls so outlined the concept of operations as outlined by the Deputy Commander 2nd Air Division USAF and procedures for use and control of RAAF aircraft and air defence operations were approved.

The Rules Of Engagement like USAF ones purely they outlined what they classed as a hostile act by definition, and it purely stated that our aircraft could fire at virtually anything in the air that was looking to attack or including interceptors, or do all sorts of other things. So anything that was coming into Thai airspace was in the realms of our Rules of Engagement. So we weren’t defending Thai palaces as such, but we were defending the USAF operations and installations that were in Ubon.

Now militarily if you take the wording of the Australian Defence Journal 158-2003, they quote a campaign as a phase of war involving a series of operations related in time and space, and aim to towards achieving a single specific objective for resolving a war. Now our air defence operations were certainly within those definitions of our operation. Now all that joining of Air Defence systems and everything else officially took place after the release of Joint Planning Committee report. Up until that day we weren’t signed into anything official. So it is with the request from America for more help in the area. The Australian government thinking, the consultation of the Joint Planning and joint Intelligence Committees and the endorsement by Defence and Chief of Staff that was the
catalyst for the RAAF to remain in Ubon for the next three years. Otherwise the RAAF would have come out.

So we’ve proven over the years that Ubon wasn’t a SETO obligation towards Thailand, that’s something that’s been thrown at us quite a lot. That was purely a political ruse as a reason. So it is documented that people have said. You can use the SETO mechanism to get your point across. And they certainly did. We’ve also proven over the years that our service wasn’t the Air Defence of Thailand per se, because there was no military threat to Thailand. That’s also in about a 1963 document when they were considering to withdraw the Squadron in 63 they made that point. The original reason for going to Ubon had been met. There was no military threat to Thailand so they were going to withdraw. We all know now that they remained there purely as a request by the United States to stay there to show the flag a little bit longer and then the escalation took over as we know.

So I’ve found in all my research all the files that I searched out related purely to Thailand. I could never officially tie the service in Ubon with service with Vietnam until I found that Foreign Affairs file that has 110 and the endorsements of the two committees on it. And the significance of that report and endorsements cannot be devalued in any way. It’s a fairly strong piece of paper that ties us in with the Sydney, with the Escorts with the war effort.

Until we joined that system, when President Johnson’s request in 64 with the escalation of war, no one had within that Vietnam thinking that the actual agreement for the air defence system is actually stated as a USAF Royal Thai Air Force joint use and integrated Air Defence operation agreement for the Thailand Air Defence the tactical air control system, which was purely an air defence system to provide protection for the USAF and friendly forces operating in and from Thailand and that’s the system that we joined. So our official system we joined was an air defence system for USAF and friendly forces operating from Thailand. And where were they operating to? The war effort. The all scrambles and lets as you’re all aware were issued by the United States. Command and Control was given to the United States like most of the RAAF operations in Vietnam. The 7th Air Force in fact controlled what the Sabres did. The question that’s never been answered and I say never. I’ve asked it on numerous occasions and has never been answered. No one can give us an answer to it is: Why did the Australian Government have to send the Deputy Chief of Air Force to Vietnam to request our release from alert at the end? And more so, why did the 7th Air Force have to officially release us from alert operations in Ubon if we weren’t part of their system? Now they officially sent a signal back from 7th Air Force Head quarters, attention to Vietnam releasing 79 Squadron from alert operations in 68. Now why should they if we weren’t part of the whole system?

This all happened and the continuation of RAAF service after June 65 was completely tied together with the escalation effort of the Vietnam war phase two operations. They were building up for Rolling Fund and all the ones now. 80% of the bombing of North Vietnam originated from in Thailand. So United States had a safe haven where they were operating from. They didn’t have their bases on the front line in Vietnam, they had it from a safe haven in Thailand which had an air defence system which the RAAF was part of to keep things safe. So the only reason we stayed in Ubon after 65 was purely because we joined the air defence system after consideration by the government as a contribution to help America. Now Mr. Brough states in the beginning that his thinking is that government policy of the day to directly support the Vietnam War effort. Well government policy of the day of that era was to completely support the United States in whatever they were doing. In fact, it’s Prime Minister Menzies’s stated: “The need to support and more importantly been seen to supporting the US in Vietnam remained unquestioned”. There’s thousands of quotes about Australia’s support of the United States effort in the war effort. And that’s what we were doing. And that as I reiterate
again goes back to what Minister. Brough said and that is government policy to support the war effort by supporting the United States.

We’ve had it pointed out to us that the VSLM regulations do not recognize support of an ally as such. The regulations states support of Australian forces in Vietnam. Well if supporting the United States Air Force who was prosecuting a war isn’t supporting your own troops there’s something wrong. Because, had the United States not had a decent air defence system in Thailand, had they had to put some of their own air power into their own system, they would have had less planes to achieve their objectives and some of the equipment coming down the Ho Chee Min Trail might have got through – and who knows. The truck with so many bullets in it may have had a bullet that had an Australian bloke’s name on it. So in one way it does do that.

Now we’re all aware of the actual build up and escalation of what happened in Vietnam after 65. There was a request from the United States for lots of things. And to be personal Doug Riding’s tour of Vietnam was also a request of the United States because they asked for more FAC pilots to help them. Another request. So everything that we did in that era relates to helping the United States in that war effort. That was government policy, so that is the way. That is why we remained in Thailand, simple as that. Now the committee report recommended three options, one from each service as I said. A combat role for the Army, which was more or less a direct request from the United States, The use of the Sydney and escorts in the supporting role which was an Australian idea to get the equipment there. And the use of the RAAF in the air defence role supporting America. Now under any equity system at all you can’t recognize two of those roles without recognizing the third role. There is a slight element in that because...It’s a simple fact that you don’t put all your eggs all in the one basket. You do keep your equipment out of the front line on lots of occasions, but you definitely support from areas outside. Regulations can and always will be able to be changed. They’re not insurmountable problems. Because those regulations were written a long time to without the true role of RAAF Ubon being stated it naturally didn’t have anything about Thailand in it. It’s the same ruling as the FESR problem. Until FESR was recognized it didn’t have an area of operations and they didn’t have all their recognition. Once FESR got recognized the Naval service and FESR got recognized they then got their area of operations then got their recognition. Ubon is similar. Until now Ubon by lots of people and still is not thought of as being a Vietnam War operation. If we can get that point across that it is a Vietnam war operation under the concept of thinking in those days, it then either has to have an area of operations relating to that war, because it was the only war that was going on. Or you have to change your regulations to encompass it. So there’s two options as I see it. It’s change the area of operation, or change the regulations, but you cannot.

I’ll repeat it. You cannot withhold recognition to one party of those three options from the Vietnam War and still have an equity system that’s available. You had three services put forward by the Australian government as contributions to the war effort. You can’t say A. and B can be recognized and C. can’t because it was not within the area of operations. Revert back to the CIDA principals which was set up by the CIDA committee to basically use as guidelines. The Joint Planning committee now amplifies the comparable service being CIDA principal number Three of the HMAS Sydney escorts and the 70 Ship’s Army staff. Now the 70 ship’s Army staff – as Rear Admiral Kennedy probably knows – were onboard the Sydney purely to handle the embarkation and disembarkation of troops. The loading and unloading of vehicles, guns, Army aircraft, containers and other auxiliary equipment and administration of Army activities onboard. So on their way up the Army staff did their utmost to ensure that the soldiers were as comfortable as possible and on the return journey the sympathetic attitude ensured that the soldiers were virtually on leave on their ten day journey home. Now it says at the end of
this little paragraph. Their contribution to the overall effect of the HMAS Sydney cannot be overrated.

It’s also quoted by Doctor Alan Stevens in “Going Solo”, which is basically a history of the RAAF. He says the same thing about RAAF Ubon that their role cannot be overstated. But he goes one step further. He also states in that book that we were defacto participants of the Vietnam War. So getting back to principal Three. You’ve got the Sydney, the escorts and the ship’s Army staff may have all been awarded the VLSM for their duty. And Ubon is in the very same instrument. The role of Ubon is in the very same instrument as the roles of the Sydney escorts and the Ship’s Army staff. Now I personally know of people who were onboard the Sydney and with respect to the Rear Admiral, they’re not necessarily Navy people, but they are people that are claiming PDS. Their stressor. They quote their stressor as being the fact that the Sydney was on alert whilst it was in Port. The Sydney was in port for a maximum of two may be three days maximum and the hearing of the war that was gong on shore. Now those people are claiming PDS for that. Now I don’t know how you people think about it. I know how I think about it, it’s a load of rubbish.

But Ubon people were on alert virtually all the time they were in Ubon. They weren’t on alert for two days whilst they were in port. So your comparable service to the Sydney, the Ship’s Army personnel and the escort personnel is now amplified by that Joint Planning Committee report. But the government’s gone one step further now with their latest recognition effort. They’ve set another precedent of comparable service with the F18s at Diago Garcia. Now the F18s at Diego Garcia were in principal doing the same role as Ubon. They were providing air defence of the United States Air Force within the island and within a certain radius. Ubon even went one further in so far as Ubon service was not only the air defence of the area, it was also the ground defence of the area and personnel also provided various forms of logistic support. The government when they created Diego Garcia created once again two areas of operation. They created what they classed as the main area or operational area being an area around Afghanistan co-ordinates dot dot dot dot dot dot, and the…I don’t think they used the word support, but the other operating area being a radius around Diego Garcia where the F18s flew. So they created an area of operation around the country where the war effort was going. They created another area of operations 4000 kilometers away from it. Ubon as you know was about 150, 160 clicks from where the war was happening. So as of the commitment doesn’t matter either. Your Diego Garcia you’re looking at about 200 RAAF personnel. And this portion of Ubon that we’re talking about the 65 to 68 we’re talking about 1000 to 1200 people. So the F18s at Diego Garcia are now being recognised by the AASM and a Campaign Medal being the Afghanistan Medal. So once again there’s another area of ADF service that has two medals as recognition.

Well our real quest really is purely to record the correct side of RAAF history and to obtain correct recognition for our actual role of direct support that we undertook during the war. There is an existing campaign medal for support already there being the VSLM for that war effort. So everybody else in that era like I said has two medals of some description bar basically Ubon. The first part of Ubon now with the understanding with what happened with the South East Asian review, the split of the two periods. Our members feel, a lot of the members object to it, but that’s a few die hards. But most of them understand now when they see the history of Ubon that entirely appropriate and we’d agree.

Once again, in the early period there was no official signed air defence agreement of any format until after the Joint Planning Committee came out and the government agreed to join the air defence system and sign the agreement for it, thus changing the Rules Of Engagement and everything else, Command and control and the lot. So the second period of Ubon is as we say. Its war like service the South East Asia committee recognized that.
The men have their qualifying service for Veterans Affairs, all they are purely after is a campaign medal to give them recognition for what they were doing in Thailand. They’re all like misfits. They go to an Anzac Day service, they have nowhere to march. They don’t fit in with Vietnam War veterans. They don’t fit in with Korea, they don’t fit in with Malaysian Emergency. They don’t fit into any of those skirmishes that were happening at that time. The only war that was going on at the time they were there was the Vietnam War. So their contribution is a contribution to the Vietnam War and they purely seek that. It’s the blokes that went to Ubon that may not have not done much more else in their RAAF service they only went to Ubon, they weren’t old enough to be involved in the Korean War. Some of them as we know, a lot of the ADGs and pilots and other people subsequently went on to serve in Vietnam, but there is an element of Ubon people that purely only served in Ubon and nowhere else. And they have an AASM hanging on their chest with nothing to say what it was for. The clasp says “Thailand”. There was nothing happening in Thailand in theory. So they’re purely after recognition of what they have done. And as I say. We can here. You people of this committee have the chance to correct not only 79 Squadron history, but RAAF history.

The other day in the honours list Sir James Killen got his recognition as Minister for Defence and also the fact that after his period he was instrumental in joining the service together. The Australian Armed Forces together as a coherent force. Because as you’re all aware there’s a lot of animosity between services especially in their early years and we feel that there’s probably still a lot of this animosity that is denying us this campaign medal. So let’s correct RAAF history and get something right.

The main important thing, and I’ll remind you of Justice Mohr’s thinking in the South East Asia review where he’s talking about direct support and the fact that there was a lot of misconceptions on what is referred to as direct support and support of operations. And he states on page 12 of the South East Asia review that it’s unfair to restrict the award to only those who have been in direct contact with the enemy. Any successes are attributed to the overall effort. The award of a campaign clasp is recognition that a man has taken part in operations or in a campaign and not necessarily that he’s been under fire. Now that’s exactly what we’re saying. Ubon is part of the Vietnam War operations. We took part in it, albeit a small part, but still part of the operations. And even when Officers and men are considered to be in places that take no direct part in the actual operations they have given direct support to the front line and have been in the area of the campaign. And he believed that they should have been the guiding principles for use in direct support of operations. That was one of his quotes and we thoroughly agree with that that we were taking part and giving support to the front line.

We also, we shouldn’t be the ones that have to do this, but we also have to remind the Australian government of its 1996 election promises, where they stated in the coalition’s election promise they stated to widen the eligibility for the VLSM, it would be considered. Now if what we’ve just given today is in the way to widen the eligibility for the VLSM I don’t know what is. As I said before there are ways to rectify our position and to honour our service and the problem is not insurmountable.

And finally that’s all I’d all like to say. We state that you people in this committee have the opportunity to help us correctly record RAAF and 79 Squadron history and to make sure that justice and equity is maintained for all ADF service. I have various other things that we can go through, but that is the thrust of our main part our thrust is that the equity principals must be maintained. Australian system of Honours and Awards must be maintained. We cannot single out one component and say in hindsight. Because things didn’t happen you’re not part of the effort. We’ve proven we’re part of the effort. We now have official proof that we’re part of the effort in the Joint Planning report that definitely ties Ubon service to the Vietnam War. Until we found that document we didn’t really have an official piece of paper to tie us into it.
GPCAPT Jacobsen

What I was going to discuss quickly and I support strongly everything that Mal and Air Vice-Marshall Scully have said. What I’d like to bring to the board’s attention is that I suggest you look very closely to that concept of operations for 68 Squadron at Ubon. Because come mid 1965 the records show quite clearly that there was a distinct change in the concept of operations for 79 Squadron. I was there immediately prior to the first alert going. That means I was there for about a month before the first Sabres were put on alert. And I’d be quite frank with you, as an operational Pilot I was continually asking myself and I think others were asking themselves. What are we doing here? What was the operational purpose? Because remember the RAAF were initially put into Ubon as part of the SEATO response to what was perceived to be the expanding communist surge in South East Asia. Now in the years that followed the Brits pulled out, the Philipinos I think never ever put anything in the first place and of course the Kiwis pulled out and it was only the Australian force at Ubon that remained of that initial involvement under a SEATO banner. But the important step was, 45 Tactical Fighter Squadron arrived at Ubon, as far as we were concerned from the operational side the whole situation changed completely. And that’s why I say, looking at the concept of operations very closely you’ll see in one of the pieces of correspondence that Mal provided that in the lead up to the change of role in 79 Squadron US political emphasis was given to any such increase in Australia’s presence to be seen as a public demonstration of Australia’s participation. And that’s a quote from one of the cables. Now a Joint Planning Committee report number 11A of 64 first raised the possibility of a change to the concept of operations of 79 Squadron namely employed in the air defence role at a high state of alert. Now out of that developed what I see as the Ubon of the latter years, because the Australian Prime Minister’s communicated to President Johnson on the 18th of December 64 ruled out certain military options which had been proposed by the US, but the point was 79 squadron had the capability of being deployed in the defence role of a half state of alert and all that was required was additional ground crew to support that level of operation. In January 65 there was a message issued regarding the air defence of Thailand which showed clearly that the Australian Air Force was in fact contributing to an integrated air defence structure across South East Asia. There were delays in its implementation. It was supposed to have theoretically gone in initially on the…Sorry. I think it was supposed to go in early February of 1965, but because the Americans found then that one, the Thais weren’t on side and had to be negotiated with and brought on side. And Secondly they’d have to set up a logistic infrastructure on the ground to support this integrated air defence system that never came actually into operation until the 25th of June 1965. We have I’ve found in certain material that Mal has provided.

AIRMSHL Riding

Was that on Op plan 427-66 is that?

AVM Scully

That’s coming later. The change to the concept of operations was formally approved in messages from defence on the 7th of June 65 and also expanded further on the 7th of July 65. That resulted of course in the issue
Mr White

Have we got copies of that?

AVM Scully

Should have. I’ll see if I can find it for you. But that then further resulted down stream that the issue of the new directive to OC Ubon dated September 65 which is that document there. And I’m sure, you can have that copy if you want it.

AIRMSHL Riding

What is significant about that directive?

AVM Scully

That directive changed the wording of the directive that originally applied to the RAAF presence at Ubon. It placed a far more operational context on the presence and the modus operandi of the flying unit and the support of the base Squadron and such like, so it did change the concept of operations to what originally was the case prior to June 65. Now the changes may have been only minor as far as the sceptical eye is concerned, but I can assure you that from an operational point of view they were quite notable and were certainly taken on board at the time.

RADM Kennedy

The biggest … … for you as a pilot there was rather squeeze the trigger instead of asking Canberra before you did it.

GPCAPT Jacobsen

Well it had significant amplifications for an interceptor pilot because it meant that as long as we had some indication of aircraft being hostile or performing some hostile act, then we had the right to interrogate and if necessary destroy which was a marked change to the way we operated prior to mid 65. In July 65 a report by the Defence Committee under the title of Australian Military Assistance to South Vietnam once again stressed. Solidarity of international support for resistance to aggression in Vietnam. And you can see this political flavour right through the whole chain of events at Ubon. Even though we at the operational end were not privy to it, there was a tremendous amount of political activity going on. No type of public acknowledgment was given to RAAF Ubon’s changed concept of operations in mid 65. And the reason for that is, in one of the documents was. It is unlikely that Thailand would agree and would not assist in demonstrating Australian support for the war in Vietnam. There seem to be this, I don’t know, this mentality about. Hey, we’ve got to do something to show what clearly the Australian support for the US war in Vietnam. And because of the change of our operational sort of situation at Ubon was so discretely different, they said. This doesn’t say any bloody thing. This is not going to mean much to our otherwise sort of presentation on the point of supporting US presence, therefore we’ll forget all about it, we won’t take it any further. On the 8th of August 1966 79 Squadron was listed as an augmentation force in Thailand and the concept of operations was further expanded in the Defence minute of August 1966 as part of the 7th Air Force Op Plan 427-66 which Mal has referred to. So you can see that once again the concept of operations was further expanded by the Department of Defence in August 66. The Ground Defence situation at Ubon became more threatening as the USAF presence continued to increase. And what I’d like to just tow onboard. And it’s regurgitating other information I know, but we can’t just sort of sit back and say. Well we’ve told you this before. We’ve got to present something. Now I was a pilot there during the period late 65-66 and I spent six months there all told. Now, this particular
document which I’d like to present to the panel is a document presented by two pilots. Once again presented to the South East Asian review, but they both outline what the operational situation was in the 1967-68 period. So I would like to present that because it does provide I think a very factual presentation of the situation at Ubon as it existed towards the latter period of the RAAF presence at Ubon.

But anyway the important thing that came of the 8th of August 66 communique was that 79 Squadron was acknowledged as an augmentation force in Thailand and it was part of the overall edifice of South East Asia and why did the air defence system of South East Asia exist? Because of the Vietnam War. It’s as simple as that. You can’t back away from that fact. The Ground Defence situation did deteriorate slowly. We’ve given you information to indicate that and I hope that sort of gives you the lead into other documents. The other point I wanted to make was, in the time I was there, all flying sortes conducted by 79 fighter Squadron were either in support of USAF’s operations, or operational training for the USAF as part of the Vietnam war effort and were part of 79 Squadron’s flying training program which prepared pilots for operational flying commitments that could arise in Thailand because of the USAF’s escalating war effort mounted from bases in Thailand as part of the Vietnam war. No presence during the time that I was there from 25th of June 65 onwards the operational flavour at Ubon changed completely and we became much more responsive to both the USAF needs and our own and therefore the raison d’etre for our being there changed more or less overnight, because it meant that we were there to support the USAF effort in the Vietnam war. We were no longer there just as a SEATO presence looking after the air defence of Thailand. Now the other point I’ve got a couple of points I’d like to bring to your attention is I keep getting back to. Why is this anomaly about Ubon service? And Air Marshall Scully has referred to it and so has Mal. Mr. McNamarra United States diplomat indicated that they would be looking again cheaply for a public demonstration of our participation. This is way back in early 1965 and openly stated in one of the pieces of correspondence that McNamarra had pointedly said to the Australian government looking again chiefly for a public demonstration of our participation. This is way back in early 1965 and openly stated in one of the pieces of correspondence that McNamarra had pointedly said to the Australian government looking again chiefly for a public demonstration of our participation. So you can see how…

AIRMSHL Riding
That’s Secretary of Defence McNamarra is it?

GPCAPT Jacobsen
The United States Defence Secretary of Defence yeah. In a particular Top Secret document I read which is in the package that Mal presented to the Minister, I quote: “In these circumstances a contribution of this kind would not assist in demonstrating Australia’s support for the US in South Vietnam”. Now that was a comment made against the presence of the RAAF at Ubon and what they could contribute to the war in Vietnam. But I go on to say: This did not mean that the RAAF presence at Ubon post 65 was not in support of the Vietnam War overall. As the CAS of that time acknowledged. And I’ll give you a minute just to show you what I mean, This particular minute was signed by Air Marshall Hancock and I’ve highlighted the section in it and it says. As the then CAS acknowledged: If it was not for the political pressure of the US the RAAF would have withdrawn from Ubon in 1965 to provide more space for operational US forces. It was a known fact that when the RAAF Canberra bombers went to Vietnam they had trouble finding space for where to put the jets and that’s why it took some time to sort out what the Canberra contribution was going to be.

One of the major considerations from Vietnam was that their bases were chockablock, absolutely chockablock. And as a result they had to look elsewhere and therefore that’s why the Thai bases came into being is because they wanted to pour in additional resources as part of phase two and as a result there was just no more room in Vietnam so they had to
go elsewhere. Somewhere relatively close where the operational capability could be exploited. The emphasis on this public relations factor, and when I say public relations factor, I mean, this point about the fact that in these circumstances a contribution of this kind would not assist in demonstrating Australia’s support for the US in Vietnam. Well that sort of mentality or that emphasis led I believe to administrative oversight on the part of Department of Defence then not recognising service at RAAF Ubon correctly. And that is of course employed in the air defence role at a high state of alert from the 25th of June 1965 until departure in August 68. But it was, and I still firmly believe and we’re all firmly very passionate about it I think that the response on the RAAF presence at Ubon from June 65 onwards was in fact part of the national effort in support of the war in Vietnam. I’m talking about the Australian national effort now in support of the war in Vietnam. Therefore the continued RAAF presence at Ubon from mid 65 onwards was not perceived as an operational development. Sorry I’ll start again. Therefore the continued RAAF presence at Ubon from mid 65 onwards was not perceived to be an operational development in the Vietnam War within the minds of the people in the bureaucracy. For some reason there was this mental glitch about the presence. And yet JPC report number 11A-64 indicates quite clearly otherwise. Yet to the RAAF personnel serving at Ubon there had been a distinct change to the tasking of the Squadron from 25th of June 65 and that revised concept of operations and tasking continued in force until they withdrew in 68. If there had been an airborne attack by Chikong or North Vietnam based aircraft on Thai or USAF military targets in Eastern Thailand, my interpretation of the Rules Of Engagement that existed at the time would have enabled me as a RAAF Interceptor pilot to disregard the national border limit when it came to intercepting and destroying enemy aircraft involved in such an attack. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on which way you look at it the possibility of such an event occurring, an attack of this nature did not occur. However 79 Squadron pilots were required to respond in accordance with the Rules Of Engagement and this meant that attacking hostile aircraft could have been pursued and destroyed outside Thai airspace if possibly identified at hostile. Those are the sort of key issues that I think need to be...
Mr Barnes
Not beyond Thailand’s borders. You’ve also got to visualise that from Ubon to the Thai border was two secs in a Sabre yeah.

GPCAPT Jacobsen
So from a practical perspective, the Rules of Engagement weren’t quite clear Doug. I haven’t got them handy, I’m sure I’ve got them, I’ll dig them up, but (unintelligible overspeech) In certain operational situations you as the interceptor pilot had to make the decision. Because one, you may have not necessarily been in contact with the TCI controller at the time because we were at low level and therefore you had to take charge of that situation.

AIRMSHL Riding
And cloud was conveniently covering the Mekong River. I wasn’t too sure where I was, but…

Mr Barnes
As Jim Flemming said, I think when he realised he was over the water and he was on the wrong side of the country he’d gone across Vietnam.

AVM Scully
Cloud wouldn’t have told you across the border at any rate if you were that close I don’t think.

GPCAPT Jacobsen
The point I’m trying to make is that I believe there was a certain mentality in the bureaucracy in Canberra, which was not reflective of the actual operational situation on the ground at Ubon. And certain people thought certain things and that was reflects and as a result certain steps or actions were made under the direction of senior officers in the bureaucracy as part of the response to the Vietnam war effort, but because of the subtle changes that occurred there was no sort official recognition given to the fact that we from mid 65 onwards were contributing to a major war in South East Asia. That’s all I’ve got to say.