

Vietnam Veterans Day 2010

Thank you for the honour of addressing you today on behalf of the Veterans of Vietnam and the 9 SQN Association on this, the 44th anniversary of Australia's pivotal battle against communist forces in VN, the Battle of Long Tan.

My involvement, one way or another with VN, spanned 4 years from 1966 to 1969.

My first involvement with VN was as crew of No 36 SQN Hercules transport aircraft flying strategic supply and casualty evacuation, known as casevac missions between OZ and VN.

It was during casevac missions that I met with GPCAPT Jeannie Harrison and her wonderful team of girls who gave of there all to provide succour to our wounded being flown on that long journey back home from the battlefields of VN to OZ.

In all, the RAAF Hercules fleet brought 3146 casevac missions back home, safely and in comparatively supreme comfort. To you, and the girls, nice one Jeannie. Well done.

As a Hercules pilot I took part in Operation Wintergrip which flew 5 Batt., and the by now famous 6 Batt. Royal Australian Regiment with their D Coy, the heroes of Long Tan, home from Vung Tau, replacing them with 2 and 7 Battalions RAR at 1ATF, Nui Dat. In all over 2400 troops were carried safely and on schedule by No 36 SQN between April and June, 1967.

My next involvement with VN was not to be so fleeting.

I remember our departure from Sydney late in July 1968. We were cheered off. Lots of "Good on ya boys!", and "Give the bastards what for!!".

I felt quite proud, and justifiably so. This is what all that hard work and training was for. I was off to do my bit for OZ and the free world against an encroaching red scourge. Scared – no way. The invincibility of youth was at hand.

I arrived at Ton San Nhut International Airport, Saigon on posting to No9 SQN RAAF based at Vung Tau, to fly that iconic symbol of the VN struggle, the venerable Bell Iroquois, or Huey chopper.

On deplaning we clambered aboard a US Army bus which took us to processing. I distinctly remember the chicken wire covering the open windows of that bus. What a nice thought, to keep the snatch thieves in the crowded streets of Saigon from ripping our watches off. No, I was solemnly informed; it was to keep hand grenades out of the bus. Suddenly it dawned, “Crikey, I’m in bloody a war zone!!”

I flew over 3800 sorties in 860 hours airborne during my year in Vietnam. I came home in mid-July 1969;..... shaken, but not stirred.

My final sorties in VN were memorable because I was given the honour to lead the largest helicopter-borne combat assault staged by the RAAF in VN when I led a formation of 12 Huey slicks carrying troops and protected by our own Bushranger Huey gunships into an insecure pad to kick-off yet another big OZ army ‘search and destroy’ operation, the kind of which made our Phuoc Tuy province the envy of VN, and eventually quite safe compared to the majority of that war-torn country.

I and my returning comrades, Navy, Army and Air Force, arrived back in Sydney on one of the weekly QANTAS military charter flights to be met by an un-Australian and uncharacteristically hostile welcoming party offering jeers, insults and derision; to be spat upon and

generally reviled. In just one short year, our parent society had apparently turned radically against us.

Why?

How had this happened and been allowed to occur? It baffled and confused us.

Apart from the stress of returning from a very dangerous period in our lives, which we had done well to leave behind with our skins intact, and looking back on a job we thought well done, we now had the additional stress of a home team cheer squad that had turned against us – we needed answers.

In a vacuum of leadership that then prevailed, those desperately needed answers were not forthcoming.

As time has slid by, the answers have slid out.

It all began in the US industrial heartland at Dearborn, in the state of Michigan. Dearborn is the home of large manufacturing, and the University of Michigan. It was at the University of Michigan that the first of many “TEACH INS” was held, on 24 March 1965.

“TEACH IN” was the newly coined euphemism for a gathering of like minded leftist radicals spreading dissent and preaching anti-war sentiments, organised by student unions and directly funded from Moscow by the Russian Secret Service; the infamous KGB.

“TEACH INS” spread to Australia, similarly organised and funded by the KGB out of Moscow. Our major institutions of learning, our universities, were actively targeted for infiltration and subversion in the altruistic pursuit of peace, funded by the KGB.

The subversion and dissent so caused from the proceedings of these “TEACH INS” was spreading rapidly, and nibbling away at the very

fabric of the US and OZ societies. This was thought by the communist block to be working in their favour toward their aim of world hegemony and domination.

The subversion became so widespread that the US administration drew a line in the sand against escalating insurrection and civil disobedience on 4 May 1970 at Kent State University, Ohio. The Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of violently demonstrating students, killing four and injuring nine. Who gave the order to fire will probably never become clear, but it was a poignant signal to all that the state would only tolerate so much.

It begs the question as to how close our administration here on OZ came to drawing a similar line in the sand?

Not to be appreciated by us at the time, the Eastern Bloc's short-sighted concentration on aiding and arming the DRV, and on fomenting civil unrest in the US and OZ, was unwittingly working in our favour. By staying in VN and keeping the communists engaged in watching the free world forces wallowing humiliated in the mire that VN had become, the West distracted the Eastern Bloc from its imperialistic designs on the rest of the world heretofore aimed at influencing the numerous weak post-colonial emerging nations to join the socialist fold.

By staying and being engaged in VN, we were able to get the Russians and Chinese to take their eye off the world ball and distract them from their nefarious expansionist game-plan.

With the Eastern Bloc so distracted, the west was able to shore up shaky regimes in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Latin, Middle and South America. Despite their anti-imperialist rhetoric

against the West, this denied the eastern bloc their own designs on socialist imperialism and the gaining of world economic critical mass.

The trap unwittingly set, but now recognised by the West, should have become obvious to the Eastern Bloc when the culmination of a US CIA operation begun way back in 1960 resulted in the fall of the socialist ALLENDE regime in Chile in October 1973 putting paid to the grand socialist design in South America.

By then, we had bombed DRV into submission so that they had earlier sued for peace negotiations in Jan 1973. The accords guaranteeing peace in VN were signed soon after; the communist forces in VN were spent.

Peace had been achieved in South East Asia. SVN was still sovereign; we had won.

But still, the communists did not get it. They rearmed the DRV, which invaded SVN in December 1974. Saigon fell the following April.

But did we care? Well, we didn't care enough to rush to the defence of SVN as we had done, so eagerly in 1964.

Why?

Times had changed for the better strategically for the west because our diversion while engaged in VN had allowed us to make it so.

Because our VN diversion had denied the Eastern Bloc gaining the economic critical mass it needed to continue fighting the Cold War on an escalating basis, the west was able to outspend the Eastern Bloc during the massive arms race orchestrated by President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s which lead directly to the financial collapse

of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1989. The commies had collapsed.

That awful and ominous symbol of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall, then came crashing down in 1990.

The West had won a bitter and protracted 44 year long Cold War that had its roots in the Yalta Conference of February 1945. It started in earnest with the advent of the Soviet Unions' entry to the nuclear age with their detonation of the atomic bomb in August 1949.

We had won the defining war of the 20th century, the Cold War.

And all due to our dirty little war in VN.

Was it worth it?

Our combat deaths tragically amounted to 501 in VN, 62 of whom were sons of this fair state. In confronting and defeating the scourge of domination by expansionist Eastern Bloc socialism, it compares most favourably with the 62,000 we lost during WW1 and the 41,000 lost during WW2 in confronting other threats to our freedom.

At last, maybe, just maybe, we were beginning to fight clever; if having to fight is ever clever.

But the nasty legacy of our victory against socialist world domination brought about by our VN experience is the dislocation it brought to the fabric of our own OZ society. US society was similarly affected.

This was brought home to me abruptly not long after I attended the 40th anniversary parade commemorating Vietnam Veteran's Day and the Battle of Long Tan in Mandurah, 18th Aug 2006.

There I met up again with Fred Ferry, a crewman gunner with whom I had flown both during training in OZ before shipping to VN and as crew in combat on our Hueys in VN. I hadn't seen Fred since leaving VN in 1969; of course we had a great old jaw wag.

He was farming a property down at Nyabing, east of Katanning; the kids were off his hands, all was sweet. Fred hadn't lost any of that solid stoicism he displayed in VN; still the same good old unflappable Fred, but now with some streaks of grey in the hair and lots more wrinkles.

I met his lovely wife Janet as we caught up with old times at the Mandurah RSL after the parade.

Early the following December, I was to again be touched by Fred.

It was a hot Sunday evening and Janet had gone out onto the back verandah to see if Fred wanted a cuppa. "Yeah Darls, thanks.", he replied as he was sitting there attending to a piece of electrical flex.

Janet thought nothing of it. She went inside and fixed a cup of tea and went back outside to give it to Fred; but he was no longer there. Perhaps he had gone down to the shed.

She went down to the shed and there hanging from an adjacent tree was Fred; he had hanged himself with the flex.

Fred, this day of commemoration and victory is for you too old son. And for all of the others who could not resile themselves to an ungracious, sneering and ungrateful society on your, and their, return from an active duty so dutifully, ably and heroically performed.

LEST WE FORGET.

