
Review
of
service recognition for
RAAF Ubon
(1965-68)

March 2008



Australian Government

A report commissioned by the Australian Government

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LETTER OF TRANSMISSION

Review of Service Recognition for RAAF Ubon (1965-68)

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

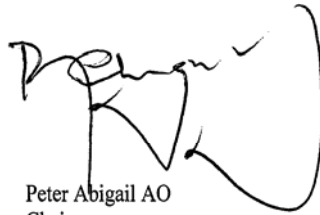
Dear Prime Minister

I am pleased to present the report of the independent panel appointed to review service recognition for RAAF personnel posted to Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon, Thailand, between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968.

The review was conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference and the Panel has arrived unanimously at the findings and recommendations contained in the Report. This Report is later than the date originally fixed, and the Panel is grateful for permission to extend the reporting date so that the issues could be thoroughly addressed.

The Panel wishes to record its high regard and respect for all who served at RAAF Ubon, and would like to emphasise that nothing in this Report is meant to detract from their achievements.

Yours sincerely



Peter Abigail AO
Chairman

31 March 2008

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference for the Review of Recognition for the Battle of Long Tan were issued by the then Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, on 12 October 2007. On 17 October 2007 the Prime Minister added a reference to review service recognition of RAAF personnel posted to Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon between 1965 and 1968. The complete Terms of Reference set out below were confirmed by the Cabinet Secretary and Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon John Faulkner, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, on 3 February 2008.

REVIEW OF RECOGNITION FOR THE BATTLE OF LONG TAN AND RAAF UBON

The government has decided to appoint an independent panel to review the treatment of award recommendations stemming from the Battle of Long Tan, and service medal recognition for service with RAAF Ubon.

With regard to the Battle of Long Tan, the review is to examine the documentary evidence available, consider the nature and context of the battle and the process that followed concerning individual and collective recognition, and seek to arrive at a fair and sustainable response to claims for further recognition.

The panel will interview key individuals and will consider material provided to it that is relevant under the terms of reference.

The review will have regard to the Imperial gallantry awards recommended at the time as well as claims for the award of the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry Unit Citation.

With regard to RAAF Ubon, the review will consider the merits of the claim for further service medal recognition by way of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal. The panel will examine the documentary evidence available and consider the nature and context of service at RAAF Ubon to arrive at a fair and sustainable outcome.

Any recommendations put to the government must maintain the integrity of the Australian honours system.

The review is to report to the Prime Minister by 28 February 2008.

On 26 February 2008 Senator Faulkner agreed, on the Prime Minister's behalf, to extend the reporting date to 31 March 2008.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL

Chairman

Major General Peter Abigail AO (Retd)
Executive Director, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Members

Major General Steve Gower AO AO (Mil) (Retd)
Director, Australian War Memorial

Brigadier Gerry Warner AM LVO (Retd)
CEO, RAAF Association (WA Division) Inc

The Independent Review Panel was supported by staff of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Review Secretary

Mr Peter Rush
Assistant Secretary
Awards and Culture Branch
Government Division

Secretariat Officer

Mr Glenn Gore Phillips
Awards and Culture Branch
Government Division

FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

The Panel found that the purpose of service at RAAF Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 was always to contribute to the air defence of Thailand. The Australian Government consistently demarcated the RAAF elements at Ubon from its commitment of forces to the Vietnam War. The activities of RAAF Ubon evolved over the period of the deployment, including being integrated with air defence arrangements in the wider South East Asia region, and the level of alert and security measures intensified as a result of the escalation of conflict in the region. While the activities of RAAF Ubon served also to provide *de facto* support to the United States Air Force (USAF) air campaign in Vietnam, the stated role, tasks and rules of engagement were limited to the air defence of Thailand, and it could not be concluded that RAAF Ubon was ever deployed as part of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War. In this respect the Panel disagrees with the Riding Review finding that the deployment of RAAF Ubon to Thailand from 1965 to 1968 was the Australian contribution to the air campaign waged against North Vietnam.

The award of the Australian Active Service Medal with clasp "Thailand" therefore appropriately affords recognition for active service to those RAAF personnel who served at Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon, between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968, and there should be no entitlement to a campaign medal reflecting participation in the Vietnam War.

Recommendation

No action be taken to offer further recognition, including by way of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal, for the service of RAAF personnel stationed at Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Brief history*

Service recognition for RAAF personnel posted to Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon (RAAF Ubon) has been closely examined by several past reviews of recognition (see 1.2 below). The “RAAF Ubon Reunion/Recognition Group” (RURG), led by Mr Mal Barnes, has made submissions to these reviews in writing and in person on several occasions. These representations have resulted in service medal recognition, and veterans’ benefits are available for this service. The basis of the current claim is that service at RAAF Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 was part of Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, and that service at RAAF Ubon should therefore qualify for one of the Vietnam War campaign medals – either the Vietnam Medal (VM) or the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal (VLSM). Service at the RAAF base at Ubon, in Thailand, is not captured by the conditions for awarding either the VM or the VLSM, so the implementation of a recommendation that either medal should be awarded would involve amendment of the relevant conditions.

1.2 *Treatment of RAAF Ubon claims by previous reviews*

The 1994 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence Related Awards (CIDA) addressed the issue of service recognition for RAAF personnel posted to Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon from 1962 to 1968. 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 [Australian Service Medal]”. CIDA also noted that “the area of operations to which the Vietnam Medal relates has been defined and established for a period of 25 years ... [and] does not agree to extending the Vietnam Medal to those who served in Thailand”. CIDA recommended that service at RAAF Ubon be recognised through the Australian Service Medal 1945-75 (ASM45-75) with clasp ‘Ubon’, with a qualifying period of 30 days. The government accepted that recommendation, but included service with 2 Field Troop, Royal Australian Engineers, at Ban Kok Talat in 1965 and 1966 in the establishment of a single “Thailand” clasp to the ASM45-75.

Separately, the Department of Defence determined in 1997 that service at RAAF Ubon between May 1962 and August 1968 was eligible for compensation under the *Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986* for any injury or disease incurred during that period of service.

The Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75, chaired by Major General the Hon R F Mohr RFD ED RL (the Mohr Review), which reported in February 2000, also examined the issue of service at RAAF Ubon. The RURG had continued to claim that its members’ service at Ubon was warlike and that they should be awarded the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements. The Mohr Review noted a marked change in operational circumstances from 1965 onwards, coinciding with an escalation of aerial bombing missions on North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh trail by US aircraft also based at Ubon. The RAAF role at Ubon changed, to include the maintenance of two fully armed aircraft ready to be launched within five minutes notice, and the deployment of Australian Airfield Defence Guard personnel to increase security at the base. Though Australian aircraft were still constrained to operate within Thai airspace, the Mohr Review concluded that service in the period June 1965 to August 1968 was “warlike” in nature, and recommended that personnel serving in that period be eligible for the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements, including the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 (AASM45-75). The government agreed with these recommendations, and established the “Thailand” clasp to

the AASM45-75 to recognise this service, and some other deployments in Thailand which had similarly been overlooked in the past. The Report of the Mohr Review did not address the question of whether a “campaign” medal (the VM or VLSM) should be awarded for service at RAAF Ubon.

In 2004 an independent review panel, chaired by Air Marshal D Riding AO DFC (Retd) (the Riding Review), was appointed to establish whether additional information presented by the RURG provided sufficient evidence for amending the regulations governing the award of the VLSM to cover Ubon service from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968. The Riding Review was informed that the Mohr Review had inadvertently overlooked the claim for a “campaign” medal, and was asked to consider this point in light of newly discovered archival information about the circumstances of the RAAF Ubon deployment and its role in wider South-East Asian conflict. The Riding Review found that RAAF Ubon, in the period under consideration, was an element of Australia’s national effort to assist the forces of the Republic of Vietnam to repel aggression; that such service did not satisfy the purpose of the VLSM; but that it did satisfy the purpose of the VM (if not the conditions for awarding it). The Riding Review recommended that a mechanism be found to amend the conditions for awarding the VM to allow it to be awarded to personnel who served at RAAF Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968.

The government rejected the recommendations of the Riding Review, pointing out that RAAF Ubon personnel were neither established in, nor operating within the boundaries of the relevant area of operations, and that appropriate recognition had already been given through the AASM45-75 “Thailand”, the Returned from Active Service Badge and Veterans’ status under the *Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986*.

1.3 Establishment of the Independent Review Panel

As a result of continuing representations from the ex-Service community, on 12 October 2007 the then Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, announced the appointment of an independent panel to review the treatment of award recommendations stemming from the Battle of Long Tan. The Terms of Reference (TOR) were determined by the Prime Minister on the same day. The Panel was required to report to the Prime Minister by 28 February 2008. On 17 October 2007 the Prime Minister also referred the matter of service recognition for RAAF Ubon to the Panel.

The Federal Election on 24 November 2007 resulted in a change of government and a new Prime Minister. The Panel had already met twice before the election, and was mindful that the incoming government had committed to establishing an independent defence honours and awards tribunal, with the issue of recognition for personnel stationed at RAAF Ubon a priority for consideration. Confirmation was sought and received that the new government endorsed the TOR, including the reference on RAAF Ubon.

1.4 Methodology

The TOR required the Panel to:

- consider the merits of the claim for further service medal recognition by way of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal;
- examine the documentary evidence available and consider the nature and context of service at RAAF Ubon to arrive at a fair and sustainable outcome; and

- ensure that any recommendations maintain the integrity of the Australian honours system.

1.5 Principles – parameters of the Review

In approaching this task the Panel examined the approaches of previous reviews, and formulated the following principles to guide its consideration.

Principle 1

This Panel will seek, in recognising the service of some, not to overlook or degrade the comparable service of others.

Principle 2

Any decisions by the Panel to recommend further recognition must be based on official records or other compelling evidence.

Principle 3

Normally only one medal within the Australian system of honours and awards should be given in recognition of a single period of service or action. A second Australian medal may be offered for significant warlike campaigns, or where Australia has played a major international role.

Principle 4

The distinction between service in a declared combat area and outside it should be preserved as a measure for the award of a campaign or related medal.

Principle 5

While the Panel has regard to previous decisions and interpretations on awards made by the Australian Government, military authorities, and previous reviews, it will not consider itself constrained by these in meeting its terms of reference. The Panel will take into account any new or additional information made available to it and will operate according to the normal standards of fairness.

Principle 6

The Panel will consider matters relating to honours and awards on their merits in accordance with the principles outlined above, and these considerations should not be influenced by the possible impact, real or perceived, on other potential claims for recognition.

1.6 Summary of claims

The RURG considered that the Riding Review's conclusions of fact and presentation of evidence were correct, and maintains that service at RAAF Ubon was "irrefutably combat operations as a part of Australia's Vietnam War effort". In its evidence to the Panel the RURG offered its view that the appropriate campaign medal for service at RAAF Ubon would be the VLSM. In summary, the claim is for a "campaign" medal in addition to the "service" medal already awarded for warlike service in the period 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, which would validate the involvement of RAAF Ubon personnel in the Vietnam War.

1.7 Nature of the Review

The Panel was mindful of the difficulty of re-examining an issue which has already been the subject of several successive reviews. Ultimately the issue would rest on a judgement of whether the deployment of RAAF Ubon was part of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War.

The Panel reviewed existing documents and reports, and interviewed key members of the RURG to allow them to put their case personally. A list of sources consulted, and key individuals interviewed, are set out in the Appendices.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet provided advice on the Australian honours system, and particularly the principles on which it operates, so that the Panel could better understand the environment in which successive awards decisions were made over the last decade, the background to previous reviews, and the wider impact that possible outcomes of this Review might have.

The Panel recognises the potential for this Review to create a precedent for awarding a campaign medal for service outside a long-established Area of Operations. However, the Panel believes that the application of its Principles will lead to recommendations that are both fair and sustainable, and should not place any pressure on the integrity of the honours system.

Finally, it is relevant to note that the Panel's review of these matters is restricted to assessing the merits of the claims and making recommendations to government. The authority to recommend and make awards remains with those empowered under the relevant award regulations to do so, and the Panel recognises that its recommendations are in no way binding on those decision-makers.

2. SERVICE AT RAAF UBON

The nature of service at RAAF Ubon has been well covered in previous reviews. The Riding Review provided an authoritative summary, and much of the following is derived from the report of that review.

2.1 First phase – 1962-1965

The RAAF contingent was sent to Thailand in June 1962 at the request of the Thai government under Australia's obligations to SEATO and in support of SEATO Plan 5, a plan to counter communist insurgency in Laos. The contingent consisted of the Command Element, No. 79 Squadron and Base Squadron Ubon. The role of No. 79 Squadron was air defence of Thailand and Base Squadron Ubon's role was to support the squadron and provide airfield support services for all SEATO air forces using the base. RAAF Ubon was under Australian national command and control.

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 US Military Assistance Command Thailand (COMUSMACTHAI) was appointed Coordinating Authority for all operational activities of all foreign forces in Thailand, including the RAAF contingent. Under this arrangement he could require consultation, but he did not command nor control RAAF assets.

The Rules of Engagement (ROE) for No. 79 Squadron 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 SEATO Plan 5. But it was decided to leave the contingent in place to contribute to an air defence deterrent against a resurgence of a Laotian threat and the spread of communism in South East Asia. The role of No. 79 Squadron remained the air defence of Thailand.

2.2 Second phase – 1965-68

In response to a perceived air threat from North Vietnam and Communist China in August 1964, the USAF and RTAF developed an integrated air defence system for Thailand with fighters on air defence alert and new ROE. This new Thai air defence system was part of the USAF Mainland South East Asia Air Defense Sector (MSEAADS) which had been established as part of the USAF Pacific Air Defense Network. The RAAF was invited to join and it was agreed that this would take effect from 25 June 1965. The RAAF/USAF and RTAF agreed new RAAF roles, tasks and ROE, broadening the original, to maintain an air defence alert and to allow use of force against aircraft attacking forces in Thailand, and before the attackers used their weapons.

This new air defence tasking was also implemented in the context of the US signalling its intention, in December 1964, 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 contemplated by the Department of Defence was the employment of No. 79 Squadron at Ubon in the air defence role at a high state of alert or, alternatively, in

ground attack over the whole area of Laos and North Vietnam.¹ Other options suggested by the Department of Defence included deploying an Australian infantry battalion near the North Vietnamese border or in Southern Laos, and using HMAS Sydney to deliver the battalion to Danang as its point of entry.

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 June 25 1965 No. 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.

The Directive to the Officer Commanding issued on 25 September 1965 gave effect to these decisions. The task of the RAAF contingent was the same as had applied previously and couched in terms of Australia's pursuance of SEATO obligations. Again, the operations of No.79 Squadron were confined to Thai airspace and its role remained air defence as "its only official role". Notably, the Directive required the OC to

"establish safeguards to ensure that RAAF aircraft and personnel based at Ubon do not violate the territory, territorial waters or airspace of countries bordering Thailand...[and that he] ...should inform COMUSMACTHAI of this restriction on your activities."²

On 26 July 1965 US President Johnson had requested additional Australian forces for the Vietnam War. Previous Defence planning work on possible military assistance to South Vietnam was incorporated into Australian Government consideration of this request, culminating in a Cabinet decision on 2 March 1966. Cabinet rejected the proposal to use No. 79 Squadron in operations over southern Laos³. While deciding to deploy a two battalion task force, Cabinet decided that "other than the RAAF helicopter and Caribou elements already mentioned, no new Air or Navy contribution should be offered at this stage".⁴ Expanding the role of No. 79 Squadron was considered but not taken up, primarily because of concerns about deniability. The RAAF Sabres of No. 79 Squadron were a unique type of aircraft in South East Asia, and given their known range and nationality, could only have come from Ubon in Thailand. The Australian Government was sensitive to the political difficulties this would have created at the time for the Thai Government. As a consequence No. 79

¹ JPC Report 110/64 "Aid to South Vietnam", dated 11 December 1964 (folios 183-202, Joint Planning Committee file 23 "Reports of the Joint Planning Committee – 87/1964 to 111/1964").

² Directive to Officer Commanding RAAF Contingent, Ubon Thailand, dated 25 September 1965 (folios 30-32, Department of Defence file 1967/541 "Deployment of forces to Thailand: Role of RAAF Squadron, Ubon in Airforce Defence of Thailand and SEA").

³ It is also noteworthy that the other options raised by the Department of Defence in 1964 were not approved in the recommended form. A battalion did deploy to South Vietnam in 1965, but operated in the vicinity of Saigon, well away from Southern Laos. Vung Tao, not Danang, became the point of entry serviced by HMAS Sydney. The Australian Government clearly wanted to limit its involvement in the Vietnam War to the territory of South Vietnam.

⁴ Cabinet decision 60 of 2 March 1966 (First Holt Ministry Cabinet submissions and decisions 1966, file 23 "South Vietnam – Possible Australian Military Assistance").

Squadron's role remained restricted to the air defence of Thailand. The squadron, accordingly was not, as such, part of the Vietnam War.

In mid 1966 the US established a more comprehensive air defence plan (7AF 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 plan 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. South East Asia – West was divided into two sub-sectors: Western, which included western Thailand and about a third of Cambodia; and, Eastern, which comprised east Thailand, most of Laos and another third of Cambodia. Overall air defence operations were conducted through a single control agency.

The Minister for Defence approved No. 79 Squadron's participation in this plan subject to the squadron fulfilling its role within present agreed conditions (i.e. air defence duties only within the territory of Thailand, and the adherence to RAAF ROE), and the squadron was listed under 'Augmentation Forces – Thailand' for the plan. No. 79 Squadron operated under this plan until its withdrawal on 26 July 1968. Participation in the plan did not change the RAAF task and ROE, and the geographic constraint on its activities, despite at least one further attempt by the RAAF to have the area of operational activity extended to cover southern Laos.

3. THE HONOURS SYSTEM

3.1 *Values underpinning the honours system*

The Panel recognised that the system of honours and awards used in Australia is underpinned by values which are held in high regard in our society and which characterise the way Australians view the world around them. These values include a sense of fairness, equity and an egalitarian commitment to acknowledge the quality of service and substance of action without regard to status or class. The Panel's consideration of claims for recognition sought to reflect these values with a generosity of spirit.

The integrity of the system is not undermined by reviews that adhere to these values. Indeed, the conduct of reviews that apply these values in concert with principles such as those set out in the introduction serves to enhance the integrity of the system.

3.2 *Service medal recognition under the Imperial and Australian systems*

The British Imperial system of orders, decorations and medals (honours and awards) evolved over time, and was used by Australia until the establishment of a uniquely Australian honours system in 1975. Australian forms of award to replace all former Imperial awards were progressively introduced until 1992, when Australian governments ceased recommending Australians for Imperial awards. Her Majesty The Queen continues to make particular awards which are in her personal gift, without recommendation from any government.

Recognition of service in military deployments under the Imperial system was typically either through the award of a "campaign" medal or a "service" medal. Under the Imperial system a campaign medal was sometimes created and awarded to recognise a single, significant warlike deployment. A separate system of "General Service Medals" was also established about the time of World War One, so that service in smaller scale campaigns could also receive medallic recognition. A clasp identifying the region or campaign in which the medal was earned was attached to the riband suspending the medal. Multiple clasps could be awarded and attached to a single medal in this way.

Under the contemporary Australian system the ASM and AASM broadly correspond with Imperial General Service Medals, while the campaign medals of each system serve the same purpose. In Australia a determination of the nature of service dictates whether the ASM or AASM is awarded for a particular deployment.

3.3 *Nature of service*

Australia's Department of Defence applies particular definitions in determining the nature of service, and hence the appropriate medal to be awarded, for a deployment:

Warlike

Military activities where the application of force is authorised to pursue specific military objectives, and there is an expectation of casualties, are generally classified “warlike”. They can encompass, but are not limited to:

- a state of declared war;
- conventional combat operations against an armed adversary;
- peace enforcement operations which are military operations in support of diplomatic efforts to restore peace between belligerents who may not be consenting to intervention and may be engaged in combat activities.

A service medal for warlike service (e.g. the AASM) generally requires one day or more on the posted strength of a unit or formation allotted (or assigned) to and serving in the operational area, or one operational sortie into or over the operational area from a unit allotted for such service.

Non-warlike

Military activities short of warlike operations where there is a risk associated with the assigned task and where the application of force is limited to self defence are deemed “non-warlike”. Casualties could occur but are not expected. These operations encompass, but are not limited to:

- “Hazardous”: activities exposing individuals or units to a degree of hazard above and beyond that of normal peacetime duty such as mine avoidance and clearance, weapons inspection and destruction, Defence Force aid to the civil power, Service-protected or assisted evacuations and other operations requiring the application of minimum force to effect the protection of personnel or property, or other like activities.
- “Peacekeeping”: operations involving military personnel, without powers of enforcement, to help restore and maintain peace in an area of conflict with the consent of all parties. This can include peace enforcement with minimum force necessary for self defence, enforcement of sanctions in a relatively benign environment which expose individuals or units to “hazard” (see above), and military observer missions.

A service medal for non-warlike service (e.g. the ASM) generally requires 30 days or more in the operational area, or 30 or more sorties into or over the operational area.

Peace-time activities are routine operations short of non-warlike and warlike activities, and do not attract medal recognition.

3.4 Policy and practice

Successive Australian governments have observed the general principle that no more than one medal is awarded for any one period and type of service. A second medal may be offered for significant warlike campaigns or where Australia has played a major international role.

Campaign and service medals broadly recognise the same thing, that is, participation in a military deployment of a particular nature and scale. Campaign and non-warlike service medals generally require a minimum of 30 days service. Warlike service medals usually require a minimum of one day's service in the operational area. The geographic and temporal conditions may vary, though, between the campaign and service medal issued for the same deployment.

The government's stated policy for introducing the AASM45-75 in 1997 was to give "a distinctly Australian award for recognition of warlike service between 1945 and 1975". The intent was that the AASM45-75 would only be awarded for service that had already been recognised through an Imperial campaign or service medal. Following its establishment it has been used in other cases, for example, the AASM45-75 "Malaysia" clasp can be awarded for specified circumstances without a previous Imperial award; and the AASM45-75 "Thailand" has also been awarded in the absence of a previous Imperial award.

Ten contemporary AASM clasps have been established to recognise a range of post-1975 warlike deployments, while only three Australian campaign medals correspond to any of those deployments (the "INTERFET Medal", the "Iraq Medal" and the "Afghanistan Medal"). Even so, there are deployments attracting the AASM which do not attract the campaign medal awarded for service given in other phases of the same general operation. For example, service at Diego Garcia as part of Operation SLIPPER, which is recognised through the AASM "ICAT", does not automatically attract the "Afghanistan Medal". The geographic scopes of the two awards are different, with Diego Garcia lying outside the area for the "Afghanistan Medal". A minimum of thirty sorties into the "Afghanistan Medal" area would be required for a pilot stationed at Diego Garcia to qualify for the "Afghanistan Medal". Ground-based personnel would be unable to qualify. Similarly, post-INTERFET warlike deployments recognised through the AASM "East Timor" do not attract the "INTERFET Medal". They are quite separate awards. Furthermore, as the campaign medals require a minimum of 30 days service and the AASMs only one day, there are likely to be cases where a person is entitled to only the AASM for a short deployment while longer-serving colleagues are entitled to both the AASM and the campaign medal. In conclusion, awarding a campaign medal with the AASM appears to be the exception, not the rule.

3.5 The Vietnam Medal

The Vietnam Medal (VM) was instituted by Her Majesty The Queen on 8 June 1968 to recognise the service of members of the Australian Armed Forces and accredited members of approved philanthropic organisations serving with those forces in assisting the Republic of Vietnam to repel aggression. Service on or after 29 May 1964 qualifies for the VM in accordance with the following conditions:

- service of 28 days (continuous or aggregated) in ships or craft employed in operations on inland waters or off the coast of Vietnam; or
- service of one day or more on the posted strength of a unit or formation on land in Vietnam; or
- one operational sortie over Vietnam or Vietnamese waters by aircrew on the posted strength of a unit allocated for direct support or operations in Vietnam; or
- service of thirty days (continuous or aggregated) for official visits, inspections or other occurrences of a temporary nature on duty in Vietnam, or in ships or craft engaged in operations off the Vietnamese coast.

Accredited members of philanthropic organisations (e.g. Red Cross) qualify with service of one day or more with forces engaged in operations in Vietnam from 29 May 1964.

In all cases, qualification is dependent on service in operations in Vietnam, off its coast, or in the air above either Vietnam or its coastal waters.

The requirement for a minimum length of service is waived if a person's service was cut short by death, or injury requiring evacuation; or if the person was awarded a medal of the status of the British Empire Medal or above, a Mention-in-Despatches or a Queen's Commendation for gallantry on a specific occasion during the uncompleted qualifying period.

3.6 The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal

The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal (VLSM) was instituted by Her Majesty The Queen on 24 February 1993, to accord recognition to certain members of the Australian Armed Forces and certain other persons who rendered service in support of the Australian Armed Forces in Vietnam. The VLSM is awarded for service of one day or more in the "area of operations of Vietnam" between 29 May 1964 and 27 January 1973 inclusive:

- as a member of the crew of a ship or aircraft operating in support of the Australian Armed Forces; or
- while attached to a unit or organisation operating in support of the Australian Armed Forces; or
- while attached to, or serving with, a unit of the Australian Armed Forces or allied forces as an observer.

The conditions for the award of the VLSM include that a person who is eligible for the VM is not eligible for the VLSM – a person cannot be awarded both medals. Regulation 3 provides that the Governor-General may declare:

- (a) an area of land and waters forming part of the territory of Vietnam; and
- (b) an area of waters off the coast of Vietnam; and
- (c) the airspace above the areas referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b);

to be the "area of operations of Vietnam". On 2 August 1993 the Governor-General declared the area of operations of Vietnam, for the purposes of regulation 3 of the VLSM regulations, to be:

- (i) all land and inland waters of the territory of Vietnam south of the parallel 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude;
- (ii) all that area of land and waters (other than land and waters forming part of the territory of Cambodia or China) bounded by a line commencing at the intersection of the boundary between Cambodia and Vietnam with the shore of Vietnam at high-water mark; thence proceeding in a straight line to a point 185.2 kilometres west (true) of that intersection; thence proceeding along an imaginary line parallel to, and at a distance of 185.2 kilometres from the shore of Vietnam at high water mark to its intersection with the parallel 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude; and
- (iii) the airspace above the area referred to in paragraphs (i) and (ii).⁵

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia Gazette no. S 251 of Friday 13 August 1993.

This description only includes Vietnam, a band of sea off the coast of Vietnam, and the airspace above these – it does not include the territory of any other country.

3.7 Criteria for a “fair and sustainable” outcome

The “fair and sustainable” outcome mandated by the TOR required the Panel to address anomalies and injustices without creating new ones. The Panel noted that anomalies and injustices are usually founded in circumstances, interpretations, attitudes, and the application of terms and conditions, either by acts of commission or acts of omission. They do not normally occur as an act of policy.

The Panel analysed documents pertaining to the commitment, role, rules of engagement and withdrawal of RAAF Ubon, including evolving refinements, to understand the context of the deployment. The Panel recognised that in this case fairness applies to both the claimants in terms of their actual experiences and service, and the Australian Government with respect to the policy intent at the time and subsequently. The government also has a strong interest in the integrity of Australia’s system of honours and awards, including service recognition.

Claimants have a right to adequate recognition for their service. However, the Australian Government determines the purpose and conditions for an operational deployment by members of the Australian armed forces: indeed, it is the sovereign right of the government to make such determinations. In the latter respect, the interests of other affected governments might be influential, but they are secondary.

The Panel considered the nature of the claimed anomaly in service recognition for RAAF Ubon. The claimants argue that their service at Ubon from 1965 to 1968 was clearly focused on support to the air campaign in the Vietnam War even though they were located outside the territorial limits of Vietnam and were formally tasked with providing air defence for Thailand only. They assert that the Australian Government, for “political reasons”, cloaked their involvement in the Vietnam War under repeated, but disingenuous, statements that RAAF Ubon was deployed throughout the period under SEATO auspices with no connection to the Vietnam War. The claimed anomaly lies in the disparity between what they believe they were actually doing at RAAF Ubon, and the Australian Government’s declared purpose for the deployment.

The claimed injustice is that they have not been given their rightful recognition for their role in Australia’s Vietnam War effort, although their warlike service with RAAF Ubon has been recognised with the award of the AASM45-75 “Thailand”.

The issue hinges on whether RAAF Ubon was part of Australia’s Vietnam War effort to the extent that it is appropriate to change the declared Australian area of operations for the Vietnam War to accommodate the claim. Australian Government policy – throughout 1965-1968 and in defining the Vietnam War areas of operations for the VM and VLSM – is the key factor to be considered.

The Panel concluded that any outcomes of the Review must therefore recognise the policy intent of the Australian Government at the time and the treatment of others, and be based on verifiable evidence.

For an outcome to be fair and sustainable it should be consistent with the principles adopted for the Review.

4. ASSESSMENT OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND OUTCOMES

4.1 *Existing recognition*

RAAF personnel who served at least one day at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 are eligible for the AASM45-75 with clasp "Thailand". The Letters Patent establishing the AASM45-75 provide that it recognises members of the Australian Defence Force and certain other persons who rendered service in warlike operations. In the case of RAAF Ubon, the award was made following the recommendation of the Mohr Review that service in the 1965-68 period should be classed as "warlike".

4.2 *Adequacy of recognition*

The Panel is aware of criticisms that the award of the AASM45-75 "Thailand" for service at RAAF Ubon is meaningless without a campaign award to define the war for which the AASM was awarded. The Panel's view is that this criticism is not valid. All awards of the AASM are made with a clasp engraved with the region or operation for which the medal was awarded. Hence, no AASM "requires" a campaign medal to define the conflict for which it was awarded. As stated in 3.3 above, "warlike service" need not be in a state of declared war, indeed, it need not be in a major international conflict, declared or not. It is therefore perfectly legitimate that the majority of the clasps declared for the contemporary AASM have no accompanying campaign medal. In the case of RAAF Ubon the warlike service was determined because service involved conventional combat operations against an armed adversary, although the combat operations mainly involved preparation and very high states of readiness in a very tense environment, rather than actual combat.

Warlike service at RAAF Ubon has already been recognised through the award of a medal. The claim for additional medal recognition depends on an assessment of whether service at RAAF Ubon was part of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War.

4.3 *Findings and conclusions*

The Panel noted the arguments that RAAF Ubon worked closely and co-operatively with the USAF at Ubon, and that US personnel at Ubon were absolutely involved in an air campaign against North Vietnam and have received Vietnam campaign recognition for their service. The argument goes that, since the RAAF personnel co-operated with the US personnel, and were part of an integrated air defence system with the US as it prosecuted its air campaign against North Vietnam, the RAAF personnel were part of the Vietnam War and should be recognised just as their US counterparts have been for being part of that conflict. The Panel disagrees with this conclusion. The roles and tasks applying to US forces do not translate to members of the RAAF. The provision of shared base services at Ubon and the integrated air defence system do not change the fundamental nature and purpose of the RAAF commitment.

The Panel also noted arguments that the RAAF contingent at Ubon was deployed "under the cloak of SEATO", implying that the Australian government had a different motive, that of supporting the war in Vietnam. At every step, and particularly in consultation between and within Australian government departments, the RAAF deployment to Ubon is always characterised as part of a SEATO obligation. Its role in the context of the Vietnam War was

sometimes contemplated, but none of the recommendations which would have made this connection were ever implemented.

The Australian Government consistently demarcated the RAAF Ubon deployment from its commitment of forces to the Vietnam War. Successive directives to the Officer Commanding RAAF Ubon unambiguously focus that commander on the air defence of Thailand within Thai territory. This was the clear and continuing policy and operational intent of the Australian Government which remained sensitive to the interests of the Thai and Malaysian governments, and the need to limit its involvement in the Vietnam War to responses to requests from the Government of South Vietnam.

The evolution of the US-led air defence control arrangements saw, first, the establishment of an integrated system for Thailand and, then, its incorporation as a discrete sector into a wider Mainland South East Asia system. But, these command and control arrangements were not determinants of the role and tasks of RAAF Ubon, and particularly No. 79 Squadron. The changes that occurred (e.g. Alert 5 and the introduction of airfield defence guards) reflected responses to changing threat perceptions relating to the air defence of Thailand, albeit that the air defence command and control arrangements changed in parallel, the threat rose in 1965 with the commencement of the USAF air campaign against North Vietnam, and the changes were agreed after consultations with US and Thai authorities.

Throughout the entire period of deployment of RAAF Ubon, from 1962 to 1968, the purpose of the commitment remained to contribute to the air defence of Thailand and the forces were limited to operations within Thai territory. The commitment and limitations preceded the commencement of the USAF air campaign against North Vietnam in 1965, and subsequently ran in parallel with that campaign.

Furthermore, even when the alert status was elevated and the command and control arrangements altered to become part of a wider South East Asia system, the stated role and ROE of No. 79 Squadron remained focused on the air defence of Thailand against a possible air threat from communist forces – not part of a particular offensive campaign against specific communist forces in Vietnam or North Vietnam, as those Australian forces committed in Vietnam were.

That stated, the Panel concludes that the activities of RAAF Ubon did provide *de facto* support within Thailand to the USAF air campaign in Vietnam. The air defence and base services they provided also covered the USAF forces based at Ubon and using Thai airspace. The sharing of airfield services and facilities with the USAF was a natural development of the fact that, prior to the arrival of large numbers of US personnel, the airfield had been under RAAF control. It would have been abnormal not to share services and facilities. Their availability meant that the US did not need to replicate them. The Panel believes it reasonable to conclude that this outcome was both understood and accepted by the Australian Government at the time.

However, this type of co-operation and the provision of air defence within Thailand does not lead to the conclusion that RAAF Ubon was participating in the Vietnam War. It was not the primary purpose of the commitment. RAAF Ubon was never so assigned and the unambiguous policy intent of the Australian Government at the time is compelling in this regard.

The RURG has raised comparisons with RAAF elements deployed to Labuan Island as part of the conflict in Malaya, and the deployment of RAAF elements to Diego Garcia as part of the conflict in Afghanistan. In the first case, RAAF elements on Labuan Island were an essential part of the Australian commitment to opposing insurgency in Malaya, and are deservedly

entitled to the AASM45-75 awarded for that service. In the second case, RAAF elements provided an air defence capability for the base from which US bombing missions in Afghanistan were launched. Importantly, RAAF elements at Diego Garcia are not entitled to the “Afghanistan Medal” purely by virtue of service at the base. Pilots would have to have flown into the designated area of operations for the “Afghanistan Medal” to be eligible for campaign recognition. Principle 4 of this Review, that the distinction between service in a declared combat area and outside it should be preserved, as a measure for the award of a campaign or related medal, also supports the consistency of this treatment. The Panel therefore finds that not awarding a campaign medal for service at RAAF Ubon would be consistent with existing awards policy.

The Panel disagrees with the Riding Review conclusion that the deployment of No. 79 Squadron was the Australian contribution to the air campaign waged against North Vietnam. Campaign medals are awarded for declared participation in particular campaigns. The identification of No. 79 Squadron as “Augmentation Forces – Thailand” in 7AF OPLAN 427-66 does not constitute a force assignment to participate in the Vietnam War. Only the Australian Government could authorise such assignment and, if directed, it would be implemented through Australian operational documentation. This did not happen.

The nature of RAAF Ubon’s linkage with those prosecuting the Vietnam War is quite different from any other group which has qualified for the VLMS. In all cases those groups satisfied the conditions of being allotted to support Australian forces in Vietnam, and of having served a minimum period in the area of operations. The extent of RAAF Ubon’s support for the Vietnam War was limited to the protection of Thai territory from retaliatory raids against US Air Force raids launched from Thailand, and the sharing of base services at Ubon. It is the Panel’s view that *de facto* involvement of this sort is not a sufficient basis to consider the service as part of Australia’s contribution to the Vietnam War, or to propose a change to the defined area of operations of that war in order to create an entitlement to a campaign medal.

The award of the AASM45-75 with clasp “Thailand” therefore appropriately affords recognition for active service to those RAAF personnel who served at Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon, between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968, and there should be no entitlement to a campaign medal reflecting participation in the Vietnam War.

APPENDICES

1. Acknowledgements

The Panel has been assisted by a very large number of people in its investigations and proceedings.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet provided secretariat and other support for the Review, including Mr Peter Rush as Secretary and Mr Glenn Gore Phillips as Secretariat Officer.

Also at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Panel is grateful for the policy advice on honours provided by Ms Margaret Varghese. The Secretariat appreciates the administrative support of Ms Tania Vanderwall and Ms Sue O'Neil. The Panel is also grateful for the support afforded by Mr Duncan Lewis, Deputy Secretary, and Ms Barbara Belcher, First Assistant Secretary, Government Division.

The Review Secretariat, in turn, tapped numerous external resources to collect information and find interviewees. At the Australian War Memorial, sincere thanks are offered to Mr Jeremy Richter, Ms Mary Pollard, and all the staff at the Research Centre's reading room, who made available valuable military records and reference material so quickly and efficiently. At the National Archives of Australia, thanks to Ms Julia Church, Ms Carolyn Connor, and the staff at the Canberra reading room, for likewise so cheerfully retrieving material for examination, sometimes at very short notice.

At the Department of Defence's Directorate of Honours and Awards, the Panel is grateful for the cooperation and assistance afforded by Ms Irene Wilson, Mr Pat Clarke, Mr Brett Mitchell and Mr Graham Wilson.

The Panel also extends its appreciation to Mr Mal Barnes and Mr Richard Stone, of the RAAF Ubon Reunion/Recognition Group, for sharing their time, recollections, opinions and insight.

While all these people generously assisted the Panel with information and advice, the views and conclusions contained in this Report are those of the Panel, and do not necessarily represent the views of anyone else.

2. Panel Activity

Meetings and attendance

Friday, 19 October 2007

Attendance: Peter Abigail (Chair); Steve Gower, Gerry Warner (Members); Peter Rush, Glenn Gore Phillips (Secretariat); Margaret Varghese (PM&C).

Friday, 16 November 2007

Attendance: Peter Abigail (Chair); Steve Gower, Gerry Warner (Members); Peter Rush, Glenn Gore Phillips (Secretariat).

While the Panel met on several occasions between 16 November 2007 and 17 March 2008, activity concerning the reference on RAAF Ubon was mainly conducted out of session during this period, and concerned additional research and examination of previous reports and reviews.

Monday, 17 March 2008

Attendance: Peter Abigail (Chair); Steve Gower, Gerry Warner (Members); Peter Rush, Glenn Gore Phillips (Secretariat); plus Mal Barnes and Richard Stone (RAAF Ubon Reunion/Recognition Group) (interviewees).

3. Bibliography

3.1 Books

Stephens, Alan, "The Australian Centenary History of Defence Volume II: The Royal Australian Air Force", Oxford University Press, 2001

3.2 Reports

Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence Related Awards (1994); Gen P C Gratton, Chair

Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75 (2000); Maj-Gen R F Mohr, Chair

Report by the Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 (2004); Air Marshal D Riding AO DFC (Retd), Chair

3.3 Other Material

Consultant Report to Director, Honours and Awards, Department of Defence, 5 May 2004

Department of Defence "Speaking Notes re RAAF Personal (sic) Posted to Ubon and the Vietnam Logistic (and) Support Medal". Undated but presented at a meeting in February 2004 between the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and representatives of the RAAF Ubon Reunion/Recognition Group

Royal Warrant establishing the Vietnam Medal approved by Her Majesty The Queen on 8 June 1968

Letters Patent establishing the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal, made by Her Majesty The Queen on 24 February 1993

Declaration under Regulation 3 of the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal Regulations, approved by the Governor-General on 2 August 1993

Letters Patent establishing the Australian Active Service Medal 1939-45, made by Her Majesty The Queen on 11 December 1997

Letters Patent establishing the Afghanistan Medal, made by Her Majesty The Queen on 30 September 2004

Determination under the Afghanistan Medal Regulations 2004, establishing conditions for the award of the medal, approved by the Governor-General on 4 July 2005

3.4 Archived material

Key to Archives series

Archive series	Agency/organisation which created the file (series description)
A703	Department of Air, Central Office
A1838	Department of External Affairs, Central Office
A1945	Department of Defence, Central Office, 1957 to 1974
A1946	Department of Defence, Central Office, 4 January 1967 onwards
A5841	First Holt Ministry - copies of Cabinet submissions and associated decisions, 1966
A8738	Joint Planning Committee, Department of Defence
AWM121	Department of Army, Central Office (Directorate of Military Operations and Plans (DMO & P))

Material consulted

Archive series	Control Symbol	Title	NAA Barcode
A703	566/2/311	Formation, organisation, movement - Headquarters RAAF Contingent Ubon	4151442
A1838	TS696/8/4 Part 6	Vietnam Defence Assistance	1728784
A1945	248/4/100	US request for Australian defence assistance in South Vietnam (File no. 2)	1565664
A1945	249/7/47	Deployment of forces to Thailand – Laos crisis of May 1962	1565733
A1945	249/7/48	Deployment of forces to Thailand (File No. 2)	11588778
A1945	249/7/55	Deployment of forces to Thailand (including proposed withdrawal of RAAF Squadron) (File No. 4)	1565735
A1946	1967/541	Deployment of Forces to Thailand: Role of RAAF Squadron, Ubon in Airforce Defence of Thailand and SEA	11393013
A5841	23	South Vietnam – Possible Australian Military Assistance (Decisions 32, 60) [includes decision 60 of 2 March 1966]	1803746
A8738	23	Reports by the Joint Planning Committee – 87-1964 to 111/1964	1171157
AWM121	161/A/4	Defence Chiefs of Staff Committee – South Vietnam	713479

4. Abbreviations used

Abbreviation	Meaning
AASM	Australian Active Service Medal (for warlike operations from 1975 onwards)
AASM45-75	Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 (for warlike operations between 1945 and 1975)
AM	Member of the Order of Australia
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia
ASM	Australian Service Medal (for non-warlike operations from 1975 onwards)
ASM45-75	Australian Service Medal 1945-75 (for non-warlike operations between 1945 and 1975)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIDA	Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence Related Awards (1994)
COMUSMACTHAI	Commander United States Military Advisory Command Thailand
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross (Imperial gallantry award)
Mohr Review	Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75, chaired by Maj-Gen R F Mohr RFD ED RL (2000)
MSEAADS	Mainland South East Asia Air Defence Sector
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NZ	New Zealand
OC	Officer Commanding (as in "OC No. 79 Squadron RAAF")
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
Riding Review	Report of the Review of Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, chaired by Air Marshal Doug Riding AO DFC (Retd) (2004)
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RTAF	Royal Thai Air Force
RURG	RAAF Ubon Reunion/Recognition Group
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
TOR	Terms of Reference (for this Review)
UK	United Kingdom
USAF	United States Air Force
VC	Viet Cong
VLSM	Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal
VM	Vietnam Medal