

21 February 2013



SENATOR DAVID FEENEY
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Senator for Victoria

Justice: Ubon veterans finally recognised

Members of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) who were posted to Thailand's Ubon Air Base between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 are now finally eligible for the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal.

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, Senator the Hon David Feeney, said it was an honour to right such a wrong.

"These are veterans who have served their nation with pride, who put themselves into harm's way for the good of Australia. I am proud to have implemented this change and to see that these veterans are finally recognised for their efforts toward the Vietnam War."

The matter as to whether to award the VLSM to RAAF members at Ubon was referred to the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal. The Tribunal found that RAAF personnel who served at Ubon should be awarded the VLSM.

Senator Feeney has accepted this finding on behalf of the Australian Government.

This is in complete contrast with the previous Government, which refused to appropriately recognise veterans.

"The Howard Government was given a report on this very matter which called for recognition, which the Government ignored. This decision makes things right," Senator Feeney said.

Head of the RAAF Ubon Recognition Group, Mr Mal Barnes, said it was a decision they have waited over 45 years for.

"We always knew this was a medal we deserved, a medal we had earned. This is something we should never have had to campaign for, but we did. It is a relief for all RAAF veterans who were at Ubon to finally be recognised for their service. This is something the Coalition had the power to fix and never did," Mr Barnes said.

Ubon is a Royal Thai Air Force base in South Eastern Thailand. From 1965, the United States Air Force (USAF) started using Ubon in support of Thailand, and later as a base to attack North Vietnam. RAAF No 79 Squadron remained at Ubon to provide a joint presence to confront the spread of communism in South East Asia.

From March 1965, USAF increased its bombing of North Vietnamese targets, with Ubon being one of the bases used. As a result, Ubon became a significant target for retaliatory raids.

On 25 June 1965, RAAF No 79 Squadron commenced the highest sustainable armed air defence alert. This applied dawn to dusk, seven days per week. Two Sabre jets remained armed and ready for takeoff with 5 minutes notice. Guards were also sent to protect the base from ground attack. They patrolled 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

“There is no doubt in my mind that these were warlike conditions. There was a very real risk, as demonstrated by the protection measures undertaken. This is a squadron that made a very significant difference to the campaign directed against North Vietnam and the protection of a base on behalf of the USAF.

“Awarding the VLISM will show for once and for all that these veterans gave essential and direct logistic support to Australian forces in Vietnam,” Senator Feeney said.

Royal Australian Air Force members who believe they may now be entitled to the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal, are invited to make application to the Directorate of Honours and Awards. Eligible next-of-kin may apply on behalf of deceased former members. Application forms can be obtained from www.defence.gov.au/medals/ or by calling the Directorate of Honours and Awards, toll free, on 1800 111 321.

The medal may not be awarded to a member who is eligible for the Vietnam Medal.

Members who have already submitted an application are not required to re-apply.

The Tribunal's full report is available at <http://defence-honours-tribunal.gov.au/inquiries/completed-inquiries/raaf-ubon/>

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