



Australian Government

Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal

**INQUIRY INTO UNRESOLVED RECOGNITION ISSUES FOR
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE PERSONNEL WHO SERVED
AT UBON BETWEEN 1965 AND 1968**

LETTER OF TRANSMISSION

Inquiry into Unresolved Recognition Issues for Royal Australian Air Force personnel who served at Ubon between 1965 and 1968

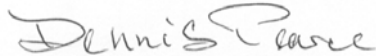
Senator the Hon David Feeney
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Parliamentary Secretary,

I am pleased to present the report of the Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal on the *Inquiry into Unresolved Recognition Issues for Royal Australian Air Force Personnel who served at Ubon between 1965 and 1968*.

The inquiry was conducted in accordance with the Terms of Reference. The panel of the Tribunal that conducted the inquiry arrived unanimously at the findings and recommendations set out in its report.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dennis Pearce AO
Chair

18 February 2011

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal shall inquire into and report on unresolved concerns regarding service of Australian Defence Force members at the Royal Thai Air Force Base Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968.

In conducting its inquiry the Tribunal shall:

- (a) make findings and recommendations as to the eligibility of Australian Defence Force members who served at Ubon for the Vietnam Logistic Support Medal or the granting of any other form of recognition for their service, and
- (b) consider any other material relevant to these claims, including, but not limited to, any previous reviews conducted with regard to recognition for this service.

The Tribunal is to examine relevant documentary evidence, and consider the nature and context of the service in relation to the criteria for Australian and Imperial awards that existed at that time, in order to arrive at a fair and sustainable response to claims for recognition.

The Tribunal may interview such persons as it considers appropriate and consider material provided to it that is relevant to these terms of reference.

The Tribunal is to report to the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support on its findings in regard to the above and any recommendations that arise from the inquiry.

In making its findings and formulating its recommendations the Tribunal is required to maintain the integrity of the Australian honours system and identify any consequential impact any finding or recommendation may have on that system.

The Tribunal is to determine its own procedures, in accordance with the general principles of procedural fairness, when conducting its inquiry as set out in these Terms of Reference.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (the Tribunal) is established under the *Defence Act 1903*. Its functions are set out in s 110UA of the Act. The Minister may direct the Tribunal to hold an inquiry into a specified matter concerning honours or awards and the Tribunal must hold an inquiry and report, with recommendations, to the Minister.

2. On 16 July 2010, the then Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, the Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP, directed the Tribunal to inquire into and report on unresolved recognition issues for Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) personnel who served at Ubon (Thailand) between 1965 and 1968. A full copy of the Terms of Reference (TOR) is at the commencement of this report.

3. The inquiry was undertaken by the following members of the Tribunal:

Professor Dennis Pearce, AO (Chair)
Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd)
Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

Summary of RAAF service at Ubon

4. Ubon is a Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) base in South Eastern Thailand. In 1962, as part of Australia's SEATO commitment, RAAF No. 79 Squadron comprising eight Sabre jets, together with associated support staff, was posted to the base. The purpose of the posting was to provide support for Thailand against a possible communist invasion from Laos. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) for No. 79 Squadron allowed the use of force against aircraft attacking Thailand with weapons without warning. The Squadron's area of activity was limited to the Thai borders.

5. By 1965 it was apparent that the threat to Thailand had passed and it was proposed by the RAAF that the Squadron return to Australia. However, by this time the United States Air Force (USAF) 8th Tactical Fighter Wing had commenced to use Ubon, initially in support of Thailand but later as a base for air attacks on North Vietnam. Following high-level negotiations it was agreed that No. 79 Squadron would remain at Ubon with a view to providing a bilateral joint US/Asian military presence to confront the spread of communism in South East Asia.

6. An integrated air defence system for Thailand was developed involving the USAF, the RTAF and the RAAF with fighter planes on air defence alert. This system was part of the USAF's Mainland South East Asia Air Defence Network which was in turn part of the Pacific Air Defence Network operated by US Pacific Command.

7. From March 1965, the USAF increased its bombing of North Vietnamese targets under Operation ROLLING THUNDER. Ubon was one of the bases used for this operation. As a result it was perceived that Ubon had become a significant target for retaliatory raids.

8. On 25 June 1965, with the consent of the Australian Government, No. 79 Squadron commenced the highest sustainable armed air defence alert of Alert State Five. This alert level applied daily from dawn to dusk seven days per week. It meant that two of the Squadron's eight Sabres were continuously fully armed and made ready for takeoff on five minutes notice. New ROE permitted use of force against aircraft attacking forces in Thailand and before the attackers used their weapons. However, the restriction on flying only within Thailand airspace was maintained.
9. At about the same time a flight of Airfield Defence Guards (ADG) was sent to Ubon to protect the base from ground attacks. These guards patrolled the base on 24 hours seven days per week basis. They also undertook patrols outside the base perimeter which US forces were not permitted to do.
10. High-level government discussions occurred from time to time on the broadening of No. 79 Squadron's activities but these were not proceeded with, largely because of the perceived sensitivities of the Thai and Malaysian Governments to be seen to support the USAF's involvement in the Vietnam War and as such activities were outside the SEATO treaty obligations. No action was taken by the USAF to protect Ubon with aircraft while No. 79 Squadron was at the base. Rather the base was used as the take-off point for Phantom fighter bomber aircraft on 24 hours seven days per week basis.
11. No. 79 Squadron withdrew from Ubon on 26 July 1968. Before doing so, a request was made to Commander 7th Air Force for approval to release the Squadron from its alert status. This was duly given.

Award sought

12. The RAAF personnel who served at Ubon from 25 June 1965 till 26 July 1968 have been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal (AASM) 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'. They are also seeking the award of a campaign medal. The award sought is either the Vietnam Medal (VM) or the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal (VLSM). The personnel do not qualify for either of these medals under the present rules.
13. The claims for medallic recognition have been considered on a number of occasions. The two most recent of these are the *Report by the Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, 2004*, (Riding Report) and the *Review of service recognition for RAAF Ubon (1965-68), 2008*, (Abigail Report).
14. The Riding Report recommended that the VM be awarded to the personnel who served at Ubon during the period referred to. This recommendation was not accepted by the government. The Abigail Report recommended that no action be taken to offer further recognition, including by way of the VLSM, for service of RAAF personnel stationed at Ubon. The government accepted this recommendation.
15. It was primarily because of the conflicting outcomes of these reports that the matter was referred to the Tribunal. In the Tribunal's view the conflict between the reports turns on the difference in result flowing from a close adherence to the formal legal status of No. 79 Squadron at Ubon, which was the approach taken by the Abigail Panel, and endeavouring to go behind that formal status to ask the question what was the task in fact

undertaken by No. 79 Squadron while based at Ubon - the approach taken by the Riding Panel.

16. The Tribunal received extensive evidence relating to the activities undertaken by No. 79 Squadron while at Ubon. There is no doubt in the Tribunal's view that the conditions of service there were warlike – as has been recognised by the Government by awarding the persons serving there the AASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND' and granting eligibility for repatriation benefits. The only war that was producing these warlike conditions was that against North Vietnam.

17. The question therefore is whether, after 45 years, it is now possible to confront the reality of No. 79 Squadron's involvement in the Vietnam War. In the Tribunal's view it is time for it to be recognised that the squadron was making a significant contribution to the air campaign directed against North Vietnam. It provided the protection of an important base on behalf of the USAF. This is how the US viewed what the squadron was doing and the Tribunal considers that it is the correct view of the squadron's actions.

18. The VLISM was struck to recognise service personnel who had given essential and direct logistic support to Australian forces in Vietnam. The Tribunal considers that service at Ubon from July 1965 equates with the type of service for which the VLISM has been awarded. The USAF air war directed against North Vietnam was an integral part of the conflict in which Australian forces were engaged. There is no doubt in the Tribunal's view that the Australian personnel at Ubon performed an essential support role for the USAF. As recognised by the government, they were engaged in warlike activities and that war was the Vietnam War.

19. The Tribunal concludes that service at Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 should be recognised with the award of the VLISM. The Tribunal does not consider that there will be any flow on effect for other service if such an award is made.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The Tribunal makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: RAAF personnel who served at Ubon air base in Thailand from 25 June 1965 until 31 August 1968 be awarded the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal.

Recommendation 2: The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal Regulations be amended to give effect to this recommendation.

REPORT OF THE TRIBUNAL

Conduct of the Inquiry

1. The Defence Honours and Awards Appeals Tribunal (the Tribunal) is established under the *Defence Act 1903*. Its functions are set out in s 110UA of the Act. The Minister may direct the Tribunal to hold an inquiry into a specified matter concerning honours or awards and the Tribunal must hold an inquiry and report, with recommendations, to the Minister.

2. On 16 July 2010, the then Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, the Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP, directed the Tribunal to inquire into and report on unresolved recognition issues for Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) personnel who served at Ubon (Thailand) between 1965 and 1968. A full copy of the Terms of Reference (TOR) is at the commencement of this report.

3. The inquiry was undertaken by the following members of the Tribunal:

Professor Dennis Pearce, AO (Chair)
Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd)
Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

Steps taken in the inquiry

4. The inquiry commenced on 16 July 2010, with advertisements being placed in the major newspapers nationally giving notice of the inquiry and calling for submissions by 30 August 2010.

5. On 30 July 2010, the Tribunal wrote to key government organisations, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Defence (Defence), advising them of the inquiry and inviting them to make submissions. The Tribunal also wrote to interested organisations and individuals who had previously made representations to the Minister.

6. The Tribunal received 24 written submissions from individuals and interested organisations. Attached at Appendix 1 is a list of the organisations and individuals who made written submissions.

7. The Tribunal conducted hearings in Canberra on 6, 8 and 21 October 2010 to hear evidence from various individuals, interested organisations and from Defence. A total of 10 persons made oral submissions to the Tribunal. Appendix 2 provides details of the Tribunal hearings and the persons who appeared at those hearings.

8. The Tribunal also considered additional supporting material including archival and departmental records and eye witness reports. The material is listed at Appendix 3.

Summary of RAAF service at Ubon

9. Ubon is a Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) base in South Eastern Thailand. In 1962, as part of Australia's SEATO¹ commitment, RAAF No. 79 Squadron comprising eight Sabre jets, together with associated support staff, was posted to the base. The purpose of the posting was to provide support for Thailand against a possible communist invasion from Laos. The Rules of Engagement (ROE) for No. 79 Squadron allowed the use of force against aircraft attacking Thailand with weapons without warning. The squadron's area of activity was limited to the Thai borders.

10. By 1965 it was apparent that the threat to Thailand had passed and it was proposed by the RAAF that the Squadron return to Australia. However, by this time the United States Air Force (USAF) 8th Tactical Fighter Wing had commenced to use Ubon, initially in support of Thailand but later as a base for air attacks on North Vietnam. Following high-level negotiations it was agreed that No. 79 Squadron would remain at Ubon with a view to its providing a bilateral joint US/Asian military presence to confront the spread of communism in South East Asia.

11. An integrated air defence system for Thailand was developed involving the USAF, the RTAF and the RAAF with fighter planes on air defence alert. This system was part of the USAF's Mainland South East Asia Air Defence Network which was in turn part of the Pacific Air Defence Network operated by US Pacific Command.

12. From March 1965, the USAF increased its bombing of North Vietnamese targets under Operation ROLLING THUNDER. Ubon was one of the bases used for this operation. As a result it was perceived that Ubon had become a significant target for retaliatory raids.

13. On 25 June 1965, with the consent of the Australian Government, No. 79 Squadron commenced the highest sustainable armed air defence alert of Alert State Five. This alert level applied daily from dawn to dusk seven days per week. It meant that two of the Squadron's eight Sabres were continuously fully armed and made ready for takeoff on five minutes notice. New ROE permitted use of force against aircraft attacking forces in Thailand and before the attackers used their weapons. However, the restriction on flying only within Thailand airspace was maintained.

14. At about the same time a flight of Airfield Defence Guards (ADG) was sent to Ubon to protect the base from ground attacks. These guards patrolled the base on a 24 hours seven days per week basis. They also undertook patrols outside the base perimeter which US forces were not permitted to do.

15. High-level government discussions occurred from time to time on the broadening of No. 79 Squadron's activities but these were not proceeded with, largely because of the perceived sensitivities of the Thai and Malaysian Governments to be seen to support the USAF's involvement in the Vietnam War and as such activities were outside the SEATO treaty obligations.

¹ SEATO was the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, a multi-national collective defence arrangement established between 1954 and 1977. Member states included Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, France, (East) Pakistan, The Philippines, ROC (Taiwan), USA and the UK. Notably, Singapore and Malaysia were not members.

16. No action was taken by the USAF to protect Ubon with aircraft while No. 79 Squadron was at the base. Rather the base was used as the take-off point for Phantom fighter bomber aircraft on a 24 hours seven days per week basis. Planes took off in groups of four every 15 minutes throughout daylight hours and in groups of two at that interval during the night.

17. No. 79 Squadron withdrew from Ubon on 26 July 1968. Before doing so, a request was made to Commander 7th Air Force for approval to release the Squadron from its alert status. This was duly given.

18. A fuller account of this history is included in an extract from the *Report by the Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, 2004*, (Riding Report) set out in summary form at Appendix 4.²

Award sought

19. The RAAF personnel who served at Ubon from 25 June 1965 till 26 July 1968 have been awarded the Australian Active Service Medal (AASM) 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'. They are also seeking the award of a campaign medal. The award sought is either the Vietnam Medal (VM) or the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal (VLSM).

20. The VM may be awarded to Australian Defence Force personnel who rendered service in operations in Vietnam. The service that qualifies for an award is:

- Service of 28 days continuous or aggregated in ships or craft employed in operations on inland waters or off the coast of Vietnam;
- Service of one day or more on the posted strength of a unit or formation on land in Vietnam;
- One operational sortie over Vietnam or Vietnamese waters by aircrew on the posted strength of a unit allocated for direct support of operations in Vietnam.

21. The VLSM may be awarded for service of one day or more in the area of operations of Vietnam during the period 29 May 1964 to 27 January 1973:

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

² Readers should also consult the two official histories: Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, pp 10-16; and Alan Stephens, *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force, 1946-1971*, AGPS, Canberra, 1995, chapter 14 (pp 272-281).

The area of operations of Vietnam is defined as the area of land and waters forming part of the territory of Vietnam; the waters off the coast of Vietnam; and the airspace above those areas.

22. It is accepted that service in Ubon does not fall within the qualifications for the award of either of these medals as presently stated.

Previous consideration of claims

23. Claims for recognition for service in Ubon have been considered on a number of occasions as set out in Appendix 5. The following is an outline of those reviews and their outcomes.

24. The *Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence-Related Awards*, 1994, (CIDA) recommended the award of the Australian Service Medal (ASM) 1945-75 with Clasp 'UBON' for all who served at the Ubon airbase for a period of 30 days or more. This recommendation was accepted by the government, although the clasp was amended to 'THAILAND'.

25. The *Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75*, 2000, (Mohr Review) considered that service at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 was properly to be regarded as 'warlike'. It accordingly recommended that medallic awards and eligibility for repatriation benefits should recognise this. These recommendations were based largely on the change in the ROE applicable to No. 79 Squadron by the removal of the requirement that engagement only be permitted against aircraft 'attacking with weapons'. The recommendations were accepted by the government which resulted in the upgrade of the ASM, awarded following the CIDA Report, to an AASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND' for service during the period specified.

26. The *Report of the Review of Veterans' Entitlements*, 2003, (Clarke Review) recommended against extending eligibility for repatriation benefits to persons who served at Ubon in the period prior to 25 June 1965. Such service could not be classified as 'warlike'.

27. The *Report by the Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968*, 2004, (Riding Report) recommended that the VM be awarded to the personnel who served at Ubon during the period referred to. This recommendation was not accepted by the government.

28. The Ministerial direction to the Panel required it to consider 'whether additional information presented by the RAAF Ubon Recognition Group provided sufficient evidence for amending the regulations governing the award of the VLISM to cover Ubon service during the period 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968'.³ The Panel recommended that the VM be awarded. This was technically outside its Ministerial direction which had directed it to the VLISM only. This was alluded to in the Minister's statement rejecting the Panel's recommendation.

³ AIRMSHL Riding advised the Tribunal that he was not given formal TORs, but merely a letter from the Minister to undertake the review.

29. The *Review of service recognition for RAAF Ubon (1965-68)*, 2008, (Abigail Report) recommended that no action be taken to offer further recognition, including by way of the VLSM, for service of RAAF personnel stationed at Ubon. The government accepted this recommendation.

30. The Abigail Panel's TOR required it to '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'. In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the panel did not call for submissions. However, it took evidence from representatives of the RAAF Ubon Recognition Group (RURG) after complaint was raised about its methodology. It did not call on other witnesses.

31. It was primarily because of the conflicting outcomes of the last two reports that the matter was referred to the Tribunal.

32. In the Tribunal's view the conflict between the reports turns on the difference in result flowing from a close adherence to the formal legal status of No. 79 Squadron at Ubon, which was the approach taken by the Abigail Panel, and endeavouring to go behind that formal status to ask the question what was the task in fact undertaken by No. 79 Squadron while based at Ubon - the approach taken by the Riding Panel.

Representations to the Tribunal

33. The RURG was set up in 1990 to press for recognition of service at Ubon. The founder of RURG, Mr Mal Barnes, and its Executive Officer, Mr Richard Stone, appeared at a hearing of the Tribunal. Mr Barnes had served at Ubon in 1966 as a Leading Aircraftsman. Mr Stone had been there in 1968 as an Administrative Officer. Both men had given evidence to both the Riding and the Abigail reviews.

34. Evidence was given to the Tribunal also by:

Air Vice-Marshal Roxley McLennan AO, (Retd) National President,
Royal Australian Air Force Association
Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully, AO (Retd)
Wing Commander Peter Larard (Retd)
Group Captain John Jacobsen (Retd)

With the exception of Air Vice-Marshal McLennan, each of these witnesses had served as a Sabre pilot at Ubon during the relevant period (1965-68), and each had also been the Detachment Commander. All of them had appeared before the Riding Committee but none had given evidence to the Abigail Panel.

35. At the invitation of the Tribunal, Wing Commander Glen Hombsch (Retd), the Flight Commander of the Ubon ADG in 1967-68, gave evidence to the Tribunal relating to the role of the Defence Guards at the base.

37. Air Marshal Douglas Riding appeared before the Tribunal at the Tribunal's invitation. Air Marshal Riding had served as a pilot at Ubon and was the chair of the Riding Review.

38. Major General Peter Abigail was invited by the Tribunal to appear before it but declined, indicating that he did not wish to add anything to his report.

39. The Department of Defence, represented by Mr Pat Clarke and Mr Brett Mitchell, appeared before the Tribunal. The Defence Department maintains that the recommendation of 'no action be taken to offer further recognition including by way of VLSM, for service of RAAF personnel stationed at Ubon' in the Abigail Report was correct.

40. Twenty-four written submissions were received and taken into account by the Tribunal. All submissions except that from Defence supported recognition for those who served in Ubon by the award of either the VM or the VLSM.

Analysis of evidence

41. A consistent picture was presented by all witnesses. Ubon was a major base for US aircraft from the early 1960s. Initially it was used as part of the US's SEATO commitments. However, from 1965 the base was used by the USAF only for the air war against North Vietnam. It was not used for the defence of Thailand except by a squadron of RTAF piston driven planes (No. 22 Squadron, RTAF) which engaged in local area patrol duties. The USAF activities were devoted to the Vietnam War, not to the defence of Thailand which was no longer considered to be under threat of attack from any quarter.

42. The Mohr Review's description of the position is instructive. It said:

The US stance in Thailand changed from being concerned, primarily, with that country's air defence to one of using Thailand as a base for the USAF's increased aerial commitment to the military effort in the Vietnam conflict. As a consequence, the threat of retaliation from either China or North Vietnam against bases in Thailand from which USAF aircraft operated grew markedly. There was an increased threat posed to airfields in Thailand by direct aerial attacks, attacks on the USAF aircraft returning to Thailand and from ground attacks on airfields by communist insurgents. As Ubon was one of the most important USAF bases for its air operations in the Vietnam conflict, the threat to that airfield grew to quite a high level.

The Australian Defence Committee in 1965 reviewed the implications for Australia of the USAF build up of forces at Ubon. Notwithstanding the increased threat to Ubon, the Committee felt 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 mounted against North Vietnam could be considered by North Vietnam and Communist China as being similar to participation in the actual offensive operation.

Nevertheless, the Defence Committee considered:

... the probability of enemy air attacks [on Thailand] would be slight.

Despite this assessment, the RAAF's commitment to the air defence of Thailand was elevated to meet the increased threat posed by the USAF's escalating efforts in the Vietnam conflict. A critical conference was held on 12 June 1965 between Commander Second Air Division USAF and the Officer Commanding RAAF Ubon. At the conference it was proposed that the RAAF undertake the air defence alert tasks with its aircraft at 'Alert State Five', from dawn to dusk seven days a week.

'Alert State Five' required that two fully armed aircraft be held on an operational readiness platform, preflighted, with pilots in close presence, ready and able to become airborne within five minutes to engage an intruding aircraft with a view to its destruction. This was the highest 'alert state' that could be achieved. 'Alert State Two', which required pilots to be seated in their aircraft, was impossible because of extreme heat experienced in that climate, and the next alert state, which called for a 'Combat Air Patrol' to be mounted with two aircraft airborne at all times, was beyond the Squadron's capability.⁴

43. The RAAF Sabres were operated under specific ROE as specified in SEATO Plans 4 and 6, with the intention to preserve the integrity of Thailand's airspace. According to the RAAF Official Historian:

Pilots were given three conditions under which 'the use of force' against hostile aircraft was permissible: self defence; in the air defence of Thailand when instructed by the Air Board; and if requested by the Thai authorities in the event of an attack without prior warning and prior reference to the Board was not practicable.⁵

On 25 June 1965, the RAAF detachment officially became part of the Thai Integrated Air Defence System controlled out of the Headquarters in Bangkok. The ROE changed to allow the Sabre aircraft to be placed on five-minute alert. The order to 'scramble' the Sabres would come from the Thai Air Defence Commander and not the Australian Air Officer Commanding.

44. Upon the arrival of the USAF in April 1965, Australian, US and Thai forces regarded the base as an integrated entity. Australian forces personnel shared guard duties with the other forces. RAAF fire fighters participated in fire and rescue of US aircraft crash incidents, airfield accidents and ground fires. RAAF refuellers were also used to refuel US aircraft. There was a continuing exchange of information between the parties. Most significantly, the USAF did not allocate resources to the defence of the base. As noted previously, RAAF Sabres provided the air cover for the base and RAAF ADGs provided the ground cover by protecting the base perimeter and surrounding terrain.

45. The evidence to the Tribunal indicated that the perceived threat to the base was real. The author of the official history, the RAAF in Vietnam, noted that: 'The RAAF

⁴ Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75 (The Mohr Review), Chapter 6, pp 6-3 and 6-4. Italics in original. The official histories both agree with this position. Coulthard-Clark, p 89-90 and Stephens, p 277-78.

⁵ Stephens, p 276.

personnel so deployed there [to Ubon] had not the slightest doubt they were at war'.⁶ The Sabres of No. 79 Squadron were scrambled from time to time to meet an apparent threat from incoming aircraft. Orders to scramble came from the USAF. No engagement ever occurred but there were instances of suspected enemy aircraft turning away, presumably when the presence of the Sabres became known. While the Alert State Five applied only during daylight hours, there were occasions when the pilots were placed on standby at night.

46. The pilots' living quarters were alongside a very large fuel supply depot and adjacent to the runway from which the USAF Phantoms took off day and night. Sleep was problematic even when not on alert. Such a location meant the quarters were a target for enemy mortar attacks, another factor that highlighted the belief that the Australians were in a war-zone.

47. The ADGs conducted airfield defence duties 24 hours a day, seven days a week⁷. They conducted armed patrols outside the base perimeter at night as well as during the day. They occasionally conducted vehicle patrols outside of the base perimeter for up to distances of 20 kilometres. Patrols outside of the base perimeter were always accompanied by a Thai police officer.

48. All witnesses described the atmosphere on the base as 'tense'. They were always apprehensive of an attack. This was particularly because the USAF aircraft were not protected with revetments but were simply lined up on the airfield. There were usually around 70 aircraft at the base. They would have provided an opportune target for any enemy force. Witnesses who saw service in both Vietnam and at Ubon were unable to distinguish the sense of danger between the two areas of service. Indeed the guard work at Ubon was regarded by those who served in both theatres as more exacting than that in some areas of Vietnam.

49. The evidence all points to the purpose of the Australian engagement at Ubon in practice having changed in 1965 from providing assistance in the defence of Thailand under SEATO arrangements to providing support for the USAF air war against North Vietnam. This support was limited to the protection of the Ubon base and the USAF planes located there. Nonetheless, this was recognised by the US authorities as providing an essential element of their air operations under Operation ROLLING THUNDER. It was put to the Tribunal by one witness that the first step in any air power deployment is to secure the base from which operations are conducted. This step was taken for the USAF by the RAAF.⁸

The formal position

50. No evidence has been found stating that No. 79 Squadron was based in Ubon as part of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War. This was sufficient to persuade the Abigail Panel that no further award should be conferred for service with No. 79 Squadron. That Panel said:

⁶ Coulthard-Clark, p 11.

⁷ It was suggested by Defence that Ubon did not operate on weekends. This is not correct. The base may have been closed then but the air operations and the guard duties continued throughout the weekend.

⁸ Wing Commander Larard (Retd), interview, 6 October 2010.

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.

...

However, this type of co-operation [with the USAF at Ubon] and the provision of air defence within Thailand does not lead to a 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.

51. If the matter is to be determined having regard only to the position stated formally by the Australian Government at the time, the Tribunal would agree with the Abigail Panel's conclusion. However, it was put to the Tribunal that the matter should be determined by looking at the factual circumstances that existed in their totality and not just as appears on official documents.

The case for recognition

52. The Tribunal has seen ample indication in the mass of documents relating to No. 79 Squadron's assignment to Ubon that indicates that there was sensitivity in Thailand and Malaysia about the role of the Squadron. The Vietnam War was a point of considerable contention among South-East Asian countries and there was a strong desire by some of them to avoid any appearance of commitment to either side in the conflict. References are common to Thai concerns about the role of Ubon as a support base for the USAF air war over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The Australian documentation reflects these concerns.

53. There can be no doubt that the Australian Government did not wish it to appear publicly that No. 79 Squadron was engaged in the Vietnam War. Whether one can, or should, take the next step of saying that the Squadron was not engaged in that War seems to the Tribunal to be less certain. The documentation reveals a continuing dialogue between Australian and US Government representatives about the involvement of Australian forces in the War. The Ubon operation featured regularly in these discussions. The documentation is directed almost exclusively to the Vietnam War. The protection of Thailand rates barely a mention.

54. On the ground, the Australian involvement in the management of the airfield and the activities based on it was almost exclusively with the USAF. The RTAF was seen as a fringe player.

55. It is apparent that the Australian Government did not wish to expand the role of the Squadron beyond the Thai border. However, this seems to have been driven more by Thai sensitivities referred to above than any decision that it should represent the extent of the Australian involvement. There are suggestions, supported by the Defence Committee, for an expanded role but these were rejected expressly on political grounds. It might be noted that, at the same time as the government was specifying the limits to No. 79 Squadron's involvement, it was agreeing to an expansion of the Army and Naval

commitment to the War, and considering the deployment of a squadron of RAAF Canberra Bombers.

56. It is accepted that, from mid-1965, there was no external threat to Thailand except such as might flow from the fact of air bases in Thailand being used to attack North Vietnam. The only 'enemy' was North Vietnam and its allies. The primary task of the Squadron was to defend the Ubon air base.

57. The position seems to the Tribunal to be that the formal position was that No. 79 Squadron was at Ubon to protect Thailand from external aggression. From mid-1965, the practical reason for being there was to assist the USAF in its air war against North Vietnam. This is recognised by the Abigail Report which 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 Panel believes it reasonable to conclude that this outcome was both understood and accepted by the Australian government at the time.

58. However, as indicated above, the Abigail Panel considered that this did not warrant a finding of participation in the Vietnam War.

59. The Tribunal agrees with the Abigail Report's factual conclusions both on the formal basis on which No. 79 Squadron was present at Ubon and on the activities that were conducted by the Squadron at Ubon. The question that it must address is whether those conclusions lead to the rejection of a claim for recognition as they did for the Abigail Panel or whether it is appropriate to look behind that formal position to reach a conclusion on whether the Squadron's actions at Ubon (together with base support personnel) warrant recognition with a campaign medal.

Identification of 'the war'

60. The Tribunal considers that it is relevant to take into account the finding of the Mohr Review that determined that service at Ubon was 'warlike'. This conclusion was based on the following finding:

'Alert State Five' was not peacetime or garrison duty, nor was it a training exercise. 'Alert State Five' required that two fully armed aircraft be at the end of the runway with pilots in close presence, ready and able to be airborne within five minutes to engage an intruding aircraft with a view to its destruction, subject to identification or lack of it. The danger of casualties was clearly forecast.

The question then remains as to whether or not this was 'warlike' or 'non-warlike'. Did the squadron face an objective danger? Did they 'incur' danger? Even though no danger eventuated in the sense that there were no actual combat engagements, they were armed for combat and had been told by those who knew more of the situation that danger did exist and they must hold themselves in readiness to meet it, not at some indeterminable time in the future, but at five minutes notice.

In regard to base security this fell into two distinct areas. First, there was security within the base itself. The Review heard from a number of those who have been at Ubon. It is clear from what was said that within the base itself the RAAF contingent had prepared defensive protection and arms had been issued for use if needs be. Second, the ADGs patrolled both day and night outside the perimeter of the base and in so doing saw evidence of terrorist activity. So far as it is known they were never engaged in an exchange of fire, but the danger of terrorist activity in the general area was known and precautions taken. These patrols were armed and authorised to fire if the situation called for fire.

The Rules of Engagement for the RAAF contingent from 1965 onwards signified that contact with hostile forces of an enemy should be expected and that these hostile forces were to be engaged in armed combat with the aim of destroying them. In these circumstances there was an expectation of casualties.

Conclusion

It is my opinion that, in the final analysis, the period of service at Ubon in the period 1965-1968 was warlike in nature. Their service, most certainly comparable with many other groups of the three services in other similar limited conflicts, should properly be rewarded with the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements.

61. The Government accepted the Report's recommendation by its approval of the award of the AASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND' to those serving at Ubon.

62. It is difficult to see what the operation was that could be classified as warlike other than the war against North Vietnam or its allies.⁹ There was no circumstance post-July 1965 involving Thailand that could be described as warlike – except the threat of attack from North Vietnam. This threat arose from the air campaign being undertaken by the USAF as part of the Vietnam War.

63. Whatever might have been said in the formal decisions relating to the retention of No. 79 Squadron in Ubon, it is clear that the real purpose of its posting was to assist the USAF air campaign against North Vietnam. There was no other reason for the Squadron to be there. Thailand was not under independent threat. The proposal was that the Squadron be returned to Australia when the threat to Thailand came to an end in 1965. It was in response to US requests that the Squadron was left at Ubon.

Conclusion on eligibility for award

64. It seems to the Tribunal to be splitting hairs to say that No. 79 Squadron was retained at Ubon for the defence of Thailand and not as part of the Vietnam War effort when it is recognised that it was the use of Thai bases in support of that War that was providing the threat to Thailand.

65. The extent to which Australian decision-making was tailored to the political sensitivities of the time is demonstrated by the evidence to the Tribunal of the subterfuges

⁹ The Tribunal noted that the Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour recognises the two members of the RAAF detachment who died during the Ubon detachment, 1965-1968.

practised to replace aircraft stationed at Ubon with new aircraft based at RAAF Base Butterworth in Malaysia when routine maintenance was required. Two Sabres would be flown in from Butterworth as escort for transport aircraft and swapped at the base for the Sabres that were to be serviced. This, it was said, avoided the Malaysian Government being made aware of the regular use that was being made of the Sabres at Ubon. Whether this deceived the Malaysians may be doubted, but it met the political niceties that were regarded as a necessity.

66. The question therefore is whether, after 45 years, it is now possible to confront the reality of No. 79 Squadron's involvement in the Vietnam War. In the Tribunal's view it is time for it to be recognised that the Squadron was making a significant contribution to the air campaign directed against North Vietnam. It provided the protection of an important base on behalf of the USAF. This is how the US viewed what the Squadron was doing and the Tribunal considers that it is the correct view of the Squadron's actions.

Recognition flowing from this conclusion

67. The Tribunal's TOR requires it to make findings and recommendations as to the eligibility of ADF members who served at Ubon between 25 June 1965 and 31 August 1968 'for the VLSM or the granting of any other form of recognition for their service'.

68. Some witnesses before the Tribunal urged the recommendation of the VM. They said that No. 79 Squadron and the ADG members were as much engaged in the Vietnam War as those in the geographical area of Vietnam. They were 'at the sharp end' of the conflict. It was said that the making of awards by reference to geographical areas based on a ground war failed to have proper regard to the practicalities of air war. Operations involving aircraft are often not confined to the boundaries of a war's area of operation (AO). It is not sufficient to recognise air support only in terms of flights over the designated AO. Significant contributions are made and danger encountered outside the AO which should be recognised by the campaign medal appropriate to service in the AO.

69. It was this line of approach that had resulted in the Riding Report recommending the award of the VM. The Tribunal has sympathy for this approach and it should be taken into account when determining eligibility in relation to future conflicts. However, the Government has rejected the award of the VM to the Ubon personnel and the Tribunal is not persuaded that there is such a clear case for its award as to warrant a fresh recommendation.

70. The Tribunal considers that the position in regard to the VLSM is different. This medal was struck to recognise service personnel who had given essential and direct logistic support to Australian forces in Vietnam. As noted previously, the VLSM is awarded to persons who served in the Vietnam AO 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. Service does not have to be on the Vietnam land area but includes service up to 185 km off the coast. This picked up the service of those who served on the HMAS SYDNEY. Service on RAAF Hercules transport aircraft also qualified for the medal.

71. The Tribunal considers that service at Ubon from July 1965 equates with the type of service for which the VLSM has been awarded. The USAF air war directed against North Vietnam was an integral part of the conflict in which Australian forces were engaged. There is no doubt in the Tribunal's view that the Australian personnel at Ubon performed an essential support role for the USAF. As recognised by the government, they were engaged in warlike activities and that war was the Vietnam War. The Tribunal concluded that service at Ubon from 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 should be recognised with the award of the VLSM.

72. The Tribunal was not pressed to recommend any other form of recognition for service at Ubon and it makes no such recommendation.

Possible flow on from award of VLSM

73. The Tribunal directed its attention to other service that might claim to be in a position equivalent to that of service personnel at Ubon. No other personnel of whom the Tribunal is aware served under like conditions to those at Ubon. Accordingly, the Tribunal does not consider that there is likely to be any legitimate claims for further recognition.

74. The Tribunal's recommendation is based on the immediate support provided by Ubon personnel to the USAF at the Ubon base, the level of preparedness that this support demanded and the nature of the threat to the base. These conditions were not replicated, for example, at RAAF Base Butterworth. Nor did they apply to RAAF personnel involved in the observation of the combat flying of USAF F-111s under Operation COMBAT LANCER at RTAF Base Takhli. These personnel are mentioned in the Mohr Review. However, they were not involved in direct logistical support of the kind provided at Ubon, nor were they under the same level of threat.

75. For the same reason that the Mohr Review did not find that service at Ubon prior to 25 June 1965 should be regarded as 'warlike', the Tribunal finds that such service does not qualify for the award of the VLSM.

RECOMMENDATIONS

76. The Tribunal makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: RAAF personnel who served at Ubon air base in Thailand from 25 June 1965 until 31 August 1968 be awarded the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal.

Recommendation 2: The Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal Regulations be amended to give effect to this recommendation.

Appendix 1 – Submissions

The Tribunal received submissions from the following people and organisations:

Donald Godfrey Battams
Allen Burns
Squadron Leader Trevor Butler (Retd)
Vittorio Carbone
Terry Deery
Department of Defence
Warren E Dickson
Mike Fogarty
Claude Halsey
Group Captain John Jacobsen (Retd)
John Jeffreys
Cecil John Edmund Levien BEM
Peter Edward Lewis
Henry Michael Loeckenhoff
Robert Manning
Michael Morrissey
Maxwell James Pahl
Denys Potts
Royal Australian Air Force Association
RAAF Ubon Branch SA Division
RAAF Ubon Reunion Recognition Group
Joseph Douglas Richards
Sydney Ryan
Arthur Skimin

Appendix 2 – Tribunal Hearings

15 September 2010

Chair: Professor Dennis Pearce, AO

Members: Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd) and Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

06 October 2010

Chair: Professor Dennis Pearce, AO

Members: Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd) and Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

Witnesses:

Air Vice-Marshal Roxley McLennan, AO (Retd), National President RAAF Association

Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully, AO (Retd) (via Teleconference)

Wing Commander Peter Larard (Retd) (via Teleconference)

08 October 2010

Chair: Professor Dennis Pearce, AO

Members: Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd) and Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

Witnesses:

Group Captain John Jacobsen (Retd) (via Teleconference)

Pat Clark and Brett Mitchell, Department of Defence

Mal Barnes and Richard Stone, RAAF Ubon Recognition Group

Air Marshal Douglas Riding, AO, DFC (Retd)

21 October 2010

Chair: Professor Dennis Pearce, AO

Members: Air Commodore Mark Lax, OAM, CSM (Retd) and Mr Kevin Woods, CSC, OAM

Witness:

Wing Commander Glen Hombsch (Retd) (via Teleconference)

Appendix 3 – Additional Material Examined by the Tribunal

Archival Records

National Archives of Australia

Series A1209

1961/600 SEATO Plan 5 (Defence Committee)

1962/122 SEATO MPO Plan 7

Published sources

Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995

Alan Stephens, *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force, 1946-1971*, AGPS, Canberra, 1995

Other sources

The previous official reports concerning Ubon service are listed and summarised at Appendices 4 and 5

Appendix 4 – Summary of RAAF Involvement at Ubon¹⁰

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, No. 79 Squadron and Base Squadron Ubon.

The original 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 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.

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 No. 79 Squadron at Ubon in the air defence role at a high state of alert. This was supported by the Department of External

¹⁰ *Report by the Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968, 2004, pp 17-19.*

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, 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.

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

Expanding the role of No. 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 No. 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 No. 79 Squadron's participation in this plan.

No. 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.

No. 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.

No. 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 No. 79 Squadron from its alert status.

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

Appendix 5 – Summary of Previous Ubon Reviews

RAAF service at Ubon between 1965 and 1968 has been the subject of five previous reviews. This Appendix summarises the findings, recommendations and Government decision for each case.

TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF REVIEWS

Review	Date Complete	Recommendation	Outcome
CIDA	1994	Service be recognised by ASM 45-75 with Clasp 'UBON'	ASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'
Defence/DVA Review	1997	Service be classed as 'Operational'	Service classed as 'Operational'
Mohr	2000	Service be classed as 'Warlike' ASM 1945-75 upgraded to AASM 1945-75	Service classed as 'Warlike' AASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'
Riding	2004	Service be recognised with the Vietnam Medal	No change
Abigail	2008	No further recommendation	No change

The Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence-Related Awards (CIDA)

Intent: A comprehensive two-stage public inquiry into the Australian system of honours and awards.¹¹

Dates of Review: May 1993 – March 1994.

Findings/Recommendations:¹²

The Committee recommended 'that service of Australian personnel at Royal Thai Airforce (*sic*) base at Ubon be recognised through the Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp 'UBON'. The relevant qualifying period should be 30 days.

The Committee recommended that members of 2 Field Troop Royal Australian Engineers and other Australian personnel who participated in Operation Crown and served in Ban Kok Talat between January 1964 and May 1966 should also be awarded the Australian Service Medal 1945-75 with Clasp 'UBON', with the relevant qualifying period of 30 days.

Outcome/Government Decision: ASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'

¹¹ Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence-Related Awards, March 1994 (hereafter called CIDA), p i.

¹² CIDA pp vi, 45-46

1997 Defence/DVA Report on Service Entitlement Anomalies Review (The Defence/DVA Review)

Intent: A joint-interdepartmental review to consider four specific periods of service by members of the ADF where it is claimed anomalies in regard to eligibility for repatriation benefit exists. One of the four periods of service examined was the RAAF contingent at Ubon in Thailand, 31 May 1962 to 31 August 1968.¹³

Dates: 1997

Findings/Recommendations:

It recommended that members serving at Ubon in Thailand from 31 May 1962 to 31 August 1968 be accorded operational service under the provisions of the *Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986*.¹⁴

Outcome/Government Decision: Upgrade of service from non-operational to operational.

Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75 (The Mohr Review)

Intent: A review of possible anomalies in service entitlements affecting those members of the Australian Defence Force who served in South-East Asia during the period 1955-75.¹⁵

Dates of Review: April 1999 – February 2000

Findings/Recommendation:

The Committee recommended that 'RAAF service at Ubon in the period 25 June 1965 until the Squadron was withdrawn on 31 August 1968 be classified as 'warlike' operational service and that personnel be eligible for the appropriate repatriation and medal entitlements'.¹⁶

Outcome/Government Decision: Upgrade of ASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND' to AASM 1945-75 with Clasp 'THAILAND'.

Independent Review Panel on Vietnam Campaign Recognition for RAAF Service at Ubon, Thailand, 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968 (The Riding Review)

Intent: To establish whether the additional information presented by the RAAF Ubon Recognition Group provided sufficient evidence for amending the regulations governing

¹³ 1997 Defence/DVA Report on Service Entitlement Anomalies Review (hereafter called the Defence/DVA Review), pp 9-13.

¹⁴ Defence/DVA Review, p 13.

¹⁵ Review of Service Entitlement Anomalies in Respect of South-East Asian Service 1955-75, February 2000 (hereafter called the Mohr Review), p v.

¹⁶ Mohr Review, pp xvi, 73.

the award of the VLSM to cover Ubon service during the period 25 June 1965 to 31 August 1968.¹⁷

Dates: June 2004 – July 2004.

Findings/Recommendations:

Inter alia, that ‘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’.

The Review recommended to the Minister that ‘the Vietnam Medal be awarded to personnel who served on the posted strength of the RAAF Contingent at Ubon, No. 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’.¹⁸

Outcome/Government Decision: Recommendation not accepted as outside the TORs.

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

Intent: An independent panel to review the treatment of award recommendations stemming from the Battle of Lon Tan, and service medal recognition for service with RAAF Ubon.¹⁹

Dates of Review: October 2007 – March 2008

Findings/Recommendation:

The Panel recommended that ‘no further action be taken to offer 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’.²⁰

Outcome/Government Decision: Government accepted the review findings.

¹⁷ 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 (hereafter called the Riding Review), p 2.

¹⁸ The Riding Review, pp 35-36

¹⁹ Review of service recognition for RAAF Ubon (1965-68) (hereafter called the Abigail Review), p v.

²⁰ The Abigail Review, pp vii, 15.