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Magpie 91

“Magpie 91 suddenly vanished”

Following a night bombing mission in the Quang Nam region of South Vietnam, near Da Nang, on 3 November 1970, a Canberra aircraft of No 2 Squadron, A84-231, call sign Magpie 91, failed to return to Phan Rang Air Base, in the south east of South Vietnam, after bomb release.

It was an uneventful flight. In Magpie 91 - the Canberra's call-sign - they flew over the jungle-matted hills and deep ravines of the enemy-held territory near the Laotian border. At 8.22pm, six bombs were dropped on the target and the plane headed for home. "That was an excellent run, sir," said the U.S. radar officer. "It looked real good down here, and we enjoyed working with you and see you again another day." Herbert replied briefly: "Magpie 91."

Exactly 70 seconds later, without any warning, Magpie 91 suddenly vanished. Dozens of intensive search-and-rescue missions carried out over the next 72 hours by both Australian and U.S. aircraft failed to find any trace of it. A court of inquiry held in Vietnam in subsequent days could not find a reason for the disappearance. The weather was fine, Herbert had been flying above the range of anti-aircraft artillery, and there were no known North Vietnamese missile launch sites near the flight path.

Under control of the Combat Sky Spot ground radar site, MILKY, the crew released 6 x M117 (750lb, 340kg) bombs at 22,000 feet at 2022 local time. Following release, the pilot reported "six away, breaking left" and maintained communications with MILKY for 1 min 16 seconds after weapon release, at which time MAGPIE 91 should have changed frequency to PANAMA Control and Reporting Centre for flight-following during the high level transit south to Phan Rang.

The crew of MAGPIE 91 did not communicate with PANAMA and were never heard from again. The last known position of MAGPIE 91, recorded by a radar station near Da Nang at 2022 hrs local time, was latitude 15°45' North longitude 107°40' East, with the aircraft level at FL220, heading 120 M direct for Phan Rang.

It was a fine night for flying. No storms, gentle winds, and nothing but thin cirrus clouds above 6000 feet.

MAGPIE 91, flown by Flight Officer Michael Herbert with Pilot Officer Robert Carver as bomb-aimer, executed a near perfect bomb drop from 22,000 feet at night and were lost without a trace after their run.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert, from Glenelg, had already flown 198 missions for the RAAF in Vietnam, and he had less than 80 days' service left in Vietnam when he left the Phan Rang Air Base on November 3, 1970, for a bombing mission on the Laotian border.

After a three day intensive aerial search by 2 Squadron members and USAF forces failed to locate the aircraft or the crew, pilot Flying Officer Michael Herbert and navigator Pilot Officer Robert Carver, were listed as 'missing'. An early search for MIAs in 1984 failed to find any

evidence of the aircraft wreckage or crew.

Michael Herbert was a conscientious and experienced pilot, with an abiding love for planes and flying. Awarded his civil pilot's licence (correct spelling in Australian English) when he was just 16, if he wasn't in the air, his idea of a good time was reading flying magazines. His navigator, Pilot Officer Robert Carver, from Toowoomba in Queensland, had only been in Vietnam for a couple of months, but he had impressed his superiors at the Phan Rang airbase as being alert and enthusiastic, and developing "extremely well" as an officer.

Their plane, Canberra bomber A84-231, was an ageing but reliable workhorse. Their mission was later described by their flight operations officer as a "most routine sortie". Herbert and Carver took off from Phan Rang on the evening of November 3, 1970, and some time later made radio contact with the U.S. radar officer who was directing them to the target.

Herbert and Carver were simply gone, lost without a trace in the black Vietnamese night. They were both 24. They were never heard from again.

Number 2 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force, flying Canberra jet bombers, conducted bombing missions from Phan Rang air base in South Vietnam from May 1967 to June 1971. Two aircraft were lost in these operations.

This was the first Canberra down, A84-231, flown by Flying Officers Mike Herbert (pilot) and Bob Carver (navigator/bomb-aimer). The aircraft (with radio call sign *Magpie 91*) never returned from a night-time ground radar-directed *Combat Skyspot* bombing mission on 3 November 1970.

Following a lengthy investigation early in 2009, the RAAF and Army Historical Unit, aided with information from the local Vietnamese population, discovered aircraft wreckage in April 2009, about 3.5 Km from the LKP which was later confirmed to be remains of A84-231. Although little remained of the wreckage, sufficient significant items were identified as that of the missing Canberra.

In July 2009, a RAAF-led team returned to the wreckage site to search for and recover any crew remains. A combined forensic and aircraft investigation team confirmed remains found were

those of Mike Herbert and Bob Carver, 39 years after they went missing.

Magpie 41

The second was Canberra A84-228, with radio call sign *Magpie 41*, piloted by the No. 2 Squadron Commanding Officer, Wing Commander John Downing, with navigator/bomb-aimer, Flight Lieutenant Allan Pinches. Both airmen safely ejected from their stricken aircraft after it was hit by a ground-launched SA-2 surface-to-air missile, while also flying a *Combat Sky Spot* bombing mission in daylight conditions over the Quang Tri region of South Vietnam on 14 March 1971.

Of great historical significance to Australia, this event was the first, and to date the only, loss of a RAAF aircraft shot down by a guided missile of any sort, air-to-air or surface-to-air.

THE EJECTION AND RESCUE

Neither Wing Commander John Downing nor Flight Lieutenant Allan Pinches should have flown on that fateful Sunday, 14 March 1971, three months before No. 2 Squadron pulled out of Phan Rang air base in South Vietnam to return home to Amberley air base in Queensland, Australia, for good.

Allan was off duty, but he came back on so a fellow navigator could play in a cricket match on the Phan Rang air base. It was probably an Officers versus Sergeants or Airmen match that was played on a strip of dirt located on one of the baseball parks on the American base. No. 2 Squadron also played cricket against its sister American squadron, the 8th Bomb Squadron, who flew the US-built version of the Canberra, the B-57. Of course the Americans had to first be taught how to play the game, which originated in England!

Then Commanding Officer of No. 2 Squadron, John, should have been on recreation leave. Only the day before he had kissed his wife Louise goodbye after their few precious days together in Malaysia. He returned to the squadron two days earlier than planned in order to help ease the burden of missions on his pilots.

Together they climbed aboard Canberra A84-228 and took off at 1.30 p.m. local time, flying

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north for an hour from Phan Rang to arrive at the Demilitarized Zone dividing South and North Vietnam, and also close to the Laotian border. They were supporting *Operation Lam Son 719*, which was a major push by South Vietnamese forces into Laos aimed at cutting the enemy’s supply route coming south along Ho Chi Minh trail.

On this occasion, John was seated forward in his perspex bubble cockpit flying the Canberra manually at an altitude of 14,000 feet, flying what was code-named a *Combat Sky Spot* mission. In this situation, instead of unstrapping from his ejection seat (in what was commonly known as “the black hole of Calcutta”, the navigator-bomb-aimer’s cramped compartment) to crawl forward and drop his bombs using a bomb-sight located in the clear glass nose of the Canberra, Allan the navigator, remained seated behind John, strapped into his ejection seat where he selected and triggered bomb release when they were told to drop by the ground-based radar operator.

As they turned, under radioed instructions, onto their final bombing heading at 250 knots air speed, Allan leant forward in his seat harness to select the load of six 750 lb bombs that they were about to drop. It was 2.45 p.m. and “Then the bloody sky fell in,” said John, “A terrific explosion seemed to envelop the aircraft”. He was wondering what had happened when he saw a SAM (surface to air missile) go past. Then he knew that they had been hit. Canberra 228 was still under control, but it obviously couldn’t last. He called to Allan that they had been struck by a SAM and that they had to eject. Out they both went in their separate Martin Baker ejection seats, plummeting downward and sky-diving initially so they would not get their parachute lines entangled with each other’s as they opened. John’s parachute blossomed automatically early at around 12,000 feet but Allan’s failed to do so. He recalled being annoyed, not only because John’s parachute had opened and his hadn’t, but also due to the noise and because his watch had been ripped off his arm in the ejection. He was about to try opening his ‘chute by pulling the ripcord when it finally opened automatically at around 10,000 feet altitude, slowing him down.

As the two men floated towards the clouds below they saw the Canberra spiraling away in a graceful arc, its right wing sheathed in flames and beginning to disintegrate. “It looked quite beautiful,” said Allan. Then they entered heavy cloud with near zero visibility, heading down fast, into a new danger – the forbidding, jungle-covered mountain country around Quang Tri province.

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John crashed through sparse trees into the side of a steep mountain ridge 3,000 feet high, landing on his knees, fracturing one kneecap in the process and badly bruising the other, gashing both. Allan ploughed through the jungle canopy of another ridge to end his fall dangling only two feet above the boulder-strewn ground. Luckily, his parachute had snagged in tree branches overhead. Allan had four vertebrae fractured when he ejected and had he landed directly on those boulders it could have been catastrophic for him.

As they struggled free of their harnesses, neither man fully realized the extent of their injuries. John figured his knees were merely bruised and cut, while Allan thought his broken back and broken wrist were most likely sprains or dislocations. They had other things on their minds, as where they had come down was in Viet Cong country - literally unfriendly tiger territory.

The first thing that John did was to collect his survival gear, including pistol, compasses, radio, flares, jungle knives, maps and water, and proceeded to distance himself from the site in case the enemy were looking for them. He left behind the heavy inflatable dinghy and several other pieces, heading up the mountain for a ridge line where he could overlook the valley below and find a good rescue spot. He called for help on his emergency radio whenever he stopped for a rest, but received no answer. By this time he was feeling dry and it was raining like hell, so he collected water in palm leaves and drank it.

As it got dark very quickly in the jungle, he set about finding somewhere dry and secure to spend the night, crawling along a steep rock ledge and finding a sort of cave which was reasonably dry. About 400 yards away, Allan was lying huddled under his life raft. He had been through bad times. His broken back was painful and he had difficulty moving - every breath was agony. He tried to make it up the ridge, but he couldn't do it. Instead, when he thought he heard traffic below, he decided to head down into the valley, dragging with him all his survival gear, about 70lb of it.

There were lots of boulders and fallen logs around, but the cliffs were worse. They were only 9-10 feet high but very hard to negotiate. In the process he dropped some of his gear, including a jungle knife, helmet and a compass, but his back injury stopped him bending over to pick them up. After only travelling a few hundred yards in a couple of hours, Allan realized that he'd never make it to the valley floor, so he began looking for a place to hide, somewhere suitable for a

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rescue pick-up.

Finally, he found what must have once been a Montagnard garden, containing an overgrown sweet potato patch and some old banana trees in a semi-cleared area. As it got dark he crawled under his dinghy to keep the rain off. That night was to be the longest in the two men’s lives. Both were soaked to the skin, both were cold and hungry, and both were in pain that kept them awake all night. Neither man used the morphine in his pack: they were saving it in case things got worse.

Throughout that time, their emergency beeping radio signals were getting no response at all. “We were optimistic that help would come,” said John, “but we were prepared to wait a few days for it.” With night came the frightening noises of the Vietnamese jungle. Birds hooted, branches snapped, strange animals screeched, raindrops spattered on palm leaves sounding like pistol shots. And from a distance there was a continuous thump of artillery and the drone of aircraft. Minutes dragged like hours. Both men were worried.

Next to John’s cave was another. It was larger and possibly the home of a tiger. “If it was, I was lucky,” he said, “because the big cat didn’t come home that night.” “At one stage,” said Allan, “I saw a torch coming through the jungle at me and I was wondering what I could toss at it. Then it came closer – and I realized it was a firefly. Sometime later I froze again. Something was gnawing a bone about 10 feet behind me, I couldn’t turn to see - not that I would have done. I just waited until it stopped. It was something big, probably a wild pig, maybe even a tiger.” During their long night they thought of their loving families back in Australia. At dawn the men continued their radio calls and looked around. “I nibbled on a few roots,” said John, “They tasted like beans. Then I set out for the top of the ridge to get my bearings.”

Meanwhile, Allan was trying the pulpy centre of a small palm tree for taste. “It was like wet sawdust,” he said. “I had plenty to drink, though. The night before I chopped a vine off and tied a chuck bag on the end of it. By morning it was full of clear water.”

Time dragged slowly on and it wasn’t until about midday that their spirits were given a terrific boost when, at last, they made radio contact with each other. “It was bloody marvelous to hear Al’s voice,” said John. “We had quite a talk”. The two downed airmen then alternated their distress calls to conserve battery power.

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It was finally in mid-afternoon that their signals were picked up by a high flying search and rescue plane, a USAF C-130 Hercules with the call-sign of *King 26*. At precisely the same time, Australian Air Force Padre Bill Wheeler was conducting a prayer service back at Phan Rang - it was a special service for the safety of the two missing airmen. Upon detecting the beep from the Aussie radios, *King 26* called in smaller, more versatile, O-2 Forward Air Control aircraft, with call sign *Barky*. Flying lower and in and out of scuddy clouds (a formation of low fractostratus clouds driven by a strong wind beneath rain-bearing clouds), they collectively refined the position of the downed airmen good enough to call in a rescue UH-1 Iroquois helicopter capable of picking them up.

It took the U.S. Army rescue helicopter, call sign *Dustoff 713*, sometime to find them. “That pilot was fantastic,” said John. “In heavy cloud he flew up and down the sides of those mountains trying to locate us. They were stinking weather conditions and we almost had to call off the rescue at one stage,” he said.

But the helicopter pilot persisted and, an hour after contact was made - 5.34 p.m. local time - John was winched up into the hovering aircraft overhead. Meanwhile, Allan had dragged himself through some heavy jungle undergrowth to an area cleared by bomb blasts. “When the pilot came in to pick me up he actually chopped away tree branches with his helicopter’s rotors,” he said. “He was really sticking his neck out.” Grabbing hold precariously of the jungle penetrator device dangling from the rescue helicopter, Allen was swiftly launched into the air and safely hauled on board at 5.37 p.m. It was dark by the time they both were taken to the 18th Surgical Hospital at Quang Tri.

The news flashed back to Aussie squadron at Phan Rang and the men there went wild with relief – and had a party to end all parties. Secretly they had little hope that their friends were still alive after a day and a half of no news. The survivors were X-rayed, clothed in dry pyjamas and bundled into beds. Transferred to Cam Ranh Bay hospital, they met Arthur Barnes, the squadron second-in-charge, who came in with a big briefcase and told them, “I have some confidential papers for you”. Then he opened the case: it was crammed full with cans of the very popular *Four X* beer from Queensland, Australia.

About a week later they were flown home to be met at RAAF Base Amberley by their wives

waiting there when the lumbering C-130 Hercules touched down. It was a tearful reunion. John hobbled home to recuperate and Allan was wheeled into hospital for another eight weeks on his back.

The Painting of Magpie 41



Painting of Canberra A84-228, with radio call sign *Magpie 41*, by artist David Marshall.

THE TITLE – A SLIGHT INACCURACY



The title of David Marshall’s painting is “RAAF Magpie 228 Takes A Fatal Hit”, however this is inaccurate as the aircraft was not known as “Magpie 228”. Each day, No 2 Squadron crews were allocated radio call-signs with the prefix *Magpie*, and numbering started with the first mission as 11, finishing at 81 or 91, the eighth or ninth and final mission for the day.

The Canberra being flown by Wing Commander Downing was numbered A84-228, with the latter three numbers prominently marked on the rear fuselage as can be seen from an air-to-air shot taken on another mission from an accompanying Canberra. Wing Commander Downing was flying the fourth mission for the day, and his call-sign was *Magpie 41*. It is understandable how a person unaware of this detail would merge the two items – Magpie and the aircraft number – to derive “*Magpie 228*”.



The painting is how the artist - David Marshall - envisaged the ejection. Mr. Marshall, now deceased, was a well-known aviation artist, who was keen for the RAAF to own his Canberra painting as he felt passionately about the faithfulness of his creation to the actual event.

The painting was sold by the artist to former RAAF pilot - Squadron Leader Barry Carpenter - who flew 240 bombing missions in No 2 Squadron Canberra jets in Vietnam from December 1969 to November 1970.

Living offshore, Barry recognized the present No 2 Squadron’s keen desire to have the painting displayed at its Headquarters at RAAF Base Williamtown, near Newcastle. Having acquired the original, he offered it on loan to the unit until his return to Australia. There it has remained until recently.

Barry, who still resides in Hong Kong where he works for Cathay Pacific Airways, decided that the uniqueness of this painting, depicting a very historical moment for the RAAF, suggested that it would be most appropriate for it to be displayed at the Australian War Memorial (AWM), in Australia’s capital city, Canberra, for all Australians to appreciate.

PRESENTATION

A small, but significant and moving, ceremony was held at the Australian War Memorial on the 47th anniversary of the ejection, 14 March 2018. The original painting was moved from No. 2 Squadron’s Headquarters at RAAF Base, Williamtown, to the Memorial in Canberra, and through Barry Carpenter’s generosity the unit received in its place a full-sized print of the original. Barry also arranged for full-sized prints to be given to Wing Commander Downing and the family of Flight Lieutenant Pinches, who is now deceased.

Many former No. 2 Squadron Vietnam veterans, together with the current Commanding Officer of the squadron, Wing Commander Jason Brown, attended the handover ceremony in Canberra, where the surviving pilot, John Downing, described his ejection experiences. Together with Brad Pinches, son of the late Allan, he unveiled the original painting donated by Barry.



David Marshall handing the original in 2011 to then-Executive Officer of No. 2 Squadron, Squadron Leader Simon Wildermuth.

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Squadron Leader Barry Carpenter on the left and his navigator-bomb-aimer, Bob Howe, with their passenger, Brig General Wallace L. Clement (center), Commander, Military Assistance Command Training (MACT), US Army, before a bombing mission on 26 April 1970.



The nose of a Canberra jet bomber on display at the **Australian War Memorial**. The bomb-aimer would track the target, open the bomb-bay doors and release the bombs from his prone position up front. As can be seen, this display even includes a wide-eyed model inside, depicting a bomb-aimer in action.

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The Commemoration Courtyard of the Australian War Memorial



The Roll of Honour, which has the names of over 102,000 Australian who have died during, or

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as a result of, serving in wars. Relatives of deceased veterans have placed many poppies beside these names. The seven members of No. 2 Squadron, who died on service in Vietnam, inscribed at the War Memorial in the picture below.



Accompanying Brad Pinches and John Downing, are the Chief of Air Force, Australia, Air Marshal Leo Davies (left) and former Chief and also former Commanding Officer of No. 2 Squadron in Vietnam, Air Marshal David Evans(right).

Also at the War Memorial on this occasion, those who didn't return home alive from Vietnam were remembered. This photo shows Arthur Rennick, Secretary of No. 2 Squadron Association and the present Commanding Officer of No. 2 Squadron, Wing Commander Jason Brown, laying wreaths in their memory.



The Vietnam veterans of No. 2 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force look forward to seeing the painting hanging on the walls of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra for all visitors to see and to be aware of what happened on that fateful day in 1971.

POSTSCRIPT

Several days after the AWM ceremony, an elated John Downing advised that through his discussions with former No. 2 Squadron attendees, he was able to get contact details of the actual person who personally packed his parachute 47 years before. John has now happily passed on photos from the ceremony in Canberra to him.



The Hunt for Magpie 91

The RAAF Canberra aircraft, call-sign Magpie 91, crashed in dense jungle on a hillside near the border with Laos. Nearly four decades after the plane dropped off the radar, the Australian Defence Force announced that the wreckage of the Canberra bomber had been found in inhospitable jungle in central Vietnam's Quang Nam province. In April 2009, Major Jack Thurgar, from the Army History Unit, and RAAF Squadron Leader John Cotterell told how they had trekked through the jungle to the crash site and found various items of equipment which determined, definitively, that the wreckage was from the plane of the last two Australians missing in action in Vietnam.

The search for A84-231 had been hampered by political apathy and language and cultural barriers, blocked by restrictions on classified material, and finally hamstrung by the sheer impregnability of Vietnam's jungle-covered mountains.

It took 12 years for the first humans to lay eyes on the crash site. Sometime in 1982, three hunters found the wreckage in the jungle of the Truong Son range near the Laotian border. The hunters, from the KaTu people of the mountains, couldn't read or write and spoke little mainstream Vietnamese. News of their discovery wasn't reported to anyone. For decades the mountain crash site quietly mouldered, visited only by dirt-poor villagers who made off with wire to use in snares, and various bits of metal to sell.

Finally spurred into action by veterans, particularly Jim Bourke from Operation Aussies Home, the RAAF decided to forge ahead with an attempt to find the lost officers and their bomber.

Bourke had been central to the 2007 discovery in Vietnam of other Australians missing in action, and he had written an exhaustive report on Herbert and Carver. He never let up.

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Thurgar was made lead investigator by the RAAF. He went back over all the paperwork, the court of inquiry report, the voice transcripts of the radio transmissions between the plane and the radar officer, the service history of Carver and Herbert, the U.S. records, and the data from a five-man Australian delegation of diplomats and military personnel who visited Quang Nam in 1984 in search of information in a brief and fruitless expedition.

Thurgar went to Quang Nam in January 2009 to talk to the local people and to the commanders of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army stationed in the vicinity in November, 1970 - he finally tracked them down following extensive research.

"The Americans wouldn't tell me what the target was; it turned out it was a classified mission," he says. "I needed to get accurate information." Le Ngoc Bay, then a lieutenant in command of the reconnaissance platoon of the North Vietnamese 141st regiment, now a senior colonel, told Thurgar he remembered the plane that had dropped six bombs near their hidden mountain headquarters in November 1970. He was one of three North Vietnamese Army soldiers who told Thurgar they heard the bombing and saw the flashes.

The bombs came close to knocking out the BT44 military command unit, where the North Vietnamese had earlier transmitted on a 15-watt radio, thus revealing their position to U.S. forces and setting them up as a target for Carver and Herbert's bombs.

With the information provided by the North Vietnamese military officers, and knowing the plane had been lost within a couple of minutes of dropping the bombs, Thurgar zeroed in on the villages closest to the crash site. At his request, Vietnamese officials visited the villages of Thon Vinh and Ta Bhing, and three elderly KaTu men stepped up to say they knew of a place deep in the jungle, in Czun Canyon, where they had found remnants of a plane many years before.

"The KaTu are Montagnards, hunters; they use crossbows and blowpipes to this day," Thurgar says. "They have their own culture, their own language. These three gentlemen can't read or write, but they confirmed they had taken wire from the site to make snares."

One young KaTu man volunteered to trek to the crash site and bring pieces back for examination. Thurgar told him to bring something with numbers, if he possibly could, and take

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photographs with a camera supplied by a Vietnamese official. The young man returned three days later bearing two crumpled bits of metal, and a ruined camera (it had rained heavily in the jungle and the camera was slung around his neck).

One of the pieces of metal was a warped air-position indicator made by Kelvin and Hughes, which had to have been either from a Canberra bomber or the almost identical U.S. B57 plane. There were no records of lost B57s in the region. "I was quietly confident we had found them," Thurgar says.

He took the rusting indicator back to the RAAF Museum in Point Cook, near Melbourne, where director David Gardner decided it was 99 per cent certain it was from a Canberra bomber, probably A84-231. The fog obscuring the fate of the pair of 24 year olds, lost for nearly 40 years, was gradually clearing.

Both Michael Herbert and Robert Carver were volunteers. Herbert was a natural for the RAAF. Flying mad from a boy, he joined the Air Training Corps at 13 and earned his private pilot's licence three years later. Squadron Leader Arthur Barnes, 2 Squadron's operations officer in Vietnam, told the court of inquiry about Herbert's obsession.

"I saw Herbert reading flying magazines in the crew room on the afternoon of the 3rd of November, 1970," Barnes said. "He spent most of his non-flying working hours in this pursuit, rather than joining in the activities of the other junior air-crew members. He flew at every opportunity. Most of his contemporaries believed he stayed in the crew room to get any extra flight which occurred from time to time."

Nearly 40 years later, identification of a crumpled and rusting air position indicator was enough for the RAAF to approve a large expedition to the jungle crash site, to begin preliminary excavations and bring back to Australia yet more evidence.

Accompanied by two Australian scientists, two Australian military officers, 10 Vietnamese officials and 30 KaTu porters, Thurgar set out on the trek in April 2009. Old army trucks were hired to take them part of the way into the jungle, to A'Buong where two canoes were used to ferry everyone across rivers.

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"We struck out up a creek line, and another creek line," Thurgar says. "In all, we went up the sides of four waterfalls, around cliff edges. It is a very densely vegetated area."

It took six hours for all 45 people in the expedition to trek into the tangled jungle site where the plane had blasted into the side of the mountain. Nothing was left of the plane except parts with no commercial value, or lumps of metal that were too heavy to move.

But the team soon found pieces of tyre, Dunlop type IX, which were only used by Canberra bombers, not the B57s, and pieces of metal with red paint, also only ever seen on Canberra bombers. Then a 9mm shell, exploded from heat rather than from being fired. Only Australians carried 9mm pistols.



Phan Rang Ugly Club badge.

Then, the proof positive. A battered club badge from the **Phan Rang Ugly Club**. There were only 13 members, and each member had to produce his badge on request, or buy a round of drinks as forfeit. Herbert, the only member who was an officer, had produced his badge the afternoon of the fateful flight.

The other 12 members, Thurgar says, still had their badges. One of these Ugly Club members, Frank Hodges, a tele-communications technician during the war. He remembered the day Herbert and Carver were lost. "It was like losing a brother, a member of the family," he said.

Jim Bourke believes a bomb hang-up can be conclusively ruled out for technical reasons. Maybe, he says, the plane was brought down by a North Vietnamese radar-guided missile or maybe by errant friendly artillery fire.

Their remains were found on 30 July 2009 and brought back for burial on 31 August 2009. "My aim was to fully account for Herbert and Carver, and see them brought home," Thurgar says. "It's our sacred duty to these men who gave their lives. I think we, as a nation, have a moral obligation to their families".



The Selling of Phan Rang Stickers - Patches - Pins - Coins

 <p>4 1/2 by 4 in. Sticker & Patch are the same size.</p>	<p>This design is available in a sticker, patch or pin. The following is the price break down for each.</p> <p>Sticker: \$3 ea. Postage included</p> <p>Patches: \$7 ea. for an order of 1 to 3. For more than 3 add \$1 for postage.</p> <p>Pins: \$5 ea. orders are limited to 3 pins. \$3 extra for any order of pins.</p>
	<p align="center">The Phan Rang AB Challenge Coin</p> <p align="center">Challenge Coin: \$9 each includes the cost of postage.</p>

Note: Send check to Jack Anderson, 826 72nd St. SE, Auburn, WA 98092 specifying exactly what you want. Make check payable to Phan Rang AB Reunion.

(Note: The way the Phan Rang AB Supply Chain Management system works is you, the customer, sends your order and remittance to Jack Anderson at the address listed above and he in-turn notifies the suppliers, either Bruce Muller for Patches, Stickers and Pins or Doug Severt, for Challenge Coins, and then they fulfill the orders. We are mailing from different states, so we can't combine orders.)



Our 2018 Reunion shirt, pictured on the left is on sale [here](#) as well as the classic knit polo emblazoned with the Phan Rang AB patch on the front. Because of the design we decided to offer the shirt only in white, but with a choice of long or short sleeve.

Doug’s Comments

Many thanks to Bob Howe who provided the inspiration and most of the material, including pictures for this issue. Bob Howe was a Canberra crew member with the 2 Squadron at Phan Rang AB and attended the events described in this issue. He remains active in Australian veteran affairs. Bob Howe is also the author of: [Dreadful Lady Over the Mekong Delta, An Analysis of RAAF Canberra Operations in the Vietnam War](#).

There still is plenty of time to submit your bio for a future issue. If you have any questions on how to write or how to format it, you might look back at Phan Rang Newsletter 140 to see what others have done. As you will see, any format is acceptable. Please email to me.

This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.