



Maggies Return

The last Australian servicemen missing from the Vietnam War were welcomed home on 31 August at RAAF Base Richmond closing an important chapter in Australian military history.

The remains of Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver, who were recorded as missing in action after they failed to return from a routine bombing mission on 3 November 1970, were recovered from thick jungle following an archaeological dig in July at the site that had been found earlier this year.

Family members of both airmen flew to Hanoi, accompanied by Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support Mike Kelly and Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin among others, to accompany the remains on the long journey home.

The two airmen were returned to Australia aboard a RAAF C-130 Hercules and welcomed home during a well-attended and moving ramp ceremony at Richmond.

Chief among the mourners who welcomed the pair home were the families who had not forgotten the pain and anguish of loss for 39 years.

A bearer party from 2 Squadron carried the remains of their comrades from the Hercules while airmen from Australia's Federation Guard formed an honour guard.

Speaking before assembled family, veterans and dignitaries, Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science Greg Combet said Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver were

both enthusiastic airmen who were respected by their superiors.

"They paid the ultimate sacrifice in serving their country," he said.

"Australia can finally lay these brave airmen to rest and honour their memory.

"I hope this ceremony provides some comfort to the families of Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver and I thank them for their fortitude and strength since the loss of their loved ones."

Mr Combet reminded the gathering that four other Australian Defence personnel had recently been repatriated to Australia from Vietnam – Lance Corporal Parker and Private Gillson in June 2007, Lance Corporal Gillespie in December 2007 and Private Fisher in October 2008.

He said the repatriation of these two airmen was an end of an era.

"The return of Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver completes the recovery of all Australian service personnel who were lost on operations and not recovered during the Vietnam War.

"Australia can now close this chapter of its history.

"We honour all of those who served in Vietnam and sincerely thank them for their service."

Military funerals for the airmen were held on 3 September at St Luke's Toowoomba for Pilot Officer Carver, and on 7 September at St Francis Xavier Cathedral in Adelaide for Flying Officer Herbert.



On 3 November 1970, Canberra Bomber A84-231 with Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver on board, disappeared after completing a night bombing mission in Vietnam.

Their callsign on that fateful mission was Maggie 91.

In October 2008, the Chief of Air Force asked the Army History Unit to conduct an investigation into the disappearance of the aircraft.

As a result of that investigation, the crash site was found in thick jungle in an extremely rugged, remote and sparsely populated area of Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, near the Laotian border, in April 2009.

On 8 July 2009, a Royal Australian Air Force team returned to Vietnam to conduct a thorough archaeological investigation of the site to determine whether any human remains were present.

Small fragments of bone were found and a thorough forensic examination determined them to be the remains of the missing aircrew.

The recovery mission was named Operation Magpies Return.

