

Clive Mayo

Naval Pilot, Lieutenant Commander, MID RAN(Rtd).

Born : Sydney 1948

Died: Perth Western Australia, aged 68

A pilot in the Royal Australian Navy – and later WA Police – Clive was one of the little-known group of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Fleet Air Arm that served ashore between 16 October 1967 and 8 June 1971 during the Vietnam War. He was just one of over 200 FAA personnel who served in Vietnam. For his service in Vietnam as a Sub Lieutenant he was “Mentioned In Dispatches” (MID).

Clive was born on 11 November 1948 in Sydney and spent a carefree and somewhat wild child/teenager roaming the bush and hills around Blackheath in the Blue Mountains. As was the norm in those places at that time, part of his essential kit was a slug gun and a suitable quantity of black powder which he used to great effect on trees, stumps and anything else that needed his “touch”. Along with his brothers Grant, Kent, Glen, Geoff and sister Michelle they had a childhood that, in later years he would reminisce on with much fondness.

His sense of adventure never seemed to leave him and so he announced to the family that he had joined the Navy to be a Cook!. During his initial training, his qualities of leadership were recognised and he was made a “Topman” (potential Officer trainee). The Vietnam conflict was raging at the time and when he was selected for Pilot training his family knew that he almost certain to be sent to war. Thus on the 27th February 1967 he became what is commonly known as “the lowest form of marine life”, a Midshipman in the RAN.

He progressed through basic training phases, with a break aboard HMAS ANZAC from July to September 1968. He then completed his advanced flying training on No. 67 Pilots Course, and was awarded his coveted Navy “Wings” on the 13th of December 1968. In later years he always said that day would be auspicious as the awarding Officer pushed the pin of the wings through his white uniform jacket and stabbed him in the chest. He completed the Parade with an expanding red stain down his suit.

Arriving back at the home of the Fleet Air Arm, HMAS Albatross, Nowra, NSW, he completed his UH-1B (Iroquois – commonly known as the “Huey”) conversion and found himself posted to the 3rd Contingent of the Helicopter Flight Vietnam (HFV), the Contingent departing for Vietnam in September 1969. The HFV was a unit that was (and still is) unique in the histories of both the

Australian and United States Armed Forces. Putting together two unlikely units as an American Army unit and an Australian Naval aviation unit, to most people's eyes just wasn't compatible!

For that reason – and with the Australian input – they were an “Experimental Military Unit”, the obvious call-sign being “EMU”. It was a call-sign that engendered great respect in the Southern region of South Vietnam during the four years of operations. The Commanding Officer was a US Army Colonel, with an Australian Lieutenant Commander as the Second in Command.

Having gotten over the culture shock of arriving “in country” and moving into a “hooch” Clive's next surprise was the general lack of flying experience of his American counterparts, particularly their lack of instrument ratings in a country well known for its monsoon weather. The flying – and associated “incidents” - were such that he never knew what the next day would bring. Fortunately his Contingent suffered no Australian deaths, but there were some very close shaves and two very serious injuries. The incident that haunted him until his dying days was when a close mate of his landed on a booby-trapped 155mm artillery shell buried in an LZ (landing Zone). The helicopter landed on the shell and the front section was almost instantly destroyed, the helicopter catching fire. The Navy pilot was critically injured and it was Clive's mission to get him to the nearest hospital (Can Tho). He was sure the pilot would not make it, but he did. The Army surgeons removed 157 pieces of shrapnel from his mate's body.

At the tender age of 21, Clive was asked to fly as the Command & Control (C&C) pilot. This is an awesome responsibility for any Officer/Pilot, but to do so at such a young age may well be unique in the Vietnam war. He has said that the experience and responsibility taught him things that were put to good use when he later became a Squadron Commanding Officer.

He tells of the “funny” side of operations when, sitting on the ground at Ben Tre, a Thai Air Force C-123 Provider aircraft blew a tyre on landing, ran off the runway and speared straight through a Huey being flown by another Australian. After a few beers later that night they all decided that the sight of the four crew members sprinting for the jungle just prior to impact was one of the funniest thing they had witnessed.

Clive returned to Australia in late 1970 and reckoned that being shot down 6 times and seeing the death and destruction caused by war was enough for any man. He then converted to the Navy Wessex Mk.31B Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) helicopter and spent the next few years learning the art (or maybe science) of submarine hunting. One thing was for sure, Clive fell in love with the Wessex (even at night between 30 and 125 feet in pitch blackness) and is reckoned by his contemporaries as probably the only Wessex pilot that did!

There followed time as Flight Commander, HC723 HMAS Moresby Flight , (HC- Helicopter Composite, i.e. more than one type of helicopter) then at HMAS Leeuwin in WA as a Divisional Officer to Junior Recruits (the same place Clive had spent his “pre-Officer” days). In later years he had almost unending invitations to ex-Leeuwin sailor reunions owing to his proving a popular and conscientious leader. He also completed a Staff Course at RAAF Williamtown.

On the first of May 1979 the Government approved the establishment of ‘a specialised and dedicated counter-terrorism assault team’, to be available to the Commonwealth to deal, where authorised, with high risk terrorist incidents. The vulnerability of the Bass Strait oil rigs were of a particular concern, so the Navy’s HC 723 Squadron was tasked with assisting the SAS in the role (Operation ‘BURSA’). Of the helicopter types that HC 723 operated only the Wessex was suitable for the low level, night over-water operations, and as Clive was an experienced ASW pilot he once again found himself back in the thick of things. The operations were deemed a total success, but by 1983 – with the imminent arrival of yet another helicopter type (the AS350 Squirrel) HC 723 gave up the task due to the impending workload.

On the 4th February 1984 HU816 (HU Helicopter Utility – general utility tasks) was formed under the Command of LCDR Clive Mayo RAN, to continue with BURSA and general Naval Aviation support. Clive was not only back in his beloved Wessex, but now in Command of a Squadron, an outstanding career move from a 21 year old Sub Lieutenant just 14 years before. His spirit of fun and adventure had not been dimmed as he tore around the Air Station in his unregistered Mini which the Squadron had painted in Tiger stripes – a Tiger’s head being the Squadron Crest. The least amused person was the Station Executive Officer as the Mini could sometimes be located in the Wardroom (Officer’s Mess) either on it’s roof, or with all 4 wheels missing.

He retired from the Navy in 1985 and flew for a civilian helicopter company in Western Australia, mainly supporting geological survey work out in the wilds of Western Australia, and also flew the Marine Pilot transfers to/from Port Sampson in the Northwest of WA. If some of the stories he told of his time there are anything to go by, life was never dull.

With his experience he was selected to fly the first WA Police helicopter. On the 21st July 1991, the tanker *KIRKI* broke up off the WA coast. When news of the disaster reached the WA Police, the weather at the helicopter’s base was fog and rain. Assessing the situation Clive decided to depart under instrument conditions and eventually reached the scene, conducting the rescue of the tanker crew. For this achievement he was awarded the Royal Humane Society of Australia award.

Never one to be put out, after finishing a night shift c.0400 he was going home, somewhat over the speed limit when he was stopped by a Police traffic car. They were about to breathalysed him when he launched into a tirade about being on Police duty, hurrying to get to bed due to fatigue, etc., etc,

etc. He left 2 poor stunned Traffic Officers on the side of the road, Clive having neither “blown in the bag”, or been fined for speeding.

Following retirement in late 1991 he spent most of his spare time renovating his back patio, relaxing with his family in a caravan at Myalup, playing golf, trying to complete cryptic crosswords and attending a Wednesday gathering of retired Naval aviation types at Rosie O’Grady’s Irish Pub, Northbridge. He Joined the Fleet Air Arm Association in 2001 and was it’s treasurer from 2004 until 2014. The Association awarded him the Diploma of Merit in 2014 for Services to the WA Division, and the Certificate of Service for 15 years membership in December 2016.

Clive leaves behind wife Margaret, sons Steven and Ian, stepchildren Melanie Ann and Levon and grandchildren Caitlin, Layla, Joshua, Hayden and Sienna.

John ‘Bomber’ Brown