

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

AVM GEOFF BROWN: Well, good afternoon ladies, and gentlemen. I'm delighted to be here today with members of the investigating team who have just returned from Vietnam investigating the disappearance of Canberra bomber A84-231.

I'm really pleased that they've made themselves available to provide you with some more in-depth information on the operation.

As the Minister for Defence - Defence, Science and Personnel, the Honourable Warren Snowdon announced on Tuesday the team is confident that they have located the Air Force Canberra bomber flown by flying officer Michael Herbert and pilot officer Robert Carver.

They were lost with their aircraft on 3 November 1970 while returning to base following a bombing mission. As you know, this is a very significant discovery as Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver are the last two remaining Australian servicemen missing in action in Vietnam.

I'd like to stress at this time the crash site has only just been discovered so an archaeological dig and a forensic examination of the site will occur in the near future. That will determine whether the remains of Michael Herbert and Robert Carver are present at the site.

The investigation site was accessed by foot on Wednesday 15 April, again, which was an achievement in itself and the team will describe that to you. The site is in thick jungle in an extremely rugged portion of Quang Nam Province near the Laotian border.

While no human remains were found during this investigation, a number of military artefacts were discovered including a club badge. The badge

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

was unique to RAAF's number two squadron and the team have some interesting photographs to show you including that particular club badge.

I'd like to actually take this opportunity to recognise the contribution of others. There was a lot of cooperation between the Air Force and Army, United States and the Vietnamese governments. And that was paramount to the success of this particular investigation.

I'd also like to acknowledge Mr Jim Bourke's continuing support and his team's commitment to accounting for our airmen. I'd also like to acknowledge the invaluable expertise of Mr David Gardner from the RAAF museum.

In addition, I think most importantly for this investigation, DSTO's involvement was integral; they used some fairly innovative modelling techniques into - so that we could refine the area of interest.

Now, unfortunately I've got a previous engagement and I'd like to hand over to Squadron Leader John Cotterell and Major Jack Thurgar who formed part of the investigation team, and ask them to provide you with details.

Thanks very much.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, Major Thurgar and I arrived back from Vietnam this morning and we're certainly delighted to be here. We're confident we have located the Royal Australian Air Force Canberra bomber flying - by Flying Officer Michael Holvert [sic] Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver.

This is a major development in defence efforts to account for the final two missing Australian Defence Force personnel from the Vietnam War.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

In March last year, Mr Brian Manns, of the Army History Unit and his principal investigator Major Jack Thurgar came to Air Force with an offer we just couldn't refuse. From their success in searching for Army diggers in Vietnam, they came with a plan that Air Force could be used to look for Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver.

After that, we took it to - through our chain of command and got commitments through to the - Minister Snowden to start an investigation.

Would you like to talk about that? not really? Okay

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Not really.

[Laughter]

You're doing well.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Yeah, thanks.

Thanks. As [indistinct] said, flying officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver were lost with the aircraft, a Canberra bomber on the 3 November 1970, while returning to base following a bombing mission.

We were able to investigate a more precise area following developments made by the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. Their modelling led us to focus on an area some distance south from the previously identified last known point.

DSTO's extensive experience with a flight path reconstruction of military aircraft accidents developed the final path off Canberra A84-231 and predicted a probable aircraft wreckage debris field.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

The Chief of Air Force was the person who put us onto the idea of using DSTO.

Following the discovery of a number of aircraft parts in the area of interest, further collaborative efforts of DSTO forensics, the Army History Unit and the RAAF Museum, led by Mr David Gardner, led to the identification of the aircraft.

The aircraft wreckage is in thick jungle in an extremely rugged and remote and sparsely populated area of Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, near the Laos border.

We deployed to the site by foot on Tuesday, 14 April. Major Jack Thurgar arrived at the site of 1309 be it 1310.

While no human remains were found, a number of military artefacts have been discovered including a club badge which was unique to the RAAF.

The team was led in Vietnam by Mr Brian Manns of the Army History Unit.

Would you like to speak more about...

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Ladies and gentlemen, as the lead investigator, Army has adopted a four-stage approach to account for our missing servicemen, and it doesn't matter whether it's Kalimantan, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam or Malaysia, but hopefully in the future into Korea.

This four stage approach concentrates on the first part as getting all of the information together including all of the personal files, all the records of all the units that might have information about the particular case, down to

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

Courts of Inquiry, reviews of Courts of Inquiry, identifying possible witnesses, et cetera, et cetera.

The second path usually then involves identification of people in the host country that might be able to help us and to shed further light, and also to conduct a reconnaissance, and that was done.

In that particular phase which was done in January of this year, what I needed to do was to identify the former North Vietnamese officers and the local militia and the Viet Cong forces who were subject to the bombing on the night of the 3 November. And by identifying them and then finding them and talking to them and gaining their experience, and then working back through their order of battle, to determine if they saw anything on the night that could be of interest to us, which they did.

Terribly lucky. By working through that process, we found that the target was the 44-front(*) headquarters and the 44-front headquarters was being protected by security elements of the 141st North Vietnamese Army Division. They, in turn, had a reconnaissance platoon out surrounding the area and had observation posts, three-man observation posts, and they did see that A84-231 on the last moments of its flight.

They did report the matter, and on the 4 November 1970 they sent a search party into the area. But, as all the other witnesses from number two squadron who conducted a most detailed search can attest to, the double and triple canopy and the nature of the terrain, and also combined with the fact Typhoon Kate had just had its dash and was leaving a lot of residue bad weather in the area, made it incredibly difficult to follow through with that.

The most complicated part of this process concentrated on the fact that all of the American records from the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, the South East Asian databases, the National Archives of America, and also from the

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

Military Command daily [indistinct] indicated that our aircraft was lost near Hway(*) which is much further to the north, and that it was flying at an altitude of 6,000 feet and had been brought down by surface to air missile.

So we had an official American account which was the complete opposite to what the Court of Inquiry that the Australians had set up established. On our Court of Inquiry they were approximately 55 to 60 kilometres further south-west of Hway, they were flying and they were flying at 22,000 feet, and they were not brought down by a surface to air missile. So, it made it an interesting start point.

I found that to gain some credibility I had to determine where the American last known and how a position was determined. And that led me on a wild goose chase because it was a classified target. So when you look at the target number it had a - the letter S after it, which meant secret or classified, and as a classified mission there was deliberate misinformation as to what the target was.

But that was clarified when the North Vietnamese said to me, they said we knew we'd screwed up because we'd used the big 15 watt radios two days before and we must have been int... like, you know like electrically intercepted. And so EW(*) had gained their particular position. And so consequently when they were bombed that was confirmed in their mind.

But this radar, secret installation, that the Americans were using was one of the key points in saying, well, they're not too far off the mark and I'll have to rely on that.

The work that DSTO did was excellent in that they took all the atmospheric conditions and listened to the actual voice tape, the real voice tape for the night with the real operator Mr Bill Hannik(*). And I spoke to Bill yesterday in America because he - I've been in touch with him now for months dealing with the operator OL-24 MILKY. And he has recalled the

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

night so many times in his mind and he was able to give a lot of small snippets of information which added to the bigger picture.

And, you know, eventually it showed that what the modelling that DSTO were able to do brought the area of interest down to approximately two kilometres. And they were able to draw triangles of error for each of the different sets of conditions that were developed on the night. And it's interesting to find that when we eventually did get to the site, it fell right within the area that they had identified.

So, if you like, we've got scientific evidence backing up the human intelligence on the ground.

I must say that a lot of support was given by the Vietnamese-Australian community. Six months ago I appealed to them in writing and through telephone calls with official permission to do so, by writing stories into the newspapers. This got a lot of support.

The clergy within Quang Nam Province also supported us, and that they appealed directly to their parishioners asking for, on a humanitarian basis, for people to come forward and not to be afraid to give information, and that it was a good thing to do.

So the team found that at every level people were well aware that we were coming and that they did want to help the Australians.

It's an interesting thing that the Government has been working with the government in Vietnam, particularly in Quang Nam Province, in major humanitarian relief projects. And that aid work has ensured that Australia has a good name within the province and that the aid is reaching ordinary folk. And that it was the ordinary folk who basically don't have two bob to rub together that were the most willing to come forward to help us out. And

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

so I think that they need to be recognised; the Vietnamese community within Australia and telephoning home and, you know, getting the high level of interest created was of great support to us.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Very much so.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Yeah. Please, could we open it to questions because I'm sure you want to ask us...

QUESTION: Can you go through the photos first perhaps?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: John, would you like to do that?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: This is basically a photo of the area which we went to area which we went into. It is an absolutely beautiful jungle area. Problem is, you look down below - below your knees and it's just infested by leeches.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Gaining access to the area, we had to, you know, go up a lot of unmarked small creeks. The North Vietnamese used to always put their camps on unmarked creeks, things that are not marked on maps, as a way of trying to avoid detection during the war. So that's - hence the term remote.

Also too we had many occasions we had to scale waterfalls, so we had to have ropes and vines deployed on the sides of the waterfalls to get up to this area.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: From starting out in the morning it took us about seven hours for the first people, who were Jack and myself, to get

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

to the site, and we used by foot, by truck, also by boat, to get to quite a remote area.

This is the Rolls Royce engine which was found. Basically the aircraft impacted about two-thirds up the mountain and from there we had to decide what had happened to the aircraft. So Jack and I followed an old gentleman who knew the site very well, and these heavy engines were in the bottom of the stream at the foot of the mountain.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: The crash site covered an area of approximately 500 metres by 200 metres on a 60 degree slope. It would appear that the aircraft impacted at quite a steep angle, and when it exploded upon impact it threw debris 50 metres up the hill to the east and the west of the site and below it. However, as it was going through the very tall trees, in that area 30 to 40 metres was normal. It would possibly have sheared off the wings and any other external fittings to the fuselage.

Those large pieces rolled down this very steep hill. Medium size pieces were approximately 200 metres below the impact point.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: And that's an example there of the medium size pieces, the oxygen and nitrogen bottles.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: And then the larger pieces which were the engines ended up down in the creek line. And of course many tiny pieces were thrown as they were ripped from the engines on their transit down to the bottom of the creek bed.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: When we actually got to the crater site, the locals had pillaged the site and there was a large, kind of like a junk yard full of different items from the aircraft. And these are just an example of part of the engine there.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

Next photo.

And near that too was part of the engine as well.

This is part of the fuselage. Now, one of the difficulties with verifying the aircraft was so much of the aircraft was actually taken away. And so we didn't have any large wings or large fuselage, we just had engines and smaller parts. And so we didn't have a lot to go with.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: The predominant colour on the - I'll call it the skin, because I'm not techo qualified, was grey, a deep grey-blue colour. And that was the prevailing colour that we found. However, when we found these small red pieces, that led us to think that it could be a portion of the roundel, the RAAF insignia, towards the tail. So it was significantly different from everything else.

American aircraft that flew initially in Vietnam when they introduced the B-57 was silver in colour. Later they painted them up in their war colours which was South East Asian [indistinct], and that was tan with two shades of green. And on the underbelly for the aircraft that flew daylight missions, it was a blue, light blue; and for the night intruder aircraft it was dark black. So we had something completely different to the US B-57 war paint.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Thanks. Next photo.

And these are just some of the articles which we photographed and took measurements off. A lot of these articles are currently being examined by the RAAF museum.

And this is more of the same. A lot of smaller parts, not bigger parts of the aircraft.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

Jack, I'll let you talk about this.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: This particular badge, you will see - when you look you will see 1970. John, could you push 70 and I'll point out 1970, and then '71 right up in the top right-hand, you'll see '71. And it's got Phan Rang underneath it. And I think the next slide might show that. Phan Rang, and you can see Rang starting to come across the bottom. And then the Ugly C... the words Ugly Club.

Now, don't have any ideas other than they say that the GSE fitters and the...

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Trucks.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: ... truckie fitters are the ugliest guys in the Air Force. And they took great pride in being the ugliest blokes in the Air Force. So they had their own small fraternity and they invited other people to come into it. And so that's the significance of this particular small group of people.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: And I imagine that the air crew who actually owned this would have worn this with great pride, that he was accepted by the technical fraternity of the Air Force.

Next photo.

Let's open it up to questions and answers. Any questions that you have?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Hi, Max, how are you?

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

QUESTION: Max Blenkin from AAP. Any indication from the Vietnamese, former Vietnamese combatants you talked to, that what shot our aeroplane down?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Shot it down?

QUESTION: Yeah, what happened? Did it crash?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Okay. I can honestly confirm that from the military region, which was part of Military Region Five Headquarters staff, B44 front - now, they changed their name to confuse American Intelligence. And also from 141 NVA Regiment, they did not shoot the aircraft down. This was such a remote and rugged part of the distribution feeder system of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. I spoke to the commanding officer of the two hundred and thirtieth transportation unit, which controlled that section of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and he was responsible for its security.

The largest weapons that he had at that time were 12.7s, 14.5 and there was a 23.2 machine guns. They could not reach 22,000 feet.

The 37 - the 57 millimetre weapons were further north at a place called Pharau(*) but they did not come down into the area till 1972. So it was not those.

The surface to air missiles were deployed a little bit further to the north at the Ashua Valley because that was known as, you know, bomb run alley, you know. And so they were definitely not down there.

So the North Vietnamese - and I should also say that portion of Vietnam was controlled directly by Hanoi whereas below Quang Nam Province was commanded by COSVN. So from all of that area north, Hanoi directly controlled it.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

Because all of the timings, their timings were one hour - the North Vietnamese timings were one hour different from the Australian timings. And of course this caused confusion because in 1970 South Vietnam operated on its time, and North Vietnam operated on their own version of GMT and there was one hour difference. So seven hours, eight hours.

So does that answer your question Max? They did not claim at any time ever to shoot the weap... the aircraft down.

QUESTION: Any indication what happened?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: I'm not a RAAF technical expert. You would have to ask those that are.

QUESTION: Is there any indication that the air crew might have got out? Was there anything left that indicates an ejector seat was gone or anything like that?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: What I tried to do was to talk to all of the various levels within the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong to see what was their standard operating procedure if - should they have found, you know, live or remnants or dead, you know, crew. And they all said that they - their duty was to report it. At all of the headquarter levels concerned, none of them right through till the end of the war in '75 said that they had ever found any crew in that area, with the exception of about 16 kilometres further south-east near a little village called Cardi(*), there were two Americans found there. They had ejected but far too late from an OV-1 aircraft and they were killed, you know, on impact. They did report those.

So the other thing to say is that - John can attest that the - there was a large debris field of Perspex canopy ranging in size from two millimetres through to seven millimetre in thickness. So that it would appear that the

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

canopy was intact when the aircraft crashed. So the physical evidence is that they did not eject and the people on the ground claimed that they did not find the crew.

QUESTION: There's been speculation over the years that various things might have happened. It could have been metal fatigue in some way in the aircraft, a wing could have come off at altitude or whatever, or that a bomb might have hung up and exploded. Now, presumably the fact that you found so much wreckage in a relatively small area would indicate that it almost certainly not a bomb exploding on the aircraft.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: That's an excellent question and if you listen to the voice tapes that DSTO has in its possession you will hear the voice of Pilot Officer Carver clearly say, six away. He was in the nose cone observing, and through that, the direct observation and his instruments, he could tell that the six had gone. Also too the men on the ground who were target to the bombing run reported a six strike. So there was not a hang up in this case.

QUESTION: Did they say whether the bombs actually hit their target, whatever it was?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: It was their headquarter area, but what they had cleverly done is that they had chosen an area which was almost like a basin, and so - and they would always... and they had selected in this case to be in a portion that was naturally protected against aerial attack. And with the angle of the hills, the steepness of the hills and from the position where the bombs were released it would mean that the bombs would strike the forward side of the hill or the top of the hill. So what the North Vietnamese had done was build all of their headquarters halfway down the reverse slope and then back into the side of the hill.

So, they said the bombs fell 300 metres short.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

QUESTION: Sorry, just one more. On the voice tapes was there anything to indicate that there was some problem with the aircraft?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: I cannot answer that. I'm not a technician, I can only listen to the words. DSTO might be able to give some information on that at a later time. But I'm - look I'm quite sure that RAAF will want to determine what went wrong for the sake of all the other people who served, you know.

QUESTION: Would it be possible to ask the DSTO officer if there like - something like, you know, the sort of exclamation you might get from a pilot if a wing fell off or something?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: We don't have members from the DSTO here unfortunately.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Please, I can't answer that question, but Andrew might be able to put you in touch with someone who can later.

QUESTION: What chances do you think there are given the force of the impact and the state of the site of finding any human remains?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Well, John can attest, I'll let him say what Senior Colonel Kinh from the Vietnamese Government told us.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: At this stage it must be stressed that the crash site has only just been discovered. I was involved with the recovery at Hudson - of Hudson aircraft in PNG in October last year, so our job up there this time was to just verify the site and then the next phase will be to do a search and recovery of the site.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

The timing for that will be determined between the Australian and Vietnamese officials.

A forensic examination of the site will occur to determine if the remains of Michael Herbert and Robert Carver are present at this site and that's all we want to say at this stage regarding that. Thank you.

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: I think it's fair to say that Senior Colonel Kinh, who was the senior Vietnamese Government official on site and responsible for their side, said that he's just completed two tasks with the Americans in the last two months, because Americans through JPAC are continually working on their cases. And he said that in those cases, they had, similar to this, the impact into the side of the mountain had been so deep that in one case they were able to, you know, find almost intact remains and in another case not so.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: And considering five days earlier Cyclone Kate had been through that area, therefore it would have been very damp conditions.

QUESTION: Just a more personal question, after this plane had been missing for, you know, 39 years and you'd trekked in for seven hours, what was it like to finally arrive at the crash site and see it there before your very eyes?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Well, I've dealt with the other soldiers in Vietnam, all four cases. It's not one of elation. It's one of almost the mourning process starts to set in, because, you know, you realise that after all this time lost, you're there.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

And so, you know, it's a very moving and your thoughts go to the family and to these young men. That's - it's not good. It's - you know, very personal and, you know.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: I really felt, you know, these guys had - were quite young when they died, and to be in an area so remote in Vietnam, I was most saddened by the experience, actually.

QUESTION: What was the attitude of the Vietnamese who had been service personnel at the time, perhaps even been bombed by these - by our air crew? What - how did you find... and what were memories like and how did you find them?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: It ranged. Those that served on the coast around Tam Ky and Danang suffered a lot of because of their presence with the UN... US Marine Corp. And they were very anti, because they equated Australians to Americans.

In the south when we dealt with all four army cases, there was quite a difference, because the Australians were considered to be fair fighters and played the game hard but were fair. I know that might sound odd, but they had the greatest respect for the Australian soldiers and also to the fact that we always buried their dead. And right today there are people over there now still looking - Australians helping the Vietnamese find their dead.

Now, in this case, yes, Mr Bludenveigh(*), one of the Katwo(*) members who, of the militia forces within the North Vietnamese Army, he was under many B-52 attacks and he was quite emotional about remembering the number of attacks and the type of air attacks.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

But they've moved on; they're trying to come to terms with the war and they're trying to heal. And this is part of their healing process too, helping us account for our war dead.

Sorry, there was a gentleman in the centre there.

QUESTION: I was just inquiring, what ultimately will be done with the wreckage; what will be done with it?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: With the wreckage? There's actually not much wreckage there.

QUESTION: Will it stay there, will it be brought back in?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: We've already brought some wreckage back and probably on the search and recovery we'll probably ta... bring more wreckage back, which will be a significant - of significance to the RAAF Museum.

QUESTION: And what's the timeframe attached to that? What is the time - how long will that take?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: How long...

QUESTION: To bring those other - to bring that other parts of the wreckage back?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: We're still working with the Vietnamese Government on these timeframes.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

QUESTION: What's the sort of difference between where you actually found the wreckage and where the aircraft was, sort of, last reported?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: There was seven kilometres difference between the American last-known position and where it was found. And it was less than two kilometres from the DSTO predictions.

QUESTION: Seventy. Seven zero kilometres from...?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Seven, seven. Seven kilometres. But, Max, that terrain is just unbelievable.

QUESTION: Yep.

QUESTION: Do you what the success rate is with other places of - other plane crashes? Either U... mainly US ones I guess? What's the success rate of finding human remains of the pilots or the crew?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: Well, JPAC never give up. If they are unsuccessful in finding human remains in a crash, it becomes a pending file, pending more information, or that a further dig at another location might be successful.

For example, it is not uncommon that villages will find remains in a crashed aircraft, and that they will do the decent thing and take those remains and they'll wash the remains and then they'll put them in an urn and bury them. And sometimes those people have passed away in the intervening years and that - but at a later time that information comes up by accident, by digging somewhere else, you know, for excavations or whatever.

TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT, A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

So, you know, America never gives up. So, yeah.

QUESTION: Is the success rate, you know, is it 50, 60, 70 per cent or can you put it in those terms?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: I'm sorry, I really can't answer that question at this time.

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Vietnamese Government officials told me that the JPAC success rate was 20 per cent against the army history unit's 100 per cent.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] family members of the men that the wreckage had been found, and have you yourselves spoken to any family members?

SQN LDR JOHN COTTERELL: Jack and I returned to Vietnam this - from Vietnam this morning, so we haven't actually spoken to any of the relatives at this stage. But we have representatives here at Air Force headquarters and - Jim Bourke from Operation Aussie [sic] Home is being representative for the families.

CONVENER: Just one more question now, please.

QUESTION: Could weather have been a factor in the crash, or was the aircraft flying above the weather - poor weather at the time?

MAJOR JACK THURGAR: The weather on the day had cloud at low level, but from mid to high it was relatively clear in that region. So whilst there was ten knot wind which did affect the final outcome from the DSTO calculations, it should not have played any part in causing the crash; and that's verified at three different and separate locations.

**TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT,
A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.**

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

CONVENER: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, there are some - those images are on the website for you

**TRANSCRIPT OF A BRIEFING ON THE DISCOVERY OF CANBERRA AIRCRAFT,
A84-231, HELD IN CANBERRA, ACT, ON THE 23RD APRIL, 2009.**

PRESENT AVM Geoff Brown, Sqn Ldr John Cotterell, Major Jack Thurgar

to be able to get access to. There'll also be some vision of the [indistinct].

Thank you for your time today.