



F1. Lt. Cliff Dohle DSM (Dec.)

Long Tan Helicopter Pilot

By

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In 1999, Fl. Lt. Cliff Dohle, (Ret.), rang me and asked my advice in seeking a pension. He told me he could no longer work at his job as a helicopter pilot, all as a result of a helicopter crash he had in Vietnam. He went on to say in the crash he suffered internal injuries and also fractured his back. These injuries had caught up with him and he now could no longer work as a helicopter pilot in Civvy Street. He went on to ask if I could get him a DVA pension. I eventually did, he became a TPI.

Through my dealings with Cliff Dohle I found out he was the helicopter pilot who dropped the first lot of ammunition to 'D' Company in the Battle of Long Tan. He also told me he was first written up to get the DFC but because of his accidental crash in Vietnam and his sequential repatriation to Australia his DFC was downgraded to a Mentioned in Despatches (MID).



Fl Lt Cliff Dohle (r) and Maj Harry Smith shake hands at Nui Dat after the Battle of Long Tan. GR Capt Peter Raw looks on.

Cliff Dohle thought he was treated unfairly by the RAAF, he thought he should have been awarded, as the recommendation stated at the time, a DFC.

I took up his case and applied to the 'Defence Honours and Award's Tribunal' to have his MID upgraded to the original recommendation of a DFC. Following my submission I was invited to Canberra to present Cliff's claim. Cliff Dohle died a week prior to the presentation.



The Governor General chats to family of the late Ft Lt Cliff Dohle after the presentation of the Distinguished Service Medal. R to L: Her Excellency, daughter Lisa Arrowsmith, grandson Max (aged 7), son Peter Dohle and widow Joan Dohle.

The following is my submission.

Cliff Dohle Hearing, 22 April 2009. (Canberra)

Definition of DFC award: ‘This silver cross is awarded to officers and Warrant Officers for an act or acts of valour, courage **OR** devotion to duty preformed whilst flying in active operations against the enemy.’

It appears that the recommendation for Flt Lt. Cliff Dohle and Flt Lt. Frank Riley’s DFC’s were written and recommended in September 66 (Review Mar.2008 5.4 p.27 2nd paragraph) just weeks after the action of Long Tan. I believe that this recommendation would be the most accurate because of the time frame. It appears that the recommendation was for the first part of the reason for the DFC: **awarded for an act or acts of valour, courage.**

Then at a later date in April 1967 some 7 months on, the following year, another new citation is made which is different to the first recommendation. By this time the CO of the unit Wing Commander Raymond Scott (CO during the Battle of Long Tan) has left the unit and Vietnam. His official duty ended 19 Dec 66. (Ref: Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans) This would mean that the new recommendation would have to be signed by a CO that wasn’t familiar with the circumstances of the original recommendation for Flt Lt. Cliff Dohles’ DFC. It is also noted the original recommendation for Cliff’s DFC was deferred. According to the Macquarie Dictionary this means: To put off to another time. It appears that this didn’t happen it was just left in abeyance. Does this mean it can still be bought forward? A new citation was raised and submitted recommending a lower order of recognition i.e. MID and the wording has been changed. (Review, March 2008, 5.1 p.25)

It appears that Cliff’s MID was awarded for the first part of the definition of the DFC that being for an act or acts of valour, courage and according to the Review dated March 2008, 5.5, page 28 under RAAF which states:

‘the DFC awarded to Flt Lt Riley, whose award recognised achievements for his entire tour of duty.’

To me this seems all a bit suspect and as the panel has indicated in its statement in Review 5.1 last paragraph:

‘Additionally, the citations for the DFC for both Flt Lt Dohle and Flt Lt Riley were very similarly worded, while the second set of citations was clearly different from one another.’

They, the Panel, were not entirely happy with this anomaly. I know that Cliff was pleased that the Panel took this line.

According to the Review dated March 2008 5.4 headed ‘Injustices arising from special circumstances-RAAF’ 2nd paragraph, the reason the citations were not forwarded was and I quote:

'the commanders in Vietnam should hold the citations until the end of the two pilots' tours, to take into account their performances in a wider context, and then re-submit them.'

I believe this to mean resubmit the original citation not a new one. This action of holding a citation or recommendation is not new in the armed forces it is done regularly. If you stuff up big time the citation (original) is torn up.

Does this mean that the citations were rewritten by someone at RAAF HQ Australia and not referred back to the CO of 9 SQD? Or to the person that originally signed the first citation? This seems very unusual in the extreme.

This is where, I become confused. Under, 1.6 Summary of claims, para 5. p.5 It states:

The evidence indicates that in September 1966 two citations recommending immediate awards of the DFC to Flt Lt Riley and Flt Lt Dohle were processed through the RAAF chain of command in Vietnam and forwarded to Australia. COMAFV was not involved in this process.

The reason that COMAFV were not involved was that in 1966 the RAAF 9 Squadron, only had a small amount of Iroquios, I think 7 aircraft and the CO was Wing Commander Ray Scott. He, his staff lived in a hotel in Vung Tau. To my knowledge they at that time didn't have an Officer at COMAFV Saigon.

Hence all correspondence, signals went direct to Canberra. *Group Captain Raw recognised the difficulty of tasking 9 Squadron helicopters into an unsafe area in contravention of the Air Staff directives. It was suggested that Canberra would need to be contacted to give approval.* (Grandin p. 145.) This means that Raw didn't have a senior officer on staff at COMAFV.

To add to my further confusion, Review 3.6 'The End of War List-Vietnam as precedent for review.' P. 16. 1st paragraph, 1.6: *The decisions of commanders in the field were not interfered with.* It appears in the case of Cliff Dohle that his original recommendation/citation was altered and it appears that it was done in Australia.

I also note Review 'Criteria for a "fair and sustainable" outcome' 3.7 p.17 para.1:

TOR requires the Panel to strike a balance between reviewing decisions of commanders in the field and maintaining the integrity of the Australian honours system.

I also note that Cliff Dohle's recommendation for a DFC would not be encumbered with the quota system: *the quota wasn't formally approved until 1968.*

It appears the citations were rewritten by someone at RAAF HQ Australia and not referred back to the CO of 9 SQD? Or to the person that originally signed the first citation? This seems very unusual in the extreme.

I note that the Panel in 1.7 Nature of the review. P.6 states:

The panel was mindful of the difficulty of making fresh judgements on events that took place over 40 years ago. Awards for individual gallantry involve subjective decisions made by those with the authority and knowledge to make the best possible judgements.

Given that statement I don't think it would be right that someone in an office in Australia alters and rewrites a citation some 7 months later and then resubmits the altered citation. There is no doubt in my mind and it appears the Panel is of the same mind when it states that 'Awards for individuals gallantry involve subjective decisions made by those with authority and **knowledge to make the best possible judgement**'.

The original recommendations for Flt.Lt. Riley and Flt.Lt. Dohle were essentially worded the same. The report goes on to say the citations were held till the end of the pilot's tour of duty. It appears that if Cliff Dohle had completed his tour of duty he would have also received the original recommendation of the DFC. (Review, dated March 08, section 5.4)

The reason that Cliff Dohle didn't finish his tour of duty was no fault of his own. On the 18 Oct 66 while transporting Royal Australian Engineers, complete with their high explosives that they were going to use to blow up a tunnel complex, Cliff Dohle's aircraft suffered a loss of power. This happened over the jungle and the Huey went into Auto Rotation and crashed into the treetops. It was only because of Cliff Dohle's piloting skills that he got the plane down in one piece, this in turn saved 6 lives, including his own.

As a result of the crash Cliff Dohle suffered internal injuries and fractured his back. He was Medivaced to US 36 Evac Hospital on the same day, the 18 Oct 66, where he was hospitalised for 13 days. On the 31 Oct 66 he was further Medivaced to RAAF Base Hospital, Butterworth. After about 10 days in hospital at Butterworth he was further medivaced to Australia. Cliff eventually ended up at RAAF Base Hospital, Richmond NSW's. All told his recovery took 3 months with him returning to duty on the 10 Jan 67. (Reference Cliff Dohle's Pilot Flying Log Book.)

The last 3 lines of 'Injustices arising from special circumstances-RAAF' 5.4 States:

'Flt. Lt. Riley's citation recognised distinguished flying during his full tour of duty in Vietnam, whilst highlighting his action in the Battle of Long Tan. The citation for Flt.Lt. Dohle referred only to his achievement during the Battle of Long Tan.'

I think you will agree with me there is an anomaly in this case, because Cliff Dohle who saved 6 lives because of his flying skills when he suffered a loss of power in his Huey that in turn crashed into the jungle of Vietnam through no fault of his own, caused him to be Medivaced out of Vietnam. It is unfair in the extreme to see him being judged and to have his original recommendation for the DFC downgraded because he did not finish his so-called tour of duty.

Cliff Dohle arrived in Vietnam on the 12Jun66. Francis, known as Frank Riley arrived two days later on the 14Jun66, and Frank finished his tour of duty on the 5Jun67. (Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans) I note the reason the citations were held according to the Review March 08 was, Para 2:

'to take into account their performances in a wider context, and then resubmit them.'

This statement was not adhered to because the citations for both Frank and Cliff were forwarded in April 1967 that is at least two months prior to Frank Riley's end of tour in Vietnam, which was on the 5Jun67. (Ref: Nominal Roll of Vietnam Veterans.)

According to the Review dated March 2008 5.1 page 25 last paragraph last 3 lines:

'Additionally, the initial citations for the DFC for both Flt. Lt. Dohle and Flt. Lt. Riley were very similarly worded, while the second set of citations was clearly different from one another.'

Has the Panel come up with any reason for this difference?

According to McAulay. P.84, para 4:

'Cliff Dohle in command of the second Huey, was quite experienced, having initially been trained as a wireless/operator/air gunner and then remustered to pilot training. He has flown jets, including the Canberra bomber, in Australia, Malaysia and Thailand, and found the helicopter "very heavy and sluggish to lift off". He had intended to follow Riley and Grandin, but soon after take-off they lost visual contact in the storm.'

As stated, (McAulay p. 84, para 1) Cliff would follow in one minute after Riley and Grandin took off, but because of the storm and the fact Riley went immediately to 600metres (2000 ft) they lost visual contact before take-off:

'The intensity of the rain reduced the efficiency of the rotors, and the engine was in danger of "flaming out". The heavily laden Huey was able to fly only at treetop height, at reduced speed. Dohle remembers it was "uncomfortable"'

Because of the weight, Cliff estimated the all up weight in his aircraft to be about 1200kg's, and monsoon down pour he thought his speed to be between 20 and 30 knots.

Cliff and I spent some time on the weight of the resupply ammunition because we were trying to work out the number of boxes that he would have had on board. We were trying to get some sort of time it would take to unload/throw out when over the target. The Huey in good conditions was designed to carry 1815kg of cargo.

RSM Chinn who was responsible for resupply would know that he would have to at least send 1st line requirements is the following according to Lt.Dave Sadden a 'D' Company who told me over the phone. (Conversation Wed 1Apr09)

Rifleman	= 60 rounds each
MG. M60	= 1000 rounds per gun
Owen 9mm	= 250 rounds per gun

According to Training Information Bulletin, No. 28, an Infantry Company consists of 5 Officers and 121 ORs and a Platoon consists of 1 Officer and 33 ORs.

Each Platoon would require 60 rounds 7.62 = 540 rounds (avg)
GMP group M60 7.62 = 1000 rounds
3 sections not counting Platoon Comd. = 4620 rounds
Company total rounds without CHQ = 13860 rounds

According to the Manual of Land Warfare Vol 6 Pam 2 Aid Memoire page 13.3:

	Rds/box	KG	lbs
9mm	1995	33.5	72
7.62	1680	26.8	59
7.62 link 800		33.3	72
7.62	1000	37.2	82

Taking an average 900 rounds per box = 15 boxes this in some cases was further broken down to: (Grandin p.147 para. 3):

'they decided to break some of the boxes open, and to package some machine-gun ammunition belts in sandbags, to make it easier for Delta Company to distribute under fire.'

Cliff Dohle remembers that all the loose ammunition in sand bags and the blankets were on his aircraft. Cliff thinks that Frank had 3 to 4 boxes on his aircraft and the rest was on his Huey. All this ammunition had to be thrown out by the two soldiers on board that were not secured with safety harness. According to McAulay p.84 para.2:

'As soon as Riley and Grandin had some ammunition on board, they lifted off, into the rain.'

McAulay, p.84. para 1:

'the pilots had decided to use a technique developed by SAS. Cliff Dohle and Bruce Lane would take most of the cargo, and follow one minute behind Riley and Grandin, who would locate the correct spot for them'.

All the pilots were familiar with this technique, as they had practiced with SAS many times. The technique works like this: Because the jungle and especially rubber plantations have a lot of overhead foliage, (show pictures) anything under the trees is very hard to see at treetop level.

The only way you can see through it is to be directly overhead and at height that way you can see over a large area. Bob Grandin in Frank's aircraft says:

'The lead helicopter, with Frank and I on board, was to take the lighter load and go out at height (about six hundred metres) to locate the target zone and make contact.' (Grandin. P.148. para 2)

That is 2000ft. Later on Grandin states in the same paragraph:

'this was designed to improve our safety, as at height the probability of being hit by small arms fire is greatly reduced.'

When Cliff arrived at the target area to which they had to navigate themselves, because they had lost sight of Riley before Cliff took off and because of the lack of visibility, Dohle was worried when he couldn't see Riley's aircraft, that in turn meant Riley wouldn't be able to see him, Cliff switched on his Anti Collision Rotating Red Light. As you would be aware the red light is very bright and flashes on and off and is easily seen for a great distance. (McAulay p. 85, last paragraph):

'They'd put on their red light on the top, to give us an easy identification. We (Riley and Grandin) directed them in, straight in, to the position, gave them a little left and right steering at treetop level.'

Cliff Dohle remembers very clearly that he had to hover over Delta CHQ and that he was directly over the smoke.

'Cliff Dohle saw the smoke below, and felt the helicopter lightening as the heavy boxes slid out, straight into the trees immediately below them. It seemed to take forever,' (McAulay P. 86. para 1)

Harry Smith the Company Commander later told a reporter that resulted in being printed in The Sun on the 27Aug66, which stated '*The helicopter hovered at treetop level-20 feet from the ground.*' Cliff said he was worried that because of the weight of the boxes that if they hit anyone they would be killed. Cliff could see that the flare was away from soldiers and he could see them all clearly. He said he had to hold the aircraft very still in the monsoon to make sure the boxes and the loose ammo all landed where they were supposed too. He thought he was over the drop zone for between 1 and 2 minutes it was the longest time in his life. The welcome cry of the crewman to get going was heard as well as the voice over the radio that informed them it said "*You bloody beaut - that was smack on*" (McAulay. P.86. para 2). Cliff immediately headed for Nui Dat.

As soon as Cliff and Bruce arrived back at Nui Dat they were on standby. As the night wore on Cliff and his crew were ordered back to an area created by the APC's just outside the main battle area. They were to pick up the wounded and the dead. According to McAulay, P. 166 the listed for medical evacuation flight on the night of 18 August are, and in the list is: *A2-1022 Dohle, Lane, Harrington, Hill and A2-1020 Riley, Graddin, Collins, Stirling.* There are other aircraft listed.

According to McAulay, p. 123, 2nd last paragraph:

'for Clif Dohle, this part of the mission was certainly the most difficult action I can remember during my Vietnam tour. We assembled over the Dust-off area at 4,000feet [1200 m] all milling around in the same piece of air space, not being able to see each other, waiting for a radio call directing us one by one to make our approach to the helipad.'

According to Cliff's Log Book he and his crew flew 7 sorties. (Give copy to panel.) That is the first one being the resupply to 'D' company. Cliff's Pilots Log Book reads: August 18 Resupply Ammo, Night Casevac 1.50hrs 7 sorties.

The last paragraph in the Review of Recognition for the Battle of Long Tan, section 5.4 states that Flt. Lt. Frank Riley '*carried the risk of being the first engaged by a possible attack. In the final stages of their approach to the D Coy position they flew low and slow over enemy positions.*' This is not true as already explained, and backed up by proof when Flt.Lt. Bob Grandin stated in his book:

'The lead helicopter, with Frank and I on board was to take the lighter load and go out at height (about six hundred meters) and then later in the same paragraph Grandin states: 'This was designed to improve our safety as at height the probability of being hit by small arms fire was greatly reduced etc.

Cliff Dohle discussed with me what actually happened and why, I have already explained the procedure and the reason for the technique that the RAAF developed in conjunction with SAS.

The statement in the last paragraph (Review dated March 2008 5.4) that:

'Flt. Lt. Dohle's aircraft had the advantage of being able to hang back and be alert to enemy fire and to be more alert to possible enemy fire, and to react to conditions affecting the lead aircraft.'

is not true, because as stated earlier the lead aircraft had already left the scene and was already at height given the one minute delay that Cliff was to have.

This one minute was to give Frank enough time to get to a height, 600m or 2,000ft and to locate the target. Given the weather conditions with huge droplets falling on the fuselage, the thunder and lightning, all this noise plus the huge amount of concentration required in this tense situation, add to that the noise of the engines and that the crew of the aircraft all have on head sets, they wouldn't know if they were under fire unless they seen a tracer bullet coming up at them. Cliff's aircraft had on all his navigations lights as well as a Strobing Anti Collision light, the aircraft would not/could not fly any higher than treetop.

Cliff was the first over 'D' company, he had to fly first over the enemy to get to the target and lit up like a Christmas tree and as he had most of the ammunition it took longer to unload and as stated in McAulay's book and reported in local newspapers: '*Cliff hovered just 20feet above the ground*' and had to hold his position until the complete load was thrown out.

Cliff told me he thought he was over the target for between 1 to 2 minutes, Major O'Brien stated in Grandin's book page 148, 3rd paragraph he estimated that he expected Cliff Dohle to be over the target '*perhaps one minute.*' In McAulay's book page 86 it was reported that, '*it seemed to take forever.*' Flt. Lt. Frank Riley's aircraft flew at what is considered a safe height from small arms and when he descended from 2000ft with a small load, his time over the target compared to Cliff Dohle's was a lot less.

It is my considered opinion that Cliff Dohle action at the battle of Long Tan was exemplary as was his action when his aircraft crashed in the jungle in October 1966, it was his skill that saved six lives that were aboard his helicopter, he deserves his DFC as recommended by his CO at the time, Wing Commander Raymond Scott DFC.

References:

Review of Recognition for the Battle of Long Tan March 2008

McAuley. Lex 1986 *Battle of Long Tan*, Century Hutchinson

Grandin, Bob 2004 *The Battle of Long Tan as told by the Commanders*, Allen and Irwin. Sydney Australia.

Cliff Dohle's Pilots Log Book. Now held at the AWM Canberra.