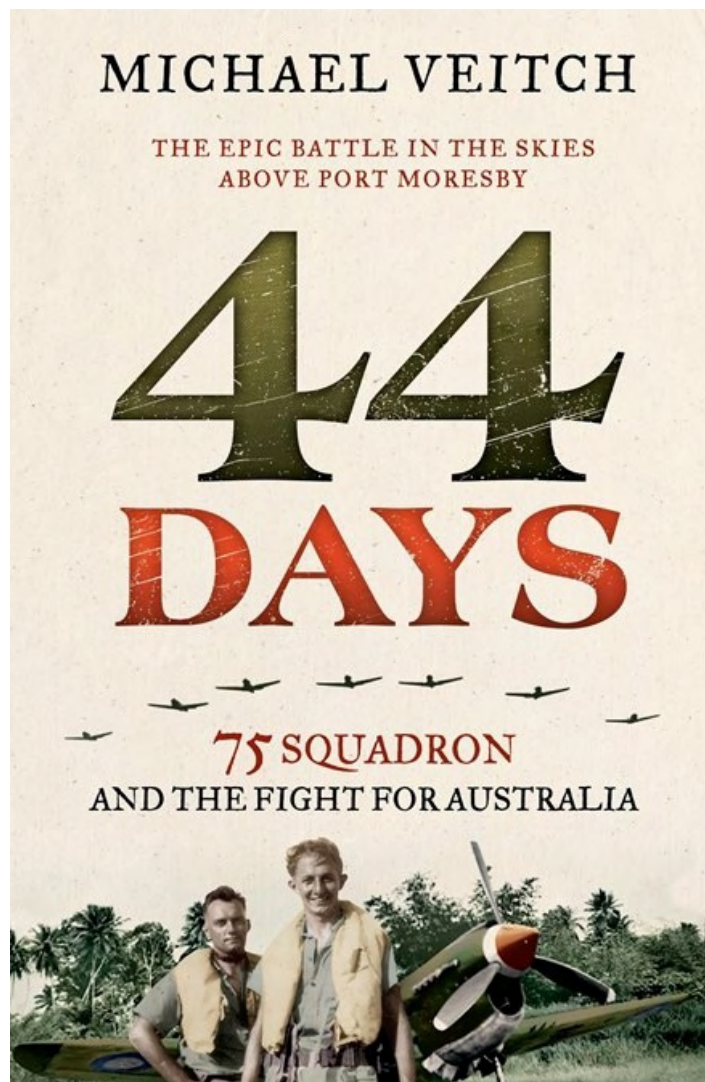


## CO'S REPORT

Happy 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday Magpies! Plenty has occurred since I last checked-in, including Exercise Pitch Black at Tindal, an Operational rotation to the Middle East, a USAF F22 Squadron visit to Tindal, a Navy support deployment to Perth, a historical visit to where it all began in PNG for ANZAC Day, and of most significance the Squadron's 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday and associated celebrations. To round-out the financial year, we're currently hosting two large force employment exercises out of Tindal and Darwin.

First and foremost, how about Michael Veitch's account of our first 44 days in Port Moresby. Many thanks to Bill Evans for attending the book launch in Melbourne and for coordinating multiple personalised autographed copies and their subsequent distribution. It's a brilliantly researched account and tribute to all of our first Magpie heroes. If you are yet to read it, the ISBN is 978-0-7336-3363-8. During our anniversary dinner, the author (Michael Veitch) gave an incredible recount of events surrounding the formation of 75 Squadron in the early 1940s, along with highlights of our first Operational campaign at Port Moresby in 1942. It was absolutely brilliant.



'44 Days: 75SQN and the fight for Australia' by Michael Veitch – July 2016

Last time I wrote 75 Squadron had just won the highly contested touch (girls) and rugby (boys) football games between 75 Squadron and 17 Squadron (the local Base Support Squadron) and we were taking our mid-year leave. What I didn't share was that just prior to stand-down, approximately half of the Magpie team were informed they were required to deploy to the Middle East in late August for five months.

We hit the ground running when we returned to work in mid-July, kicking-off with Middle East force preparation, a package of essential courses such as fitness, medical, weapons, first aid, as well as other specialised training. This was immediately followed by Exercise Pitch Black, Australia's premier multinational day/night fighter flying Exercise that involves the United States and multiple countries from our immediate region. To achieve our Middle East work-up during Pitch Black, we surged the schedule day and night and the maintainers didn't miss a beat. Despite the increased rate of effort, the Squadron remained level-headed, focussed and achieved excellent work-up training whilst fulfilling all Pitch Black missions. IN parallel, we ran a handful of information and preparedness support meetings and functions in the background, for the families and friends of those members deploying.



**A 75 Squadron Hornet about to taxi for a mission in the Middle East – January 2017**

Surging to support Pitch Black concurrently with pre-deployment training sorties was certainly not the lead-up I had envisaged prior to deploying, but in comparison to the work-up the Magpies had in early March 1942 before making Seven Mile Strip their home, I was quietly comfortable that the team and experience selected would do the job well. Immediately prior to departing, we managed to identify a week to down-tools in late August for deploying members to achieve a week of dedicated family time prior to heading off. The Squadron departed, via Darwin, on Tuesday 06 September.

I split our overall deployment success based upon 50% Operational Execution and 50% Welfare Support to members and families remaining at home. I feel this balance was correct, and we excelled equally at both. The main horsepower behind the welfare support at Tindal was provided by Krystal Blanch and Adam Primmer. The kids activities, family events, spouse night out and regular family welfare support checks occurring at Tindal, put the deployed team completely at ease.



**Gunnies working overtime and two Magpie's heading up the Gulf – January 2017**

Whilst deployed, the Magpies performed superbly. Based in the United Arab Emirates, the entire team prepared exceptionally well, day in day out. We flew long missions, six days a week, for a total deployment of just under five months. The maintenance, armaments and logistics team delivered a 100% aircraft availability rate for the entire deployment, an unprecedented statistic achieved through immense pride and sheer dedication. The aircrew performed immaculately too. Some missions in excess of ten hours, most in excess of eight or nine; an exceptionally long time to be strapped into an ejection seat (day and/or night without cabin service) and being expected to perform at our absolute peaks on just a few moments notice.

Equally, our conduct around the Base and integration with the pre-positioned Combat Support Unit and Task Unit Headquarters (the folks providing us services and support allowing us to get the business done) was second to none. We turned that Aussie compound into a mini-Tindal, through constant interaction, mutual respect, and by taking a majority of the support staff through 'a day in the life' at the sharp end. We showed them how their roles contributed to kinetic effects, took them to pre-mission briefings, gave them equipment demonstrations, and let them assist launching jets; we made them feel like they owned the kinetic effects just delivered. Our positive relationship development efforts made a significant difference to the feel and morale of the entire Australian compound. Aside from bolstering 75 Squadron's professional reputation, generating these positive relationships was another great success of our deployment.

There were many Magpies that didn't deploy this rotation, remaining at Tindal and supporting the Operation from afar. This support was absolutely critical to our success at the coal face, and we needed to reach-back to Tindal often. Of most relevance, the support provided to deployed families was nothing short of brilliant. Lawn mowing, handyman repairs, family functions, you name it they did it. The Magpie spirit demonstrated back at home was superior and the direct impact this had on our overall deployment was significant.

On Tuesday 26 January 2017, Australia Day, we returned home to family and friends after almost five months away. There's no place like home – the Magpies did great.



**The 2016/2017 75SQN Middle East deployment Team – January 2017**

Once home we took a week and a half of to reunite with families and adapt back to old routines. The break was short-lived though, when a dozen F-22s arrived at Tindal to fly with us for the rest of the month. What a fantastic opportunity that was, for the entire Squadron to be able to openly interact with an Operational fifth generation USAF outfit. This is precisely what 75 Squadron will become in January 2022, after we retire the last of our fantastic F/A-18A Hornet fleet at Tindal in December 2021. IN addition, there were many new Magpie faces to meet in February, as one third of the Squadron had changed out over the Christmas break whilst we were deployed.

Saturday 04 March, marked our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It also marked the morning of our Perth deployment. Like many other locations across the country (and some internationally i.e. Guam and PNG), Magpies assembled in force and celebrated this historical occasion. At Tindal, it was a birthday brunch in the Airmans Club, complete with tales of rich Squadron history and a huge birthday cake. Much like 75 years ago, the celebrations were short-lived as the Squadron was on the move. By noon members were on a bus enroute to Perth via Darwin, for a Navy support deployment.

Blessed with perfect weather, Perth proved to be a great opportunity to meet many of the new team. Ten jets headed west in support of our Navy, to motivate students on pilot's courses and at 79 Squadron, plus we needed to get back into the swing of air to air core skills training having been primarily focussed on air to surface roles for the previous six months. Getting ten jets across and back without a glitch, whilst achieving some superior 4vX training with five additional contracted air assets in the mix, was a superior way to start 2017 and a great indicator of things to come.

April started exactly where we left off at Perth, with the maintenance team digging deep to continue producing huge aircraft availability rates in order to facilitate another few weeks of 4vX training. It was a brilliant effort. We downed-tools and took a breath and a breath over Easter and slowed for the rest of April, as we prepared for ANZAC Day and Squadron birthday celebrations. Nothing short of a full team contribution was going to result in a credible and memorable birthday function in our 75<sup>th</sup> year.

75 Squadron made significant ANZAC Day contributions both domestically and internationally this year, with a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary flavour. The SENGO lead the way in the Sydney parade, the XO held the fort at Tindal, many of our sections spread throughout remote NT communities and hosted unique dawn services, whilst I was privileged to be involved in a historical and emotional visit to where it all began in Port Moresby, with GPCAPT Tim Alsop and members of John Jackson's family.



**Two 75 Squadron F/A-18As awaken the Bomana Cemetery dawn service – April 2017**

My visit to Port Moresby with Arthur and Patricia Jackson and their families, turned out to be one of the most relevant and emotional experiences of my career. Under the careful guard of our visit coordinator, GPCAPT (Ret) Steve Fielder, the locations and sites we visited were extremely moving. Visiting John's gravestone at Bomana Cemetery, observing the Governor General hand Arthur and Patricia a copy of John's medals at the same location, and being part the opening of a new John Jackson static display in the departure lounge of Jackson International Airport was an incredible experience. This was followed-up the following day by participating in the ANZAC Day dawn service at Bomana, laying wreaths with Arthur and Patricia, before very proudly watching a pair of 75 Squadron F/A-18s appear out of the dawn fog at the crescendo of the Australian National Anthem. It was the perfect finish to a moving service, a very proud moment for all involved, and certainly a career highlight for me.

Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> April not only marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of our first combat leader, SQNLDR John Jackson DFC, it was also the day we integrated our oldest and youngest Magpies for a handover of stories and history, joining together to celebrate 75 magnificent years. I opened the doors to current, former, and families of former Magpies to join us at Tindal for a unique birthday celebration. Operating on smell of an oily rag, the team improvised for this veteran focussed event, pulling together to deliver two fantastic days of activities. This included observing sitting-in on mission briefs, watching maintenance prepare aircraft, watching aircraft depart and recover, a Ross Fox site visit and service by resident Chaplain Tom Killingback, aircraft static displays, simulator experiences, flying displays and we concluded with a birthday celebration dinner in the form of a tactical dining-in, with special guest speaker and author, Michael Veitch. For those fit to drive the morning after, a road trip to Wyndam to visit the resting place of JP Conlan (20 years on) was also on offer.



75 Squadron Birthday Celebrations – April 2017

The broader birthday concept was to bring the veterans and their families to Tindal, to impart their stories and knowledge on to our most junior members, to ensure the rich Squadron history and legacy endures, whilst celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> year. We housed our guests in the mess and immersed them in a Tindal experience they should not forget for some time; I felt this was warmly welcomed by all. I also wish to make special mention to all members that selflessly volunteered to host and drive our guests during their stay; thank you muchly.

The two days' worth of local activities also appeared to be a hit with our veterans, guests and families, however I feel the greatest win was witnessing familiar-like interaction between young and old strangers; over seven decades between our youngest (Annie Turner) and our oldest (Ed May) as pictured below cutting the birthday cake. We wore working dress in a North Annex hanger during the birthday function, amongst current equipment and backdrops of artwork that covered our span of seven and a half decades. Working dress was used to not only replicate a something more like an all-ranks operational working meal several decades ago, but it was also used so our guests could identify with us by name uniforms.



**Michael Veitch's speech and (almost) 75 years between the old and young – April 2017**

Joe McGrath, Ian Thompson and Daryl Pudney kept many on their toes with plenty of stories from their days involving Kittyhawks, Mirages and Hornets. Many family members of John and Les Jackson we also keen to share a historic note. Richard Dean-Butcher kept us entertained late in the evening with some heartfelt words on behalf of Bill, and later in the evening when he broke out the brass and entertained the floor with several trumpet numbers. The bograts (junior pilots) achieved a score of superior on the night, by delivering the perfect main course; over half a dozen spit roasts on the go at once, on-time and cooked to perfection. Michael Veitch's after dinner speech was a clear highlight of the evening, covering a recount of Australia's Defence position leading up to 75 Squadron's formation, through to our rapid formation, subsequent thrust into PNG, tales of leaders that got us underway, plus an insight into some of our lesser-known hero's that didn't make it home. It was brilliant.

Most impressive however was the level of conversation, participation and engagement between the entire Squadron and our veterans, families and guests. I was immensely proud that members acknowledged the rare and historic opportunity that was being presented to them during the dining-in, and that they went forth and actively engaged with (or even just listen to) our veterans and family guests who were in possession of rich Squadron history from as far back as the Islands period. In our 75<sup>th</sup> year, I could not be more proud of the interaction I witnessed that evening.



**A21-38 with a '75 Years' tail flash watches over the Birthday celebrations – April 2017**

This month we wrap up the financial year with two simultaneous exercises. Arnhem Thunder is a major pilot upgrade opportunity incorporating live weapons at our local ranges i.e. fight your way in, drop weapons, fight your way out missions; it tests our up-and-coming aircrew to their limits whilst giving the gunnies plenty of training too. Diamond Storm is a highly complex integration exercise, the final stage of the fighter combat instructor course, and we have inherited superb flying upgrade opportunities by participating in their complex missions out of Darwin. Whilst every day this month has been extremely long for everyone, the rewards have been of equal magnitude.

In summary, another highly rewarding, Operational and historic twelve month period conquered, in the year we celebrate our 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. Whilst we've well and truly earned our mid-year break, it could be short-lived given the current degree of global uncertainty. Regardless, whenever called upon, the Magpies will be ready. Rest assured our professional reputation both domestically and internationally remains second-to-none, bolstered heavily by our work and relationship with USAF F22 Squadron's in both the Middle East and at Tindal, plus our flawless performance this month during the aforementioned dual exercises. The remainder of the year looks steady; an Asia deployment after the mid-year break plus some domestic deployments later in the year, will keep us on our toes until the Christmas period.

Many thanks again to all Magpies past and present, for your ongoing support. We are at the top of our game at the moment, a great place to be in such uncertain times, achieved through sheer Magpie dedication, determination and pride derived from 75 years of rich history.....Once a Magpie, Always a Magpie.

Regards, Mick G  
CO75