



State Minister's Message
Issue 31 (9 September, 2009)

A regular update from the Office of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, The Hon. Michael Atkinson M.P.

Flying Officer Michael Herbert "Home at Last"

Nearly 1,000 South Australians took the opportunity to pay tribute to Flying Officer Michael Herbert at his funeral with full military honours almost forty years after the Vietnam Veteran disappeared while piloting his Canberra aircraft in 1970.

Minister Atkinson was pleased that so many South Australians took the opportunity to farewell the last fallen warrior of the Vietnam War and pay their respects to all Vietnam Veterans.

Flying officer Michael Herbert was laid to rest at Centennial Park following the Pontifical Concelebrated Mass of Christian Burial presided over by Archbishop Phillip Wilson at St Francis Xavier Cathedral. Michael was just 24 when he was killed with navigator, Pilot Officer Robert Carver when their Canberra bomber crashed in Vietnam in 1970, their remains undiscovered until April this year. Pilot Officer Carver was buried in Toowomba last week on 3 September.

Michael's family led the tribute at Monday's funeral service joined by family friends, dignitaries, old Sacred Heart College school mates, along with current students, teachers and Marist Brothers, serving airforce representatives, members of the veterans' community and the general public to ensure that Michael finally got the funeral for which he had waited so long.

Following Eulogies from Michael's brother, Shane who was just 11 when Michael's plane vanished and family friend Bill Denny, Tributes were given by Frank Hodges, a former member of No 2 Squadron and Premier Mike Rann.

More information about the funeral service and photographs are available at the following website: <http://www.defence.gov.au/media/download/2009/Sep/20090907e/index.htm>

**Premier Mike Rann's Tribute to Flying Officer Michael Herbert
(Monday, 7 September, 2009 - St Francis Xavier Cathedral)**

Today, as we welcome Flying Officer Michael Herbert back to his eternal home, we again pause to remember what happened in war, years ago.

So often, we visit the war graves and try to touch with our minds the relatives that sometimes we did not even know.

The ordinary heroes who made us proud.

We sing hymns, and raise the flag.

We fire the guns in salute and hope that somewhere, somehow, they can hear us in our acknowledgement of the magnitude of what they did and what they lost, on our behalf.

For those, like Michael Herbert, who served our nation in Vietnam, their courage and their sacrifice was – at first – neither recognised, nor decently honoured.

Those who returned came back to the country town streets, and the farms, factories and suburbs they now saw, with a newer, harsher wisdom born of pain.

Over almost four decades, we have travelled long miles from those bitter times.

And today, we take the final steps towards full and proper remembrance and reconciliation.

Our last brave son who was lost in Vietnam has returned to us.

The last of too many fresh faces in slouch hats, and airmen's helmets, in family albums that would never grow old.

Michael, we salute your courage and we praise your commitment.

Flying was your life - a life you gave in the service of our nation.

There can be no higher calling.

Ceremonies like these are important for Australia's soul.

They mark an everlasting companionship between the living and the dead - a handshake across the void.

We cannot begin to understand the pain and the loss endured by your family and friends.

It's been 38 years, 10 months and five days since your final mission, and every day since, they have longed to have you home.

Your mother, Joan, devoted so much of that time to finding you.

Sadly, she is not here to see her dream realised, but you are forever united in spirit.

To your father, John, your sister, Kerry, and your brother, Shane, we hope your return brings resolution and peace.

Please know that, on behalf of the people of South Australia, we mourn your loss, we admire your courage, and we offer our deep and abiding gratitude for your sacrifice.

You will forever hold a treasured place in the hearts and memories of our State, and our nation.

Michael, we are all so pleased that you are "Home At Last".