

## SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR & AVIATION EVENTS PROFILES

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### WGCDR (Retd) Robert 'Bob' Andrew Macintosh AFC OAM MiD

*From a Korean War fighter pilot to helicopter pilot in Vietnam to flying Preacher to veterans' advocate*



*Bob Macintosh in the cockpit of a RAAF Sabre aircraft.  
(AFA-SA Collection)*

Robert Andrew Macintosh was born on 12 March 1929 in Nowra. His father was a public works engineer. He grew up in Northmead, Sydney and went to Kings College, Parramatta, before starting an engineering degree.

He applied to be a pilot in the Air Force and enlisted as a trainee pilot on 1 October 1951. He completed No 8 Pilot's Course at No 1 Basic Flying Training School at Point Cook and Uranquity, flying mostly Wirraway aircraft. Graduating as a Sergeant pilot in 1952, he proceeded onto Fighter Operational Conversion Course flying Mustang and Vampire aircraft at RAAF Williamtown.

Robert Macintosh was posted to No 77 Squadron where he converted onto the new Meteor aircraft in April in Japan with No 91 Wing before serving in

Korea from May to July 1953. Bob used to recall that shortly after arriving in Korea, he heard a light aircraft approaching during the night. He asked a fellow sergeant what the aircraft was and was assured it was a British Auster aircraft only to shortly after hear a large explosion and air raid siren. He consequently rushed out of his bed into an air-raid trench. This was Bob's first encounter with Bed Check Charlie; North Korean light aircraft that conducted low level harassment strike operations at night over allied forces.

His missions involved escorting U.S bombers, conducting armed reconnaissance missions and striking ground targets. He recounted many missions seeing tracer bullets passing his jet, but to his surprise he never actually got hit. The Korean War saw 77SQN lose an average of 1 pilot per month during the 36 months that the squadron was in Korea. A number of Macintosh's colleagues perished while he was at the squadron. For his service in Korea, he was belatedly awarded the United States Air Medal by the US Ambassador to Australia in 2011 alongside ten fellow 77 Squadron colleagues from the Korean War.

Returning to Australia in August 1953, Macintosh converted onto the new Sabre fighter aircraft serving as one of four initial Sabre instructors in the new Sabre Trials Flight. He was at the forefront of the RAAF's new fighter capability for several years. After commissioning as a Pilot Officer and serving a brief six month posting at No 3 Squadron flying Sabres in 1956, he served as a flight instructor with No 1 Applied Flying Training School flying Wirraway and Vampire aircraft for the next three years.



*SGT Bob Macintosh (3<sup>rd</sup> from left) returns from a sortie during the Korean War. (AWM)*

After completing a staff posting in Canberra, he was selected in 1962 to undergo helicopter pilot training in the United States for the new Iroquois. During his posting with 9 Squadron from 1962 to 1965 he was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air for flood relief operations. On one mission, he rescued 11 people off the top of a building and then rescued a young family including their cat and pet Galah off the roof of a house. In 1965/66 he completed an operational tour in Malaya flying the Iroquois on many sorties deploying Gurkhas and Australian soldiers into the Malayan jungles.

From June 1966 to March 1967, he completed an operational tour in Vietnam flying the Iroquois. In August, only six weeks after arriving in country, he piloted one of three Dustoff Iroquois into Long Tan in the evening

immediately after the battle to evacuate wounded Australians from the battlefield. It was a feat of night flying which no training prepared him where he flew with no lights low over jungle. He once recalled "It was pitch-black and I was unable to put on my landing lights until I was about 50 feet off the ground. Prior to this I was guided down the pencil-thin beam of a penlight held up by a soldier."

A month later, he was tasked with picking up a SAS patrol near Binh Gia. As he came in to land, a major firefight erupted with the enemy. The patrol had to run for the helicopter firing their weapons and ducking as the door gunners fired over their heads. Despite the enemy targeting the soldiers and his helicopter, Bob remained on the ground displaying immense courage ensuring the SAS patrol was onboard before lifting off. The enemy fire continued until Bob cleared 1000ft.



*FLTLT Bob Macintosh in a RAAF Iroquois in Vietnam (AWM)*

In February 1967, he flew more than 30 sorties in 24 hours in Operation BRIBIE, performing resupply and medical evacuation tasks for a 6RAR element that encountered a significant Viet Cong force on the ground. The Iroquois Bob flew, A2-1019, is now proudly on display at the Australian War Memorial. Bob was Mentioned in Dispatches

for his distinguished service in Vietnam with the citation stating “He proved himself to be an aggressive and capable helicopter captain determined to ensure the success of his tasks. He led a large number of small formation missions and participated in many emergency extractions of Australian Army patrols in danger of being over-run by the Viet Cong.”

Returning to Australia, he wrote the syllabus for the RAAF’s first helicopter pilot instructor’s course for which he was awarded the Air Force Cross. He returned to 5 Squadron Canberra where he was promoted to Wing Commander serving a year as the Commanding Officer before being posted to RAAF Edinburgh as the Commanding Officer Base Squadron until December 1978. After 27 years’ service and three operational tours, Macintosh retired from the RAAF in 1978.

Completing training for the Uniting Church ministry he went to Meekatharra, WA, as a “Flying Padre” with Frontier Services. Macintosh and his wife, Jenny, flew the church Cessna C182, serving an area of more than 450,000 square kilometers, or nearly half the size of SA before retiring (again) in 1994 and settling in Adelaide.

Having served in Korea and Vietnam, Macintosh saw first-hand the effects military service has on those who serve and was passionate about supporting veterans. He was a tireless servant of the Royal Australian Air Force Association (RAAFA) SA Division, including service as President of its Mitcham Branch and as a Vice President of the State Council. He worked as a Pension and Welfare Officer and as an Honorary Chaplain for numerous ceremonies and commemorative services. Bob served on South Australia’s Veterans’ Advisory Council for three years from 2014 to 2016, sharing his passion, understanding and concern for the veteran’s community. On 8 July 2015 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List for service to the community, particularly through church and veterans’ organisations.



*WGCDR (Retd) Bob Macintosh in recent years at a RAAF Association gathering in Adelaide. (AFA-SA)*

Passing away on 3 September 2019 in Adelaide, Bob Macintosh lived an extraordinary life serving in three different conflicts across three different decades serving as a fighter pilot, a helicopter pilot, a flying pastor to being a veteran’s advocate. He was a true officer and a gentleman.

**Greg Weller  
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