

A South African Korean War hero ... killed in the Vietnam War
Flt Lt Everitt Murray Lance

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“Lofty”

Flt Lt Everitt Murray Lance
1928 to 1971



The Observation Post

South African Modern Military History

Written and researched by Peter Dickens

<https://samilhistory.com/>

April 2007

South Africa Air Force and the Korean War

Lofty Lance, SAAF in Korea

Lofty Lance was born in the Aliwal North, Eastern Cape Province, on the Orange River, Central South Africa on 29th April 1928. After his schooling at the Aliwal North High School, his career followed a rather convoluted route, the adventurous life loomed large and he initially joined the Navy and trained on the S.A.T.S General Botha (Cadet 1305) joining the ranks of many ‘Botha Boys’ who would later advance prestigious careers in the military, he then joined his ‘first’ Air Force – The South African Air Force as a fighter pilot.

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Lofty' first employment in 1945 was with the "Clan Line", a merchant passenger and cargo shipping line during the post war reconstruction period by serving on the ship "Perthshire".



By 1950 Lofty found himself in his 'first' war serving with the SAAF. War broke out in Korea on 25 June 1950 and on 4 August 1950 the South African government announced its intention to place an all-volunteer squadron at the disposal of the United Nations to fight in Korea.



On 25 September 1950, SAAF 2 Squadron (including Lofty), known as the Flying Cheetahs, sailed for Japan. On arrival at Yokohama the squadron proceeded to Johnson Air Base near Tokyo where they completed their conversions on F-51D Mustangs supplied by the United States Air Force (USAF). SAAF 2 Squadron served as one of the four squadrons under the command of the USAF 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing and flew their first mission in Korea on 19 November 1950 from K-9 and K-24, Pyongyang.



F-51 Mustangs from No. 2 Squadron, South African Air Force (SAAF) conducting run-ups in Korea in 1951. Photo courtesy Mike Pretorius

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The SAAF flew with the distinctive Springbok in the centre of the roundel, introduced when 2 Squadron, was sent to Korea. Their role was interdiction against the enemy's logistic and communication lines, providing protective cover for rescue operations, reconnaissance flights and interception of enemy aircraft.



However, the main the SAAF mustangs took part in 'close air support' operations in support of ground troops, often sarcastically referred to them as "mud moving" missions, they were highly dangerous as the aircraft has to get right into the battle at very low altitude and speed. It was a 'baptism of fire' for the SAAF.

Before moving onto jet propelled Sabre aircraft, the propeller driven Mustang phase of the war saw SAAF pilots on these sorties coming in 'low and slow' into the range of enemy ground based anti-aircraft fire which proved highly dangerous and in operations of this kind using the Mustangs, the SAAF lost 74 of its 95 aircraft – nearly the entire squadron's allocation.



SAAF Mustangs in Korea – the different colour spinners denoted formation rank

Epitomising the attitude of the SAAF pilots at this time was Lofty Lance who maintained that for all the Mustang's downsides on the upside it was an excellent aircraft to have a crash in. He would know, during the war he wrote off, not one, but three Mustangs.

Fellow pilot Al Rae recalled Lofty Lance returning his Mustang to base after it was shot up during a sortie. When Lofty selected 'undercarriage down' only one wheel, the one on the starboard wing, locked into place. Landing on one wheel he kept the aircraft level as long as possible bleeding off as much speed as possible before the wing dropped, and the aircraft went into the much-expected ground-loop. As the fire engine arrived to pull the pilot out, foam down the aircraft and as the dust settled, the firefighters were surprised to find Lofty as a spectator standing with them. He had long since exited the aircraft whilst it was moving and jumped clear.

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Lofty Lance's SAAF Mustang after one of his crash landings during the Korean War

On another one-wheel landing, Lofty Lance's Mustang spun off the runway and ripped through a nearby armoury (which luckily did not explode), tearing off both wings and the rear fuselage. Continuing to slide on for some time was the armoured cocoon containing the cockpit and Loft, once it finally came to a rest and he climbed out completely unscathed.

2nd Lieutenant E.M 'Lofty' Lance, for his actions in Korea became the 23rd South African to earn the American DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) in Korea (out of a total of 55 South African pilots to receive it) and the American Air Medal with Oak Leaf Clusters – a brave man indeed.

"Lofty" features prominently in the book "South African Flying Cheetahs in Korea" by Dermott Moore and Peter Bagshaw, published by Ashanti Publishing.

Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force

At the end of the Korean War on 27th July 1953, Lofty Lance decided to advance his career in his 'second' Air Force – The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Wanting to be a fighter pilot he had to start at the beginning and initially landed up flying RCAF Canadair CP-107 Argus (CL-28) maritime reconnaissance aircraft. After a few years of flying the Argus his aspiration to become a fighter pilot led him to become RCAF instructor as a next step. His wanderlust overcame him and he then joined his 'third' Air Force – the Royal Air Force (RAF) in 1962.

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RCAF Canadair CP-107 Argus (CL-28)

As with the Royal Canadian Air Force, when arriving the United Kingdom and joining the RAF Lofty had to advance his career using the same routine, flying instructor first, and he landed up as a flight instructor at RAF Leeming flying RAF Jet Provost trainers. His attitude however remained that of a combat pilot and he was often heard to say, “sod the briefing, let’s fly”.

He eventually got a break to become a fighter pilot in the RAF and was posted onto the super-sonic and extremely quick RAF EE Lightnings (capable of Mach 2) on which he did two very successful tours. Along the way he married Margaret and had three children, Murray, Graham and daughter Meredath. Margaret was an Australian and Lofty and his family took the decision to move to Australia.



A Royal Air Force English Electric Lightning circa 1962

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In Australia he joined his 'fourth' and final Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and starting from the bottom again on his quest for a fighter pilot role but he found himself instructing and flying RAAF helicopters. Lofty and Margaret moved their residence to 3 Tivey Place, Hughes, Canberra ACT. So how did our hero Lofty find himself in the Vietnam War?

Vietnam War and Australia

Here's a little-known fact – the Australian Armed Forces also took part in the Vietnam War! Yup, alongside the Americans – which given all the iconography and cultural conditioning surrounding the Vietnam War would come as a complete surprise to many South Africans.

Here's a little background on how Australian armed forces personnel found themselves fighting in mud, guts and blood which was to epitomise the Vietnam War and all its political and military misgivings.



Members of 5 Platoon, B Company, 7th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (7RAR), near Dat Do awaiting extraction from United States Army 'Huey' helicopters

The Vietnam War for the Vietnamese has two really distinctive phases – the 'French' phase and the 'American' phase. Prior to World War 2 (WW2) Vietnam (North and South) was a French Colony. During WW2 Japanese Imperial Forces occupied Vietnam. After WW2, the French moved to re-take control of their old Colony – at the displeasure of the Vietnamese people who were expecting and had in fact declared independence. Independence had been driven by communist guerrillas (ironically supported by the American OSS – the precursor to the CIA) who had initially been in the fight against Imperial Japan led by Ho Chi Min.

As the Indo-Chinese subcontinent was reshaping itself post WW2 in the early 1950's Vietnam found itself in a similar position to Korea on the chess board which was to become the 'Cold War' – with a Communist insurgency starting in the North supported by 'International Communism' – in both cases the USSR and Communist China.

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French troops in their Vietnam War show the kind of deja vu of what would eventually await American troops

America found itself embroiled in the Korean War alongside a United Nations (UN) coalition (involving Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and even countries like Belgium, Netherlands, Greece and South Africa). 'Peace' (actually a cease-fire) was attained when the country found itself literally split in half with a DMZ (de-militarised zone) along a latitude – in this case the 38th Parallel. Communists – North, 'Democrats' – South.

Independently of a coalition and more or less at the same time France found itself embroiled in a war in Vietnam with Ho Chi Min's northern based communist 'Viet Minh' army to take back control of all of Vietnam. After slogging it out in the mud, jungles and rain for 7 long years with fierce fighting and atrocities been committed by both sides the French Armed Forces dug in for an all-out toe to toe at Dien Bein Phu in the Vietnamese highlands.

The battle of Dien Bein Phu ended on 7 May 1954 as a North Vietnamese victory – it was a shattering defeat for the French and forced the implementation of Geneva Accords in 1954 to split Vietnam in half with a DMZ (de-militarised zone) along a latitude – in this case the 17th Parallel. Communists – North, 'Democrats' – South.

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General Navarre, General Cogy and General Gilles inspect troops and defences near Diên Biên Phu prior to their embarrassing defeat in May 1954

The French promptly left Vietnam and America found itself in a dilemma, simply put they felt obligated to support the newly formed 'South Vietnamese Republic' so as to prevent another 'Korea' and defeat of the Indo-Chinese sub-continent to International Communism.

As the inevitable war in the South Vietnam escalated again, America found itself gradually drawn into the war with a slow 'mission creep'. Wanting another Korean War styled coalition and not wanting to be seen as going it alone, the Johnson administration pressured other countries to join the USA in the Vietnam War (much as President George W Bush would later form a "coalition of the willing to fight the Iraq War).

Initially they turned to their NATO allies and (no real surprise) they found that France had no interest in joining them, for the French the Vietnam war had become known as 'la sale guerre' (the dirty war) and domestic support had all but evaporated. Also, the 'special relationship' between the UK and USA proved a non-starter and the British withdrew any official support for a war in Vietnam. They also found no appetite for a coalition in the UN.

However, they were able to cobble together a weak coalition of sorts comprising the 'South Vietnam Republic' (no surprise there either), South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines.

It was no small sacrifice in terms of actual boots on the ground for this coalition with the USA – in the end South Korea proved the American's main supporter in Vietnam, providing over 300,000 troops and suffering some 5,000 deaths. Almost 60,000 Australian military personnel eventually served in Vietnam, 521 of whom died, about 3000 New Zealanders served, 37 of whom died.

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A squad leader of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) Tiger Division keeps in contact with his men during an operation in the Vietnamese Central Highlands

Not many people know about the sacrifice of countries like New Zealand, South Korea and Australia in the Vietnam War and they should. The same iconography of war and cultural upheaval that took place in the United States surrounding their involvement in the war also took place in Australia and New Zealand, and, like Americans, many Australians to this day struggle to reconcile with the Vietnam War and the values which underpinned it.

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No. 9 Squadron Royal Australian Air Force

Fourth air force for 40 year-old Everitt Murray "Lofty" Lance, seen here (right) with Flt Lt Frederick Stuart while signing on with the RAAF at Australia House in London. Aged 40, he had previously served in the SAAF, RCAF and RAF



Australia did not hold back or diminish its support for the USA in the Vietnam War either, it went in all out and sent personnel to Vietnam from literally every arm of service, along with everything from bombers to tanks to artillery – and especially helicopters. As a ‘helicopter’ war the Royal Australian Air Force helicopter (RAAF) squadrons and their pilots were all in supporting both American and Australian ground force operations. By this time Flight Lieutenant ‘Lofty Lance’ was serving as a pilot with No. 9 Squadron RAAF – a helicopter squadron.



Flight Lieutenant (Lofty) Everitt Murray Lance as part of 9 Squadron RAAF standing next to his Bushranger Huey in Vietnam

9 Squadron RAAF started their involvement in Vietnam on the 6th June 1966 sending eight Iroquois helicopters Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), landing at the Vung Tau airbase, Vietnam. The Bell UH-1B Iroquois or “Huey” is almost synonymous with the Vietnam War and for the next five and a half years 9 Squadron’s Hueys supported the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF).

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The squadron carried out a number of different types of missions: inserting and extracting Special Air Service patrols, evacuating wounded troops, spraying herbicides and pesticides (now very controversial), dropping leaflets, and flying “olfactory reconnaissance” or “people sniffer” missions (a sophisticated ‘smell’ detector was fitted to the helicopters). The squadron supported every major operation conducted by the Australians, eventually flying 237,424 missions.



Soldiers from the 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment unloading supplies from a No. 9 Squadron RAAF helicopter during the Vietnam War in 1967

In 1968 the squadron’s size was increased to 16 ‘Huey’ helicopters. Four of the squadron’s Iroquois were subsequently modified into gunships, which carried twin-fixed forward-firing 7.62-millimetre mini-guns and two seven-tube 2.75-inch rocket launchers, in addition to the two door-mounted M60 machine-guns. Known as a ‘Bushranger’ gunship it was able to cover troop-carrying helicopters approaching ‘hot’ landing zones and provide fire support.

Rather painfully, as just a few months prior to 9 Squadron’s last mission in Vietnam on the 19th November 1971, Flight Lieutenant ‘Lofty’ Lance would lose his life – 7th June 1971.



Now aged 40 years old, Lofty was back in the thick of things flying close support missions again in his RAAF Bushranger Huey. On the 7th June 1971 whilst flying RAAF Iroquois Bushranger’ number A2-723, Lofty Lance was providing gunship, ammunition resupply and casualty evacuation support for Bravo Company of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and Centurion tanks of the 1st Armoured Regiment, who were involved in an attack on a Vietnamese enemy bunker system in Long Khanh province as part of Operation Overlord.

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During an ammunition resupply, Lofty Lance's helicopter was hit by enemy fire and crashed into trees killing both him and his gunner, Cpl David John Dubber. Lofty's co-pilot and one other crew member survived with minor injuries. An initial casevac was attempted but had to be aborted due to intense enemy fire.



Cpl David Dubber MID



Under continuous fire from Bushrangers and US Army Gunships, Bravo Company was resupplied with ammunition and the aircrew casualties were eventually evacuated.

Flt Lt Everitt Murray "Lofty" Lance
Caricature from SAAF days



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P05389.010

Sappers from 2 Field Troop, 1 Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers (RAE), inspect the wreckage of the Bell UH-1 Bushranger flown by Flight Lieutenant Everitt Murray Lance. The sappers later used C4 explosive to destroy the wreckage to prevent any part of it from falling into enemy hands.

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As was the case in many instances experienced during the Vietnam War, the Australians won the day clearing the enemy bunkers and were eventually able to review the crash site and take photos of it, only to have to leave it eventually for the Communists to re-take it – and more so by the early 70's, the withdrawal of American and Australian troops and support from Vietnam would see Saigon (the South Vietnamese capital) eventually fall on the 30th April 1975 to the Communist backed statutory North Vietnam forces and guerrilla South Vietnamese 'Viet Cong' forces.



Final Rest and legacy

The mortal remains of Flight Lieutenant 'Lofty' Everitt Murray Lance were sent back to Australia and he was buried with 'Full Air Force honours' a week after his death on the 16th June 1971 in the Woden Cemetery, Canberra, Australia.

Cemetery or memorial details: Canberra Cemetery, Australian Capital Territory

But what of his legacy?

1970 was a watershed year politically speaking, both in the USA and in Australia, the year saw their respective domestic anti-war movements peak, and it was not a minority of 'Liberal' snowflakes, the peak saw significant parts of the voter base from all parts of society stand up against their governments. 'The Peace Moratorium' campaign in Australia drew over 200,000 Australians protested across the country and approximately 100,000 citizens participated in epicentre march in Melbourne. In the USA – over 2 million American civilians joined their 'Peace Moratorium' marches. The writing was on the wall and by August 1971, the Australian Prime Minister, William McMahon, officially announced he would lead a campaign to withdraw all troops from Vietnam.

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Vietnam War Peace Moratorium march in Melbourne, Australia 1970

In Australia, like America, returning Vietnam War veterans found themselves disillusioned with their country's commitment to send them to try and win an unwinnable war. In Australia in particular Vietnam War veterans in some instances were even shunned and excluded in their local RSL branches by the old WW2 veterans as not having fought a 'real war'. The political landscape at home had been changed considerably by the war and continued to change over many years, sadly all this left many Vietnam War veterans and their legacy behind.

The brutality of the war and the deep social divisions created by it left many with very deep psychological wounds and many refused to talk about – and not just the 'Free West' veterans from France, America and Australia, many of the Vietnamese veterans, North and South also found themselves in the same boat – it was all just too painful, better to just forget.

As in America, Australia – under its ANZAC values – has in recent times been able to reconcile with its Vietnam War past, especially in understanding the long-term mental effects of the war on its veterans and reinstalling honour to both the veterans and the military personnel who sacrificed their lives when their country called them to duty.

Lofty Lance now occupies a special place of honour on the Australian honour roll, remembered annually on ANZAC day. He is not really remembered on honour rolls in South Africa, he does however occupy a special place on the S.A.T.S General Botha remembrance roll (the South African Training Ship's base that he initially cut his military career on) and a plaque has been dedicated to him by the 'Botha Boys' in recognition of his sacrifice along with that of Albert Frisby a fellow pilot killed in Korea. The plaque was dedicated in an official ceremony to the S.A.T.S General Botha cenotaph and full respect to the Botha Boys for doing the excellent work that they do.

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However, nationally he is not really acknowledged as a son of our land lost in one the most tumultuous wars experienced after WW2, in fact it's very likely that this article will be an eye-opener for many South Africans.

South Africa is a different matter, South Africans in trying to bury their past have simply buried this kind of history with it, and many would struggle to understand why it was necessary to fight Communists and their drive for liberation of their people from 'Imperialism' and 'Colonialism' after all, in their minds at least, Communist trained and backed guerrillas freed them from Apartheid. It's a simple and highly misaligned logic – the fact that the advent and advance of Communism as an ideology proved both dangerous and deadly to millions of people around the planet is conveniently ignored.

Conclusion

South African military veterans and wars fought prior to 1994 need to be viewed in their historical context, and this includes Lofty Lance. The 'Cold War' was a very real one and the jousting between Communism and 'The Free West' was a highly deadly one. As the dominoes fell to Communist backed insurgencies in 1966 on the Indo-China sub-continent, so too did dominos fall on the African sub-continent. The same call to arms which brought American and Australian young men into conflict against Communism was used in South Africa to call men to arms, and many did – not to fight 'for Apartheid' but to fight against 'Communism'. Yes, it's all rather 'grey' now and the values which drove these men to fight are not clear to many as history has also shown that this call to action was also overplayed by governments trying to attain futile political goals in a sea of social dissonance and domestic resistance to their policies.

The Vietnam War would ultimately prove a pivot in the history of 'western democracy' – it literally forced the USA to re-embrace the values of 'freedom' on which its founders shaped the American nation, changed American culture at its very core and steered the country into its modern identity – from its music to its civil rights.

What is also clear is that serving personnel in the military serve their country against any adversary and the honour to do this is theirs. Men like Lofty Lance made a career of the military, and like many in this career he moved around within his country's Allies respective armed forces to advance it. Remember that when Lofty served in the SAAF, South Africa was a 'Union' and a 'Dominion' – Canada, the UK and Australia were all military Allies with South Africa as they were also part of the

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Commonwealth and all of them took part as partners in WW2 fighting the onset of Fascism and subsequently in the Korean War fighting the onset of International Communism – literally fighting side by side. Given shortages and secondments it was not at all unusual to find South African airmen in Allied Air Forces.



Commonwealth aircraft identification roundels for each air force in Lofty Lance served (L-R) SAAF, RCAF, RAF, RAAF

In doing so, the ‘Allies’ and the ‘Commonwealth’ military coalitions would eventually reshape European democracy and turn the efforts of ‘International Communism’ around. They forged the modern democracies we now find ourselves in with all the modern liberties we now enjoy.

Lance’s service was one of honour and one so dangerous that few men are drawn to it. It is with the same honour that we should remember one very brave South African – Flight Lieutenant (Lofty) Everitt Murray Lance, may you Rest in Peace, your duty done.

In Memorial



Australian War Memorial

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Flt Lt Everitt Murray Lance 1928 to 1971

Enlistment: RAF London
Service number: O316996
Rank: Flight Lieutenant
Unit: 9 Squadron
Service: Royal Australian Air Force
Conflict: Vietnam, 1962-1975
Date of death: 7 June 1971 (Aged 40 Years)
Place of death: Long Binh during the Battle of Long Khanh Vietnam (air operations)
Cause of death: Killed in action, helicopter crashed and burned. They were providing gunship, ammunition resupply and casualty evacuation support for Bravo Company of the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment and Centurion tanks of the 1st Armoured Regiment, who were involved in an attack on an enemy bunker system in Long Khanh province as part of Operation Overlord. During an ammunition resupply, Lance's helicopter was hit by enemy fire and crashed into trees killing him, the gunner and injuring two others. Helicopter suffered small arms fire, failed to lift, crashed and burned.

Previous Active Service roles before Australia

| | | | | |
|------|------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1948 | SAAF | South African Air Force | (5yrs) | Trained as Air Pilot |
| | | 2 Sqn | Flying Cheetahs Squadron | Korea |
| | | | Flew Mustang Fighter Bomber | |
| | | | Korea – 75 Sorties – awards citations | |
| | RCAF | Royal Canadian Air Force | 1953 to 1960 | |
| | RAF | Royal Air Force | 1960 to 68 | 8yrs Instructor |

Awards: Air Medal – South African Air Force Korea War with Cluster
Australian Defence Force medal
Vietnam Medal
Distinguish Flying Cross (USA) Korea
Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster (USA) Korea
Others ?

Next of Kin: Husband of Margaret A. Father of Murray, Graham and Meredith

Cemetery or memorial details: Canberra Cemetery, Australian Capital Territory

Source: AWM153 Roll of Honour cards, Vietnam