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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE PETER HOWSON, MP, MINISTER FOR AIR.

RAAF PILOT DECORATED FOR VIETNAM SERVICE

The Commanding Officer of an RAAF Mirage fighter squadron killed in a Mirage crash off the NSW coast on May 17 has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for service in Vietnam as a Forward Air Controller attached to the United States Air Force.

The award, to Wing Commander Vance Drummond, formerly CO of No 3 Squadron RAAF Base, Williamtown, was announced today by the Minister for Air (Mr Peter Howson).

The citation to the award states that in July, 1966 Wing Commander Drummond (the Forward Air Controller) and his pilot, with complete disregard to their own safety under automatic weapons fire, provided a vital life line to an army company surrounded by Viet Cong and in danger of being annihilated.

New Zealand born, Wing Commander Drummond was one of the most experienced fighter pilots of the RAAF and had already been awarded the Air Force Cross.

He joined the RAAF in 1949 and after graduating as a pilot, served in Korea with No 77 Squadron.

Flying Meteor jets he took part in air battles over North Korea against Soviet Mig 15 aircraft and was taken prisoner-of-war.

The citation to the award for the DFC reads:-

"His vast experience in tactical air support was put to practical use when Wing Commander Drummond was posted to the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron, for forward air controller (FAC) Duties on 8th July, 1966. He flew more than 500 hours with this squadron until the completion of his tour in November, 1966 and in this capacity he displayed an uncanny ability for locating Viet Cong forces and installations. He took part in many hazardous operational missions and he proved himself to be a highly successful FAC.

"At 1930 hours on 24th July, 1966 he flew as the FAC on an urgent operational mission. He and his pilot were scrambled on a O-1 light aircraft to cover an army company that was surrounded by Viet Cong and in danger of being annihilated. On arrival in the area the aircraft encountered intense automatic weapons fire. With complete disregard to their own safety, they provided a vital life-line to the ground troops; Wing Commander Drummond played an indispensable role in directing flare dropping aircraft and fighter aircraft into the area to support the besieged troops. Remaining in the area until dangerously low in fuel, they then made an emergency landing at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. After a quick refuel they returned to the besieged company at 0030 hours and remained in the area directing support aircraft until 0300 hours during this period they continued to encounter light automatic weapons fire and the weather conditions approached marginal operating conditions. Wing Commander Drummond and his pilot again returned to the area at 0600 hours and remained in contact with the ground troops until helicopter-borne troops relieved the besieged company just after first light."

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"During the hours of darkness from the night of the 24th July 1966 until the morning of the 25th July 1966, the pilot of the O-1 aircraft and Wing Commander Drummond, as FAC, showed outstanding courage and unselfish devotion to duty in directing operations that were instrumental in saving the lives of many members of the besieged company. This incident typifies the outstanding qualities displayed by this officer throughout his operational tour with the USAF, and he reflected great credit upon himself and the Royal Australian Air Force."

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