USN visit to Saigon ends

HANOI – The US Navy frigate USS Vandegrift and crew of 200 have completed a four-day port call to Ho Chi Minh City, the first by an American warship since the Vietnam War.

The ship visit came a week after Vietnamese Defence Minister Pham Van Tra made a landmark trip to the US and was the first concrete evidence of a new era of military relations between the former foes.

During the Vandegrift visit, the crew embarked on a series of public relations events.

On Friday, some American servicemen explored the Cu Chi tunnels about 70 kilometres north west of Ho Chi Minh City.

The tunnel network stretched for 250km in the Vietnam War.

There were other entertainments. In recent years, Saigon has regained its war-era "sex, drugs and rock’n’roll" reputation.
F-111 blow to industry – Part 2 (from previous page)

tions. Israel, Russia and other leading technological players. Without this national capability Australia would have taken such introduction projects over seas – and end up with the tech no logical capability that third world nations.

Once the F-111 is killed, the WSBU will no longer have the volume of core activity to sustain its skills base and will idle contract. In practical terms Australia will dumb down in an area where few nations have a capability – and many nations are desperate trying to develop one.

Regional nations such as India and China are in investing billions to build up such a capability. Isreal Aircraft Industries turns over US$2.1 billion doing exactly this and many nations are desperately trying to develop one.

A large pool of experienced design engineers, reliability engineers and software developers can solve problems on all ADF aircraft, not just the F-111. At this time the Boeing 707 tankers are receiving extensive repairs at the WSBU facility – in pos ilie but without the accumulat ed experience gathered in ongoing F-111 work.

The same skills could be used to stretch the life of the AP-3C, C-130H and Caribou fleets. The WSBU is a resource which has much to offer the ADF in the longer term, but only if it can survive at its current size – a prerequisite for the required capability.

The de bate around the F-111 was wholly focused on is sue of the Amberley WSBU would be a body blow. Most badly damaged would be the skills sets the most difficult to acquire and sustain – systems design, systems integration and air-borne embedded software development and testing.

There is no other air craft in Australia which could provide the required platform for developing and sustaining such skills.

With the F-111. After more than a decade of expensive taxpayers’ investment in this technological capability, destroying it before it can real is its full re turn is a monumen tal waste of tax pay ers’ resources. It will dump hordes of engineers and maintenance staff, often with unique and expensively developed skills, into an unneeded technology jobs market.

Yet again one wonders whether federal Cabinet have any idea of what they have ac tu ally been sold on.

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‘Boss Lift’

takes to field

PERTH – A group of 21 employers from Westerm Australia will travel to Penang, this week as part of a Defence program dedicated to encourage employer support for the Reserves.

The group will visit Rifle Company Butterworth, a force of about 120 Australian Army Reservists from Westerm Australia’s 13th Brigade. Many of the employers will see their employees in the field.

WA Police Service Superintendent Mick Emmanuel and Commander Murray Lampard, for example, will meet 11 police Army Reservists.

The Defence Reserves Support Council says the three-day “Boss Lift” program will highlight the importance of the Reserves in defending Australia’s interests.

DRSC executive officer Marc McGowan said he hoped Boss Lift would show the benefits that Reserve service brings back to the civilian workplace.

“Reserves make up a significant proportion of the ADF – in fact, almost 40,000 Australians serve in the Defence Force Reserves,” said McGowan. “As the ADF’s com mitments grow, there is a greater reliance on the Reserves.”

The 13th Brigade Reserve soldiers, who are in Malaysia for three months, are taking part in bilateral exercises while overseas.

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HeadsUp 287 – Page 4