

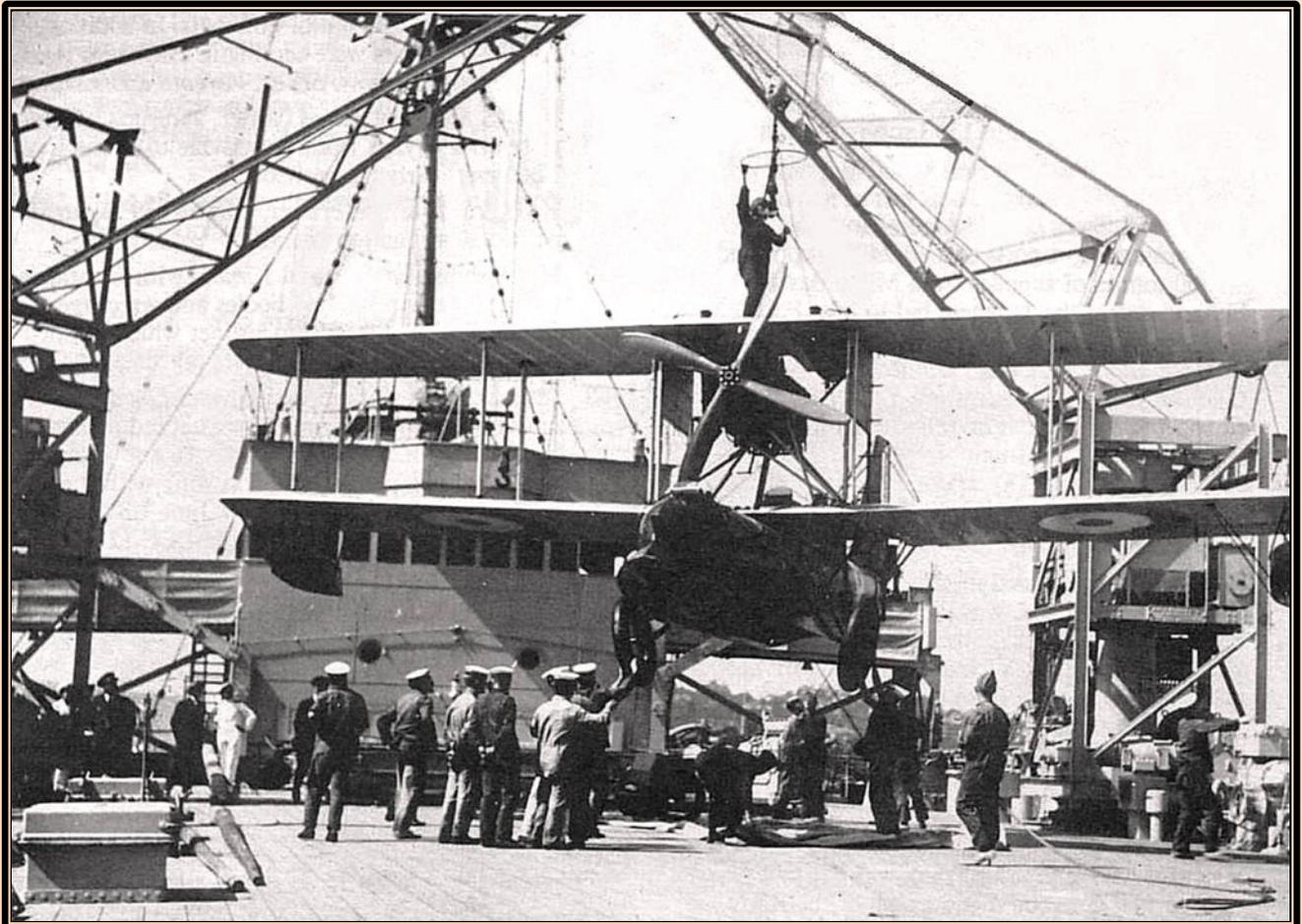


FlyBy

ABN 3007 129 1677

See our website [here](#)

A periodical of the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia
Edition 21 April 2019.



When the RAN's first purpose-built aircraft carrier HMAS Albatross was commissioned on 23rd January 1929, aviation at sea was still very much in the experimental stage.

The RAN didn't have its own Fleet Air Arm either (it was to wait another 19 years for that), so it borrowed aircraft from the RAAF. It was generally accepted that they must be amphibians, with the ability to be moved around on deck but take off and land on the water adjacent to the ship.

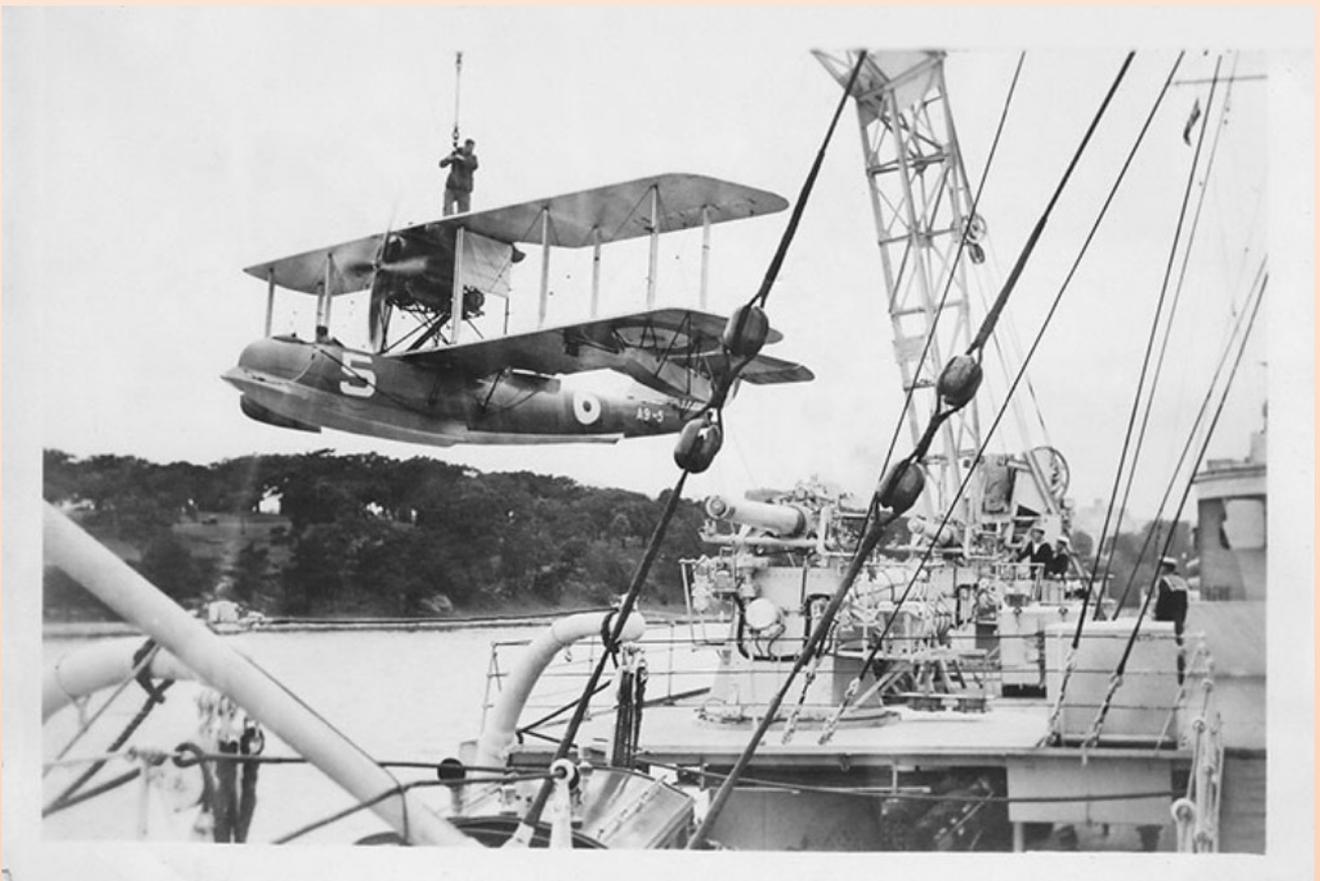
The RAAF had ordered six Supermarine Seagull III amphibians to serve on HMAS Albatross (with a further three to follow). The first arrived in April 1926 and no time was wasted in training aircrew.

The Seagull III was an amphibian powered by a single 500hp Napier Lion water cooled engine, with an endurance of four hours. They were of wooden construction and were susceptible not only handling damage, but delamination caused by the ingress of moisture or even hot and humid

conditions. By today's standards their performance was modest, to say the least. You also had to be quite fit to operate them. The retractable undercarriage was operated by a handle in the pilot's cockpit and took 162 winds to wind up or let down. Lowering them was relatively easy but retraction took a considerable time and effort and was often difficult particularly in bumpy conditions.

The aircraft was normally stowed between decks in Albatross and had to be wheeled through the hangar hatch and on to the flight deck (which wasn't really). Once there the wings were unfolded forwards and eight securing pins inserted by hand. A good crew could have an aircraft up, spread, hoisted and with the engine warmed in just ten minutes – not bad considering all the handling involved.

When the aircraft was ready to be hoisted out the Observer or Telegraphist Air Gunner (TAG) had to climb up on the top centre section and hold onto the slings so as to slip the quick release hook when the aircraft was about two feet off the water. Good timing was imperative – if the aircraft hit the water whilst still connected and the ship had any way it



A Supermarine Seagull III being lowered into the sea prior to launch. Note the engine is running to enable it to 'fly off the hook' – a delicate operation that required fine judgement by all involved.

could be dragged against the ship's side. Similarly, release too early could damage the hull as it dropped the last few feet into the sea.

Launching was usually done with the ship heading into wind and either stopped, or making way at about two knots; but it was also possible to launch whilst the ship was under way up to ten knots. This operation was tricky and required experienced pilots as it was necessary to use a considerable amount of throttle to 'fly the aircraft off the hook' as the Observer standing on the centre section knocked the quick release free. Observers in those days were made of tough stuff!

After an operation, the aircraft flew around the ship at 1000 feet and awaited permission to land. This was usually granted by Aldis Lamp, or by flag signals strung horizontally on booms protruding either side of the signal bridge. On landing the aircraft approached the ship from the stern and taxied until under the hook, when the Observer raised the slings and hooked on. As soon as this was done the crane lifted the aircraft free of the water and hoisted it aboard.

The Seagull III could not be launched by catapult as its wooden hull was not robust enough. It was soon superseded by the Seagull V which was largely of metal construction. By then early catapults were in operation, allowing the aircraft to be launched directly from the ship.

You can read of these early footsteps into Naval Aviation through a range of "Heritage" articles on our website, including on the [Seagull III and V](#), and [HMAS Albatross](#). ✈

CMDR Vickridge awarded a Commendation



The NMC Commendation which is presented for sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service.

A United States Naval & Marine Corps Commendation Medal has finally been awarded to the late **Commander Geoffrey Leonard Willet Vickridge** RAN, nearly fifty years after he was cited for it.

The NMC Commendation was originally granted by the Secretary of the US Navy to (then) Lieutenant Vickridge for his efforts in assisting the survivors of the USS Frank E. Evans on the morning of 19 October 1970. Unfortunately it was not recognised by the RAN and could not, therefore, be awarded.

At 0300 on 3 June 1969 during Exercise Sea Spirit the US Destroyer was ordered to take station aft of Melbourne for plane-guard duties in preparation for flying operations. She cut across Melbourne's bows during this manoeuvre and was



CMDR Geoff Vickridge at the presentation of his NMC Commendation on 02 March 2019. Clockwise from left: Consul General Rachel Cooke; CDRE Brett Dowsing SO(WA); CMDR William Dull USN SNO(US)(WA); CAPT Ainsley Morthorpe CO Stirling; CMDR Geoff Vickridge RAN Ret'd. and his wife Da. The ceremony was attended by about 40 people including officials, family and friends. (Navy image).

struck by the carrier. The bow section sank almost immediately taking with it most of the 74 USN personnel who lost their lives on that night.

Lieutenant Vickridge was involved in the rescue operation of the 252 surviving crew members. The citation for his award read as follows:

To Lieutenant Geoffrey L.W. Vickridge RAN.

For meritorious achievement on 3 June 1969 in connection with a collision involving HMAS Melbourne (CVS-21) and USS Frank E Evans (DD-754) while engaged in a combined exercise in the South China Sea, resulting in the sinking of the forward half of the US destroyer, and the evacuation of the after half. After rigging fire hoses and scrambling nets, Lieutenant Vickridge boarded the stern section of Evans which was secured alongside, the bow section having already sunk. He carried out a thorough inspection of the shattered forward compartment, then searched the berthing areas for possible additional survivors. By his prompt and courageous actions, Lieutenant Vickridge contributed materially to the rapidity and orderliness with which the evacuation of USS Evans was accomplished. His efforts reflected credit upon him and were in keeping with the highest traditions of naval service.

**Given this day 10 September 2018.
Originally awarded 19 October 1970. Secretary of Navy.**

Australian Honours and awards for actions during the rescue operations comprised 20 instances including a George Medal, an Air Force Cross, 2 Members of British Empire, 1 British Empire Medal, and 15 Queen or Naval Board Commendations. These were gazetted in 1970. LEUT Vickridge received an RAN Naval Board Commendation for his actions.

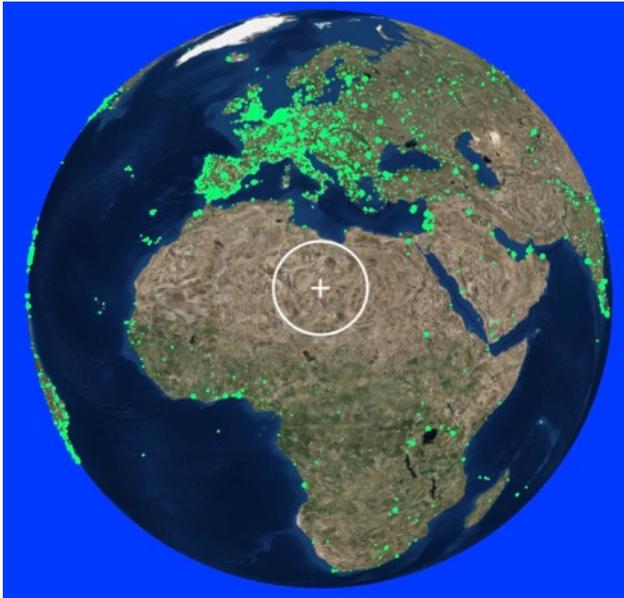
The award of a (United States) Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal to Geoff Vickridge is amongst 17 similar awards that have recently been approved by the Australian Government, finally enabling their presentation to Australian recipients nearly 50 years after the collision.

The Award was made by the US Consul-General and the SNO(US) WA in a poignant ceremony in a Perth hospital, as CMDR Vickridge was in the final stages of leukaemia. It was attended by a large number of his family, friends, RAN and FAAAA members. Regrettably the condition took his life just 6 days after the event. You can read a little of his life story [here](#).

† REST IN PEACE †

Since the last edition of 'FlyBy' we have become aware of the loss of **Geoff Vickridge, Bill Barry and Robert "Lou" Burns**. You can read a little more of these sad events on our Obituary pages [here](#). ✈

One for Technology Buffs...



Here's an interesting little App that (reportedly) shows every radio station on earth. Click on the image above to open the world map. Place the circle on any green dot to hear radio streaming from that particular station. ✈

Subscriptions

We still have a large number of members who have not yet paid their subscriptions. If you have not – please, please do so as we rely on your support to keep going. This newsletter and Slipstream and the other services offered by the Association will CEASE if we can't afford to sponsor and support them. If you are not sure how to renew, click [here](#) for advice from the database manager.

For those of you who are not members – would you consider becoming one? You can do so for about the price of cup of coffee per month. Click on the PINK button on our website [here](#) for details, cost and an application form.

Around the Traps...

Post Nominal "RANR" a Thing of the Past

The Chief of Navy has advised that the post nominal "RANR" has been discontinued, effective immediately. It had been used to differentiate between officers who were serving in the Navy permanent force ('RAN') or serving on the Reserve ('RANR').

The logic behind CN's announcement is the post nominal is redundant as Navy now comprises both permanent and reserve members, with the ability to move flexibly between the two. Discontinuance will promote a one-culture Navy.

Henceforth, officers on both the permanent and reserve will use the post nominal "RAN". Officers who have retired will use the term "RTD". ✈

Wings Over Illawarra

One of the biggest annual airshows in Australia is ramping up again. 'Wings Over Illawarra' is held at Albion Park airfield and is a major source of fundraising for HARS, who does all the

hard work arranging it.



This year the airshow will be held on **May 4 and 5th 2019**, which is only a month or so away. The program, which is of course subject to change between now and then, currently includes the RAAF Rou-

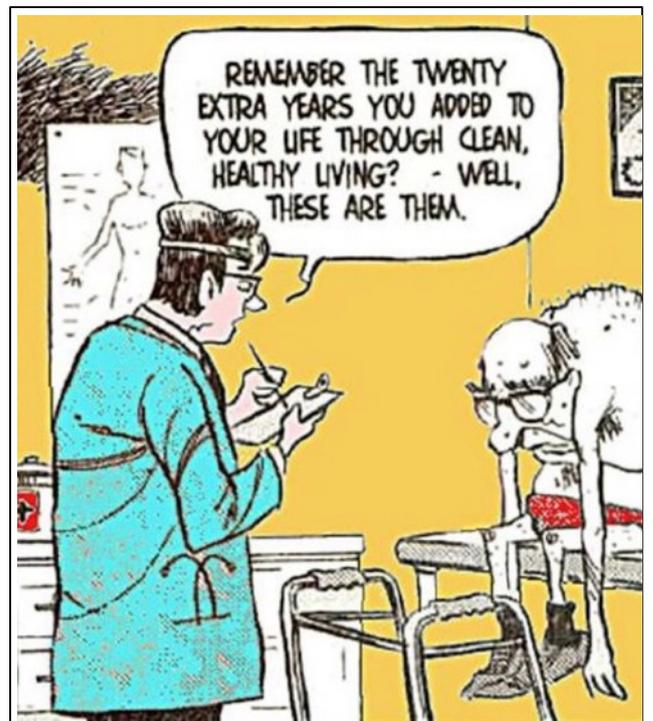
lettes, a C-17 Globemaster, F/A-18 Hornets, a C27J Spartan (the Caribou replacement); C130J Hercules and P-8A Poseidon and a Seahawk MH-60R Romeo. A range of vintage warbirds will display including a Hawker Hurricane, Supermarine Spitfire, CAC Mustang and a Focke Wulf 90, supplementing a plethora of vintage aircraft (eg Jet Provost, Sabre, T-28 Trojan, CAC Wirraway, and a NA T-6 Harvard. There's also a range of civilian aircraft that will fly.

More details and tickets are available [here](#). The queues last year were long, so save your legs and buy on line - which will also save you at least \$10 a pop over the gate price. ✈

Wanted – RAN Lapel Pins

One of our readers is looking for lapel pins/medallions for 723, 725 and 817 Squadrons and for HMAS Albatross. If anybody can point us in the right direction, please contact the webmaster [here](#). ✈

NSW Division has received 2 EFT payments that didn't include the member's name. A payment of \$35 was made on 27Dec18 via the Illawarra Mutual Bank (IMB) and a payment of \$55 on 18Feb19 via the Bendigo Bank. Members who may have made these payments are requested to contact the NSW Secretary, [here](#) as soon as possible.



Cartoon forwarded by KJ Vote, who is but one of us living those extra years. We wish him well in his recovery :-)



It was the dry season at Sanford AAF, South Viet Nam, hot, dry days no IMC. With the clear weather, the workload in the ATCT was comparatively light, traffic running maybe 45 to 60 aircraft per hour.

A routine call came across the VHF, "Sanford Tower, Trash Hauler 123 request crossing your southern extended for Head Shed."

Dead Head on local control replied, "Trash Hauler 123, approved."

Dead Head and 36 Charlie watched the OH-58 Kiowa, nose down at max speed, flying through the southern part of the Sanford control zone headed to USARV HQ's landing pad. Suddenly the OH-58 was nosed up, nosed down, yawing both right and left in a semblance of an airshow aerobatic sequence. Thinking the helicopter may be suffering a control failure, Dead Head asked the Kiowa's pilot about the gyrating flight path and the need for assistance; no answer, the prospect of a smoking hole in the ground seemed imminent. The OH-58 regained some degree of control as the VHF crackled to life, a very high-pitched voice transmitted, "Snake in the Cockpit! Snake in the Cockpit!"

Dead Head, always a quick study, calmly instructed the semi-panicked pilot "Turn right, clear to land any runway." 36 Charlie hit the crash horn and picked up the Red Phone to tell the crash net we had an OH-58 inbound with a unique onboard emergency.

The helicopter hit hard, no hover; it was skidding down the runway. Even before the helicopter came to a stop, doors flew open, and the intrepid aviators unceremoniously bailed from both sides of the aircraft. With 58's rotors still at full flight RPM, the fearless aviators, with sidearms at the ready, cautiously circled the aircraft intent on disposing of the slithering cockpit intruder.

The fire trucks, medics and the airfield commander were soon on site, and cooler heads prevailed. With Airfield Commander Major Brown's encouragement, one of the Kiowa's pilots gingerly reached inside the cockpit and shut down the helicopter's engine. The rotor blades slowly decelerated as the entire entourage searched for the errant serpent from a respectful distance. The reptile had retreated to the right chin bubble and was casually wrapped around a rudder peddle; now the problem became how to remove the viper? Extricating snakes from a plane is not covered in the Army Technical Manuals.

By now a large contingent of airfield kibitzers, of various rank and expertise, had formed a loose circle around the -58. An ad-hoc committee formed, and dubious contingencies were broached.

Various methods, most required a brave individual catching the serpent by hand, were suggested. These were dismissed when all the lower ranking enlisted personnel, knowing who would be selected for such a task, beat a hasty retreat to a safe distance. It was looking like the runway would be blocked for some time as reticent reptile stood its ground, flicking its forked

tongue and maintaining ownership of one Army helicopter.

The solution came from an unexpected source; one of Sanford Airfield's betel nut chewing Vietnamese firemen, without comment, pulled a CO2 fire extinguisher from the fire truck, blasted the snake with its icy contents and removed the now solidly frozen denizen. Crisis averted.

Now, the rest of the story. The OH-58 was flying to USARV HQ to pick up a couple of VIPs for a quick trip to Saigon. The right seat pilot was flying while his partner was filling out the ubiquitous Army paperwork. He glanced down to see a rather large stowaway passenger rising between the rudder pedals. Without a word to his compatriot, he unbuckled, unplugged and somehow made it over the armoured seat back to the rear of the 58. In the process, he kicked the cyclic control starting the flight gyrations.

Our paper jockey, suddenly PIC, was shocked and disoriented but regained control of the helicopter just in time to see the stowaway winding its way up the right collective lever, forked tongue testing the air and its beady eyes looking for, what he assumed, lunch. Viet Nam helicopter pilots were courageous men, often flying into hot LZs greeted by copious ground fire and this pilot demonstrated nerves of steel. This Warrant Officer deserves the DFC for successfully landing the 58 with such a threatening co-pilot.

It must be remembered that in Viet Nam there are approximately 100 species of snakes, 98 are poisonous the other two swallow you whole.

Thus, ended another day in paradise; Score: Army 1, Snake 0, the body count duly reported to Saigon. ✈

Wall of Service Update

Order No 42 remains open for applications for Plaques. We need a minimum of 12 names before an Order can be raised with the Foundry. Current applications are:

LCDR GLEX(P) K.J. MacKenzie	L/WRMTD M.A. Cocks
CMDR GLEX(AvWI) A.R. Milsom	CPO ATWO4 D. Bain

More info on the Wall [here](#), explaining just what it is, who is eligible to have their names on it, and how you can apply. ✈



In this day and age of unwanted telephone calls just as you are sitting down for dinner, or spam filling up your email inbox, it is easy to become tired of being asked for a donation and overwhelmed with the sheer number of worthy causes seeking your support. How do you pick one or two to support over all the others that do good work in the Community? And even if you restrict yourself to supporting the Defence/Veter

ans sector, there are many to choose from. Of course there are traditional organisations such as the RSL and Legacy and the newer charities, such as Soldier On or Mates for Mates, who seem to focus their attention on the younger generation of veterans.

This editorial is not attempting to promote any of these wonderful charities over the other – they all do great work! However, a few years ago Navy launched its own charity called Keeping Watch and it positioned itself to help and support an often-forgotten group - current Navy families in financial need. It does not try to assist veterans returning from war or war-like service – there are lots of organisations that do that, including the Department of Veterans Affairs. Neither does it try to replace the Defence Community Organisation who has a charter to assist Defence families to deal with the everyday challenges of peacetime service.

However, it is an unfortunate truth that things occur in family life which are not covered by the remit of the Department of Social Security or the Australian Health system. Some Navy families do find themselves in dire circumstances with their bank accounts drained and bills piling up through no fault of their own and it is in these times that Keeping Watch is likely to be able to help.

Keeping Watch helps serving members of the Royal Australian Navy and their families who are suffering hardship, normally through non-refundable grants. Some examples of the support that is available under Keeping Watch include financial assistance for:

- Essential living expenses after a family crisis such as a house fire, or unexpected death or serious illness of a loved one;
- Medical treatment or health support for situations not fully covered by Medicare or private health insurance;
- Child care costs when the usual at-home carer is not able to look after their young family during an unexpected family crisis.

As the Chief of Navy points out in his Foreword on their website, "... since Keeping Watch began in 2013, there has been over \$193, 000 used to grant Navy people some form of financial help. This is a figure we can all be proud of. It's a reminder to each of us to care for one another on and off duty. Keeping Watch is regularly called upon to consider assistance to a wide range of people, each with a different story to tell."

He adds ... "Keeping Watch remains vital to the well-being of all RAN members. It is important to know that help is at hand when one of our Navy family hits difficult times. Whether you are a serving member, a former member or a member of the public wanting to recognise the fine work our people do, I urge you to give to our cause."

So if you are looking for a slightly different cause to support, Navy's own charity Keeping Watch is well worth considering. Information is available on the website [here](#).

The website provides instructions on how to donate on a once off or on an ongoing basis. Donations over \$2 to *Keeping Watch* are tax deductible.

Reproduced from the newsletter 'NVN News' ✈

Last Month's Mystery Photo



March's Mystery Photo showed a dramatic moment aboard an RAN ship and asked readers to tell us **when it was, and what was happening.**

In today's context of offshore refugee camps and hard line policy, it is easy to forget that, in many cases, there is a story of human suffering behind each individual seeking refugee status. It may be that they are fleeing from war or religious or political persecution, or perhaps they just fear for their lives. Even those with the wealth to pay for passage are driven by circumstances so severe that they are willing to risk their lives and those of their families.

These circumstances were certainly true of a group of Vietnamese people back in 1981. South Vietnam had surrendered to the Communist north in 1975 and in the following years over one million people fled, on rickety boats with few provisions. It is estimated that over 300,000 perished in the attempt – killed by drowning, pirates or the environment.

The evening of 21 June 1981 found 99 such people adrift 250 miles east of Vietnam. They had boarded a boat there nearly five days earlier, but now their engine was broken and the boat was leaking, and their drinking water was contaminated. Some – mostly the women and children – were delirious, and all of them expected to die within a few hours.

By chance, HMAS Melbourne was conducting flying operations in the South China Sea when one of her Trackers, about to land on for the last flight of the day, spotted what appeared to be a junk on fire about five miles to the east of the ship. The S2 overflew the vessel and observed it to be full of people, and the fire was in fact a distress flare.

Melbourne closed the vessel and over the next three hours rescued all 99 refugees. Many were on the point of unconsciousness, and all were in a very distressed emotional state. In many cases the only way for them to embark was to be carried up the side of the ship by volunteers.

The group, which came to be known as MG99, was taken first to Singapore and then flown to Sydney, where they were placed in a refugee facility in East Hills. Over the next few years they not only successfully integrated into Australian society, but prospered by hard work and by retaining the strength of the group that had kept them alive. Many have contributed significantly in our community.

The story of MG99, as the group became known, is a remarkable one. You can read about it and find video links to the story at the Mystery Photo answer page on our website [here](#).

No new Mystery Photo this month as I've run out of them! ✨

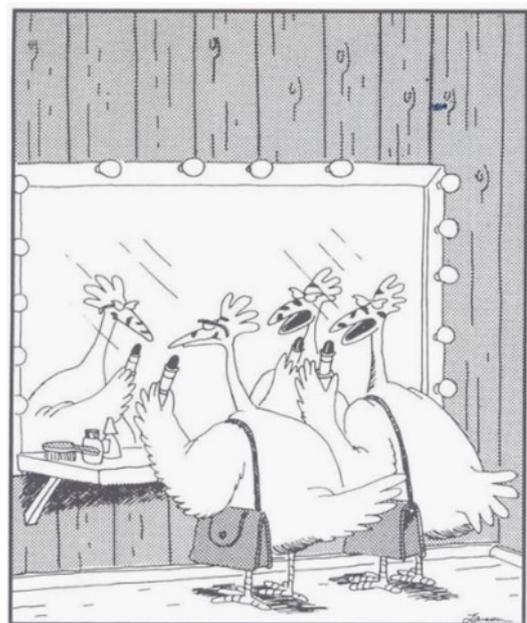
ACT Division is King of Electronic Media

The ACT Division has become the first to crack a significant "Electronic Media" milestone, as more members opt for distribution of 'Slipstream' electronically, than by print post.

When Electronic Slipstream became available in 2015, just 20% of ACT members took up the offer. There was a dramatic swing this year, however, with nearly 63% of ACT members now opting to peruse it on line.

On a National basis, just 11% of members took up the electronic option when it became available in 2015. Today, just under 28% of all members choose to read their Slipstream on line. With ever increasing postage costs, this represents a significant saving to the organisation and to the environment!

If you are currently receiving Slipstream by snail mail and would prefer to read it on line, simply contact your Divisional Secretary or use the 'Contact Us' form at the bottom of our website page [here](#). ✨



"This is no use, Wanda. It's like they say— we just don't have lips."



The Taranto Raid

On the night of 11 November 1940, twenty one aircraft from the carrier HMAS *Illustrious* struck the Fleet at Taranto. It was a bold and daring raid that should never have succeeded, but it destroyed or damaged most of Italy's capital ships.

On the night of Nov. 11, 1940, most of the capital ships of the Italian navy, including all six of its battleships, lay at anchor in the harbor at Taranto, which the Italian admirals believed to be secure. They were not overly concerned about the risk from concentrating the fleet.

Taranto, located inside the heel of the Italian boot, had strong defenses that included sound-detection devices to pick up airplanes 30 miles away, submerged breakwaters, jetties, anti-torpedo nets, barrage balloons, and hundreds of anti-aircraft guns.

The admirals recognized the theoretical danger of air attack. Taranto was within operational range for British carriers in the Mediterranean, but never in history had carrier-launched aircraft been used to strike a heavily defended naval base.

Previous assumptions about such an attack were about to be blown away.

Just before midnight, the first of two waves of open-cockpit Fairey Swordfish biplanes, launched from the British carrier HMS *Illustrious*, swept down on the anchorage at Taranto. The first two aircraft dropped flares to illuminate and backlight the Italian ships in the harbor. Close behind them came more Swordfish dropping torpedoes and bombs.

In 65 minutes, the attackers sank or severely damaged three

of the battleships, two cruisers, two destroyers, and assorted other targets. Two of the Swordfish were shot down by anti-aircraft fire. In the House of Commons, Prime Minister Winston Churchill proclaimed that the loss to Italy of half its battleships "affects decisively the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean."

Some nations were paying closer attention than others. Japan was especially interested and dispatched its naval attaché from Berlin to investigate. A group of Japanese naval officers visited Taranto for a further look, bringing a long list of questions and interviewing as many eyewitnesses as they could.

Taranto is often described as the precursor or blueprint for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor 13 months later, but that is something of an exaggeration. Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto was already thinking about a strike on Pearl Harbor, possibly with aerial torpedoes.

There is little doubt, though, that Taranto confirmed the feasibility of Yamamoto's idea. Serious planning of the attack and experiments to modify aerial torpedoes for use in the shallow waters of Pearl Harbor—about the same depth as at Taranto—began in early 1941.

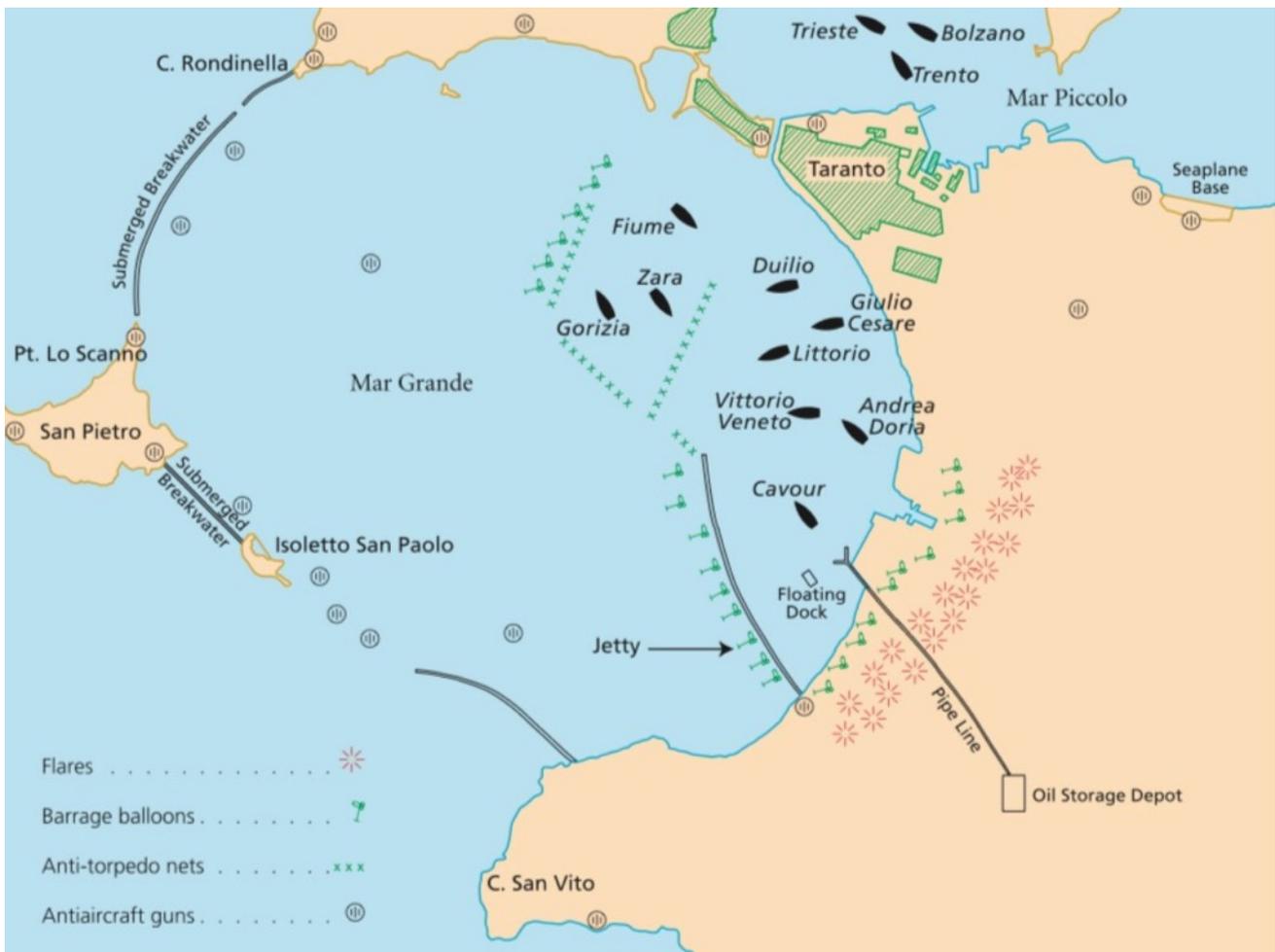
Challenge in the Med

Admiral Andrew B. Cunningham, commanding the British Mediterranean Fleet, was caught short-handed when Italian dictator Benito Mussolini declared war on Britain June 10, 1940.

Some of Cunningham's assets had been transferred to the Home Fleet for the impending Battle of Britain. Other British forces were tied down in North Africa, where an Italian army was massed on the frontier between Egypt and Libya.



Mediterranean theatre



Cunningham had to keep the sea lanes open to the Suez Canal, the critical passage to India, Australia, and British possessions in Asia, but he had only a squadron of surface combatants and the aging carrier HMS *Eagle*, a converted battleship with an improvised flight deck.

The day after Mussolini declared war, Italian bombers from Sicily pounded British bases on Malta. Several clashes at sea ensued in July and August.

The Italians held a substantial numerical advantage in both ships and aircraft and a position of strategic advantage from their base at Taranto. Nevertheless, they had several weaknesses.

The fighting potential of the Regia Marina, the Italian navy, depended on its battleships. There were no aircraft carriers, Mussolini having decided that the entire peninsula of Italy functioned as a carrier. The defense of Taranto included Italian air force interceptors, but their bases were some distance away. None of the aircraft in southern Italy had a night-fighting capability.

Italy's resources were strung out and strained by Mussolini's military adventures from the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and participation in the Spanish civil war to the invasions of Albania in 1939 and Greece in 1940 and the current challenge to the British in North Africa.

Mussolini's advisors warned him that the Italian industrial base could not readily replace ships lost in war and the admirals were reluctant to take risks. After Cunningham received rein-

forcements—including the newly commissioned carrier *Illustrious*—in September, he believed he could beat the Italians in an all-out naval battle.

String Bags and Torpedoes

If the Italians, following their cautious strategy, would not come out to fight a major engagement, Cunningham would go into Taranto to get them. The notion of a carrier-launched attack on Taranto dated back to the Ethiopian invasion.

The plan was updated in 1939 and the man who had updated it, Lumley Lyster, arrived in September aboard *Illustrious* as the new rear admiral for carriers of the Mediterranean Fleet. He presented a plan for attack to Cunningham, who laid it on with the designation of Operation Judgment.

The strike was set for Oct. 21, the anniversary of Lord Nelson's celebrated victory at Trafalgar in 1805. The two carriers, *Eagle* and *Illustrious*, were to launch a total of 30 Fairey Swordfish aircraft, carrying a combination of torpedoes and bombs.

The Swordfish entered service in 1936 and was outmoded even then. Its biplane configuration was old-fashioned and it was painfully slow. The top speed was officially rated at 143 mph when carrying weapons, but according to fleet air arm crews, it seldom went faster than 100. The aircrews in the open cockpits wore heavy insulated flying suits for protection against the cold.

For all of that, the Swordfish was sturdy and reliable. It was popular with the crews who affectionately called it the "String bag," named supposedly for the knotted string bags used by

We are now at 1,000 feet over a neat residential quarter of the town where gardens in darkened squares show at the back of houses marshalled by the neat plan of the streets that serve them. Here is the main road that connects the district with the main town. We follow its line and, as I open the throttle to elongate the glide, a Breda AA gun swings round from the shore, turning its stream of red balls in our direction.

This is the beginning. Then another two guns farther north get our scent — white balls this time — so we throttle back again and make for a black mass on the shore that looks like a factory, where no balloons are likely to grow. We must be at a hundred feet now and must soon make our dash across that bloody water ...

I open the throttle wide and head for the mouth of the Mar Piccolo, whose position ... can be judged by the lie of the land. Then it is as if all hell comes tumbling in on top of us ... the fire of one of the cruisers and the Mar Piccolo Canal batteries ...



Taranto Harbour, Swordfish from 'Illustrious' Cripple the Italian Fleet, 11 November 1940 by Charles David Cobb (c) David Cobb; Supplied by The Public Catalogue Foundation

We turn until the right hand battleship is between the bars of the torpedo sight, dropping down as we do so. The water is close beneath our wheels, so close I am wondering which is to happen first — the torpedo going or our hitting the sea — then we level out, and almost without thought the button is pressed and a jerk tells me the 'fish' is gone.

shoppers in England and referring to the Swordfish's versatility in carrying things. By an alternate explanation, "String bag" derived from the web of rods and struts between the upper and lower wings.

The Swordfish normally had a crew of three: a pilot, an observer, and a gunner. The observer, more important than suggested by his title, handled navigation, reconnaissance, and target recognition. The pilot sat in the front cockpit and the gunner and the observer shared the larger second cockpit.

The Taranto mission required supplementary long-range fuel tanks, which were usually slung under the Swordfish fuselage. That was not possible when carrying torpedoes, which had to be mounted centerline between the wheels. Thus the fuel tank was put into the observer's space. The observer moved to the smaller seat previously occupied by the gunner, who was scrubbed from the crew.

The base at Taranto was divided into inner and outer harbors, connected by a small canal. The battleships were in the larger

outer harbor, protected by a breakwater and anti-torpedo nets. Several of the cruisers and some of the destroyers were in the inner harbor.

The battleships with their heavy armor plating were too tough to knock out with bombs so half the Swordfish carried torpedoes. The other half would use bombs against the cruisers and destroyers.

The conventional wisdom was that air-dropped torpedoes could not be used in water less than 75 feet deep. If the water was too shallow, the torpedo would not be able to recover from its steep plunge and begin tracking toward the target. Taranto harbor was 40 feet deep.

What the Italians did not know was that the British had found a solution. The nose of the torpedo was hooked to a wire wound on a drum beneath the aircraft. Upon launch, the wire pulled the nose of the torpedo up so that after falling from low level, it hit the water in a belly flop instead of a dive. Attack was possible in water as shallow as 22 feet.

Bad Luck and Good Luck

Both the makeup of the air strike and the timing were changed by intervening surprise events. On Oct. 18, three days before the scheduled mission, a mechanic fitting an auxiliary fuel tank on one of the Swordfish dropped a tool, setting

off a spark and causing a fire that destroyed two airplanes and badly damaged three others.

The attack had to be postponed. The moon would not be full again until the middle of November, which would give the aircrews greater visibility over Taranto and when returning to the carriers in the dark. The operation was rescheduled for Nov. 11, with fewer aircraft.

The next glitch came in early November with the discovery that *Eagle* needed emergency repairs. The hull had been shaken by near misses during the summer battles, damaging the pipes that carried aviation fuel within the ship. The danger of fire or explosion was so great that *Eagle* was withdrawn from action.

Illustrious would be the lone carrier for the strike. Several more aircraft were lost in accidents Nov. 9-10, leaving 21 Swordfish as the attack force aboard the ship.

These misfortunes were offset by several pieces of good luck

for the British. Initially, the Taranto harbor was protected by 90 barrage balloons, tethered on steel cables that could tear the wings off low-flying airplanes. Sixty balloons were lost in a storm Nov. 6 and had not yet been replaced. With only 30 balloons remaining, the cables were 900 feet apart—three times the previous spacing—allowing the Swordfish plenty of room to maneuver between them.

On Nov. 11, the day of the attack, the Italians had scheduled a gunnery exercise at sea and spent much of the morning in the extensive task of removing the torpedo nets around the ships. The exercise was canceled but the torpedo nets had not been re-rigged.

The movements of *Illustrious* were concealed within the broader context of Operation MB8, an elaborate series of British actions in early November timed to provide additional cover for the air strike. Among other distractions, a group of cruisers and destroyers would run slightly ahead of *Illustrious*, between the carrier and Taranto.

The Swordfish Launch

A few hours before the attack on Nov. 11, an RAF reconnaissance airplane from Malta overflew Taranto and confirmed that the Italian fleet was still in place. Packed into the inner and outer harbors were six battleships, nine cruisers, 28 destroyers, and other vessels.

The Swordfish were divided into two waves because *Illustrious* could launch only 12 of them at a time. The first wave, led by Lt. Cmdr. Kenneth Williamson, was off at 8:30 p.m. Six of the airplanes had torpedoes; four had bombs, and two had flares and bombs.

En route, they encountered thick fog. Most of the squadron, following standing orders, climbed to higher altitude to get above it, but Lt. Ian Swayne did not. Separated from the others, he assumed he had fallen behind and proceeded to Taranto at lower altitude to make up time. In fact, he was well ahead, arriving 15 minutes before his colleagues, alerting the air defenses and setting off flak from the shore batteries.

The sound-detection equipment had picked up Swayne's approach some distance out but the Italian air force had no night-fighter interceptors nearby. The Italians would not put up a single fighter that night, which was critical to the survival and success of the slow-moving Swordfish.

As soon as the last of Williamson's airplanes were away, the ship's crew brought the nine aircraft for the second wave up to the deck—five with torpedoes, two with bombs, and two with flares and bombs. Launch began at 9:20 p.m., with Lt. Cmdr. J. W. Hale leading.

The last two Swordfish bumped wings on the deck. Lt. W. D. Morford was able to take off, but Lt. Edward W. Clifford was held back until the repair crews fixed the damage to his aircraft, which took about 15 minutes. He launched anyway, hoping to catch up.

Meanwhile, Morford was having problems. The bump had

caused more damage than was apparent. The straps holding the extra fuel tank gave way and the tank fell into the sea. He had to abort and return to the carrier. The mission was now down to 20 Swordfish, one of them arriving early at Taranto and another one getting there late.

Over Taranto

The first wave reached Taranto at 11:12 p.m. The first two airplanes circled around at high altitude and dropped a string of flares along the eastern rim of the harbor, backlighting the targets for the strike aircraft approaching from the west. The ground gunners banged away at the flare droppers, but it did no good. The flares fell 1,000 feet before igniting and the airplanes had moved on.

Close on the heels of the flare droppers came flight leader Williamson with Lt. Norman Scarlett as his observer. They swept in very low, between the barrage balloons, and released their torpedo 20 or 30 feet above the water. It tracked unerringly to the battleship *Conte di Cavour* and blew a 40-foot hole in the

hull. Moments later, Williamson and Scarlett were shot down. Their airplane crashed into the harbor but the Italians fished them out. They spent the rest of the war as POWs.

Other Swordfish were scoring hits, too, but it was difficult to tell which weapons were causing what damage. The attackers were flying so low the Italians could not shoot at them effectively at depressed trajectory for fear of hitting their own ships. Nor could they make good use of their searchlights, which would mostly have blinded their own gunners.

The first wave completed its strike at 11:35 p.m. and there was a lull before the second wave attacked at 12:11 a.m. Again, the flare droppers came first and the strikers continued the toll on the Italian fleet. A second Swordfish was lost to a direct hit by the anti-aircraft guns. Neither of the airmen, pilot Lt. G. W. Bayley or observer Lt. H. J. Slaughter, survived as their airplane burst into flames and fell into the water.

About 12:30 a.m., shortly after the last of his colleagues had departed, Clifford reached Taranto, his wing repairs holding up just fine. He attacked a cruiser in the inner harbor, but his bomb was defective. It punched a hole in the deck but failed to explode. Clifford was clear of the harbor defenses by 12:35 a.m. and the air raid was over. The last surviving Swordfish returned to *Illustrious* at 2:50 a.m.

RAF reconnaissance photos showed three battleships with their decks awash. The worst hit was *Conte di Cavour*, sunk with only its superstructure remaining above water and never to return to service. The bows of the battleship *Littorio*, hit by three torpedoes, were under water and oil was streaming into the harbor. A third battleship, *Caio Duilio*, was beached in shallow water to prevent its sinking completely. The torpedo had blown a hole between two magazines. Had it struck a few yards either way, *Caio Duilio* would have been done for.

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Continued on page 16.

ASBESTOS SCREENING PROGRAM



The tragic news that we recently lost another MOBI to Mesothelioma gives another timely reminder that, for many of us, exposure to Asbestos was part of what we did in the Navy.

You can't undo the past, but you can take action for monitoring your health by participating in an **Asbestos Screening Program**.

Fortunately, DVA offers a free Screen to any current or ex-ADF member or Defence Civilian. This involves:

Calling the Defence Service Centre on 1800 DEFENCE (1800 333 362) to register your details. You'll then be sent an information pack which will provide a medical assessment booking form. Once completed, the form will be sent to Aspen Corporate Health who will contact you to arrange a medical assessment. It's as easy as 1-2-3!

All costs, including travel if you live more than 50km from the place of your appointment, are covered by DVA.

You can read all about this service on the DVA Factsheet (DP13) which is downloadable [here](#). ✈

SEA VENOM RESTORATION PROJECT

Murray Lindsay recently forwarded the photo below of Sea Venom 870 (one of the side numbers worn by WZ895) in its better days. Readers will remember that work started on this

aircraft in 1986 to return it to flying status, but was subsequently cancelled. The airframe languished with the RAN Historic Flight until 2018 when it was bought by HARS as a 'job lot', following the complete disbandment of the Flight.



WZ895 is dismantled and in poor condition but the pieces of it, together with a bunch of generic Sea Venom spares, are being unpacked and cleaned by an enthusiastic HARS volunteer team, as per the image below.



The final status of the Sea Venom restoration is still unclear at this time as it is still too early to evaluate fully or correctly the possible scope of the future restoration. ✈

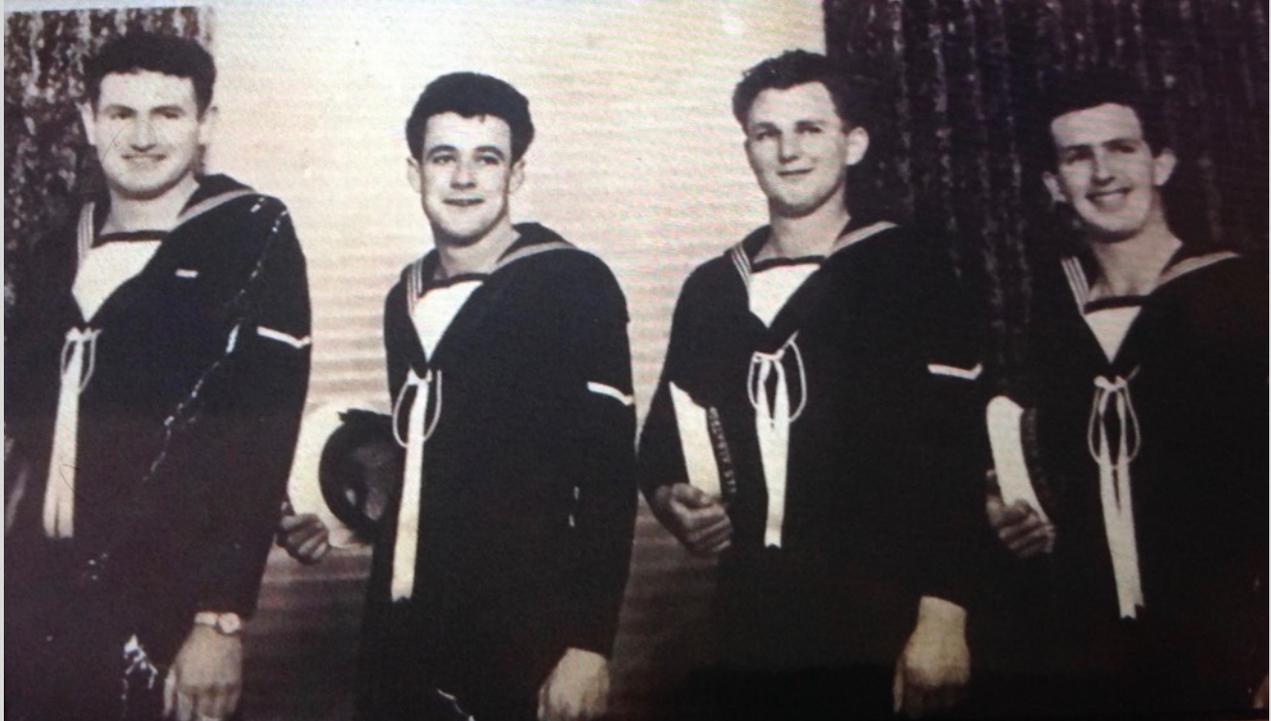
Would You Do It?



Now that the excitement has blown over for the 17-hour, Perth to London flight that launched in early 2018, Qantas is looking to up its game. By 2022—in an initiative they are dubbing 'Project Sunrise'—Qantas hopes to have a Sydney – London flight that'll be 20 hours long.

But the big question is, will passengers go for it? What would entice them to trap themselves on a plane with 300-plus strangers for 20 hours? Well, besides getting from A to B a lot

CAN ANYONE HELP?



*The photo above was sent to the webmaster by Ms Simone Greenup, who is trying to find out more about her late grandfather. Our super-sleuth, John Harrison, did a lot of work and has advised they are (from the left) **Jeff Larcombe**, **Ron Moody**, **Tim O'Halloran** and **Jim (Zeke) Greenup**, but we would still like to know when it was likely taken and what the occasion was. Can anyone help? If so, contact the webmaster [here](#).*

faster, Qantas is currently brainstorming ways to feature high-end amenities never before seen on a long-haul flight.

We're talking luxuries like an in-flight café, an area to do gentle exercise and stretching, sleeping pods, noise-cancelling headphones and improved entertainment options (rumour has it even Virtual Reality might be thrown into the mix) that'll make it easier to switch off and unwind.

Although some consider making a 20 hour flight without a re-fuel stop is somewhat ambitious, Qantas seem to think that in just three years they will reclaim the title of the world's longest sector – currently coming second to the 19-hour Newark – Singapore flight.

But the most important question stands: Would you agree to board a flight that runs close to an entire day? ✈

New President for NSW Division

The NSW Division held its AGM on 20 March and elected a new President. **Mr Phil Carey** now takes that position, replacing **Mr Greg Wise** who had held the mantle for many years.

The Minutes of the AGM will be published once ratified, but in the meantime we thank Greg for his many years of selfless service to both the National Body and the NSW Division, and welcome Phil to the position of NSW President. ✈

New Pay Deal for Rotary Wing AvOs?

Defence has made a submission to the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) for a new Pay Structure for Navy and

Army Rotary Wing Aviation Officers.

In regard to Navy, the submission seeks to:

- (a) Establish two pathways (Command and Specialist) for Navy rotary wing aviation officers, and establish two competency streams (Pilot and Aviation Warfare Officer) within the two pathways, using rank and increment ranges;
- (b) Place current rotary wing aviation officers into the Officer Aviation Pay Structure without financial detriment, based on the officers' rate of salary the day before transfer. For Navy it is proposed that initial placement for all aviation officers would occur on a single transfer date;
- (c) Establish a suite of internal transfer protocols to transfer their Officer Aviation members between their Command and Specialist pathways.

This follows a DFRT decision in 2016 which was heard in relation to Air Force. The current submission will, however, not use the Air Force matter as a precedent and will therefore have to stand on its own merits.

The Tribunal will consider the submission, together with any representation from Defence and/or other parties, most probably on April 4th (although this doesn't necessarily mean a decision will be forthcoming on that date). CDRE Chris Smallhorn, the previous COMFAA, is expected to give Navy specific evidence in regard to the matter.

We will update as information becomes available. ✈

Government Commissions DFRDB Enquiry



The Government has advised that it will commission an independent inquiry to examine the information provided by scheme administrators and relevant Departments to members of the Defence Force and Death Benefits (DFRDB) scheme.

In a Media Release dated 25 March, the Honourable Darren Chester MP (Minister for Veteran Affairs and Minister for Defence Personnel) stated that the DFRDB Scheme, which was established in 1972 and closed to new members in 1991, allowed members to commute (exchange) part of their pension for a lump sum. It noted, however that there are different views among some in the Veteran's community about certain areas of the scheme, and the appropriateness of information provided to members at the time.

The statement further advised that the Government recognises the importance of open and transparent discussion around Veteran concerns and will consult with the ex-service community about the terms of reference for the enquiry as well as panel membership.

In response to the announcement, the Defence Force Welfare Association issued the following press release:

"The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) welcomes the Government's announcement yesterday that it would finally commission an independent inquiry into the commutation arrangements of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits (DFRDB) superannuation scheme.

In commenting on the announcement, the National President of DFWA, Kel Ryan, stated that he particularly welcomed the Government emphasising the importance of open and transparent discussion around veteran concerns, and that it would consult with the ex-service community about the Terms of Reference for the inquiry.

As for the commutation arrangements, Kel Ryan stated that DFWA and the veterans community as a whole had long sought redress of varying grievances relating to DFRDB, not the least of which included the continued application in 2019 of out-of-date 1962 life tables for calculating both commutation entitlements and fortnightly superannuation payments made to veterans subject to the DFRDB scheme.

Hopefully, the proposed inquiry will uncover the serious financial injustices that those out-dated life tables have caused to DFRDB superannuants. Life expectancies have markedly increased from the time since the DFRDB scheme was introduced in 1973. Those increases have meant that the amount of permanent pension reduction calculated using old tables is far higher than they should be if current tables applied.

The Defence Force Welfare Association, along with its partners in the Alliance of Defence Service Organisations, will be making written submissions to the inquiry and looks forward to actively participating in drafting the Terms of Reference."

The DFWA further advises that the matter will be aired on a segment of 'The 7.30 Report' to be aired sometime before Anzac Day.

It should be noted, of course, that a General Election is due before the end of May and should the Coalition not win a further term then the enquiry may not proceed. ✈

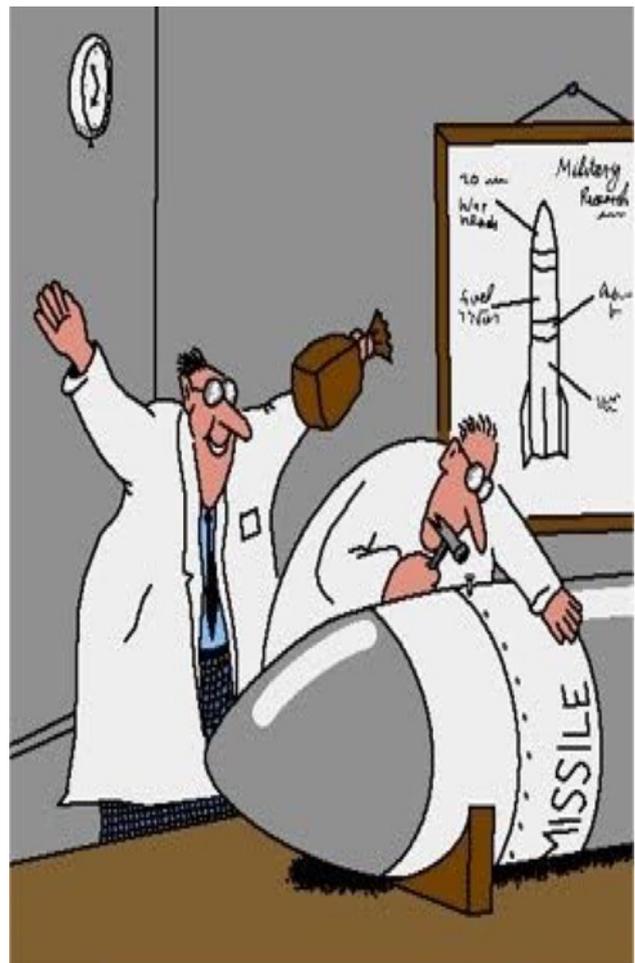
Forthcoming Reunions

Here are some of the reunions coming up that we are aware of:

817 Squadron Anzac Day Reunion Bungendore 25-28 April. Events you can participate in are the Dawn Service either in Canberra or Bungendore; the Anzac Day March in Bungendore followed by BBQ lunch and reunion, and/or a formal dinner in the Bungendore War Memorial Hall. More details on our website [here](#), or ring **Shane Holness** 0409 364 757

Vietnam Veterans' Day Old Bar: 16-18 August. A range of activities over the 3 days including a "Meet and Greet", Breakfast, Reunion Dinner and of course the Veterans' Day Parade and Service. Events can be booked (and paid for) separately. See our website [here](#) for details and an application/expression of interest form.

All Navy Reunion Maroochydore 25-27 October. Events are expected to include Registration/Meet and Greet; Navy on Display (Guard and Band); Reunion Dinner and/or Brunch in the Park. Details from Mark or Bill on 0438 800 799 or 0411 024 985 respectively. ✈



SLIPSTREAM EDITOR WANTED

Our long-serving 'Slipstream' Editor, **Ron Batchelor**, is hanging up his running shoes when it comes to the production of our flagship magazine. We are looking for a volunteer to take over the role.

Slipstream commenced monthly publication in April 1957 as an initiative of a few stalwart folk at HMAS *Albatross*. It continued until 1974 when funding dried up. Eighteen years later the Fleet Air Arm Association picked up the mantle and, with very few exceptions, it has been in quarterly production since that time under a succession of Editors. It has become synonymous with the FAAAA and is our premier publication. This newsletter, 'FlyBy', is entirely separate.

The Editor's job is to collate material for each edition of Slipstream, typeset it, and present it to the printers for production once every three months.

A computer, printer and software will be made available. All you need is the desire to give back to the Fleet Air Arm, an eye for detail and a keen interest in keeping people informed and entertained. It's also your chance to bring your own style and artistic flair to the publication!

If you have what it takes please contact the current Editor [here](#) (or phone him on 0402 854 959, and he'll be happy to talk about what it involves).

Update on HARS Navy Heritage Flight

For those readers interested in what's happening to the Navy aircraft recently acquired by the Historic Aircraft Restoration Society (HARS), the following update has just been provided by Professor Michael Hough, the Project Leader.

Tracker 845. HARS is exploring ways of towing this to their Albion Park facility, where it can undergo an external refurbishment as a first stage - but essentially this is a (ground) display airframe only. Tracker 844 is run each week, and you can see video of the engine run up on 18 March [here](#).

Dakota C47. There was a detailed inspection of this airframe in the last week carried out by our senior HARS staff including our Chief Pilot Mr. **Bob De La Hunty** and our Chief C47 Pilot **Don Hindle**. We are now planning to tow this airframe to HARS Albion Park, and to submit it to a thorough engineering inspection with a view to restoring it to flying longer term.

Wessex. Wessex 832 (Albion Park) is being worked on as a static display, and we were delighted to find out this week that the electrical systems will still "fire up" and provide live display of the cockpit instrumentation for example. Our Wessex volunteers are working hard on sorting through a large container of spares. Wessex 813 is at HARS Parkes- no reported activity this week.

Sea Venom. The completely dismantled Sea

Venom has a team of HARS volunteers unpacking and cleaning components as they are removed from e.g. their containers (see photo next page).

Sea Fury. Sea Fury WG 630 is in temporary secure storage at Air Affairs, and we are planning to move the airframe by road asap from Nowra to HARS Hangar 1 Albion Park. We have now been advised that we will require additional Police escorts plus two other escort vehicles to make the move, and the estimated costs of this move have just increased considerably as a result of this decision

Hueys. Both Iroquois UH-1B 893 and 898 are at Air Affairs at AATP in secure storage. There is no reported activity this week. ✈





Sea Venom fuselage at the HARS Albion Park facility March 2019

Continued from Page 11



The battleship Conte di Cavour after the attack, with only her superstructure above the water.

The raid had also sunk or damaged two cruisers and two destroyers as well as causing fires and losses to other ships, the oil storage depot, and the dockyard. Two of the battleships were refloated, repaired, and eventually returned to service.

In the Wake of Taranto

The Italians tried to minimize the bad news, announcing that one ship was “gravely damaged” and that they had shot down six British airplanes, but the actual losses could not be concealed. In *The New York Times*, Hanson W. Baldwin noted that the British “achieved their greatest results with the torpedo rather than the bomb” and that the raid marked an “increasing accuracy of attacks from the air against ships on the sea.”

Cunningham was jubilant, declaring, “In a total flying time of six and a half hours—carrier to carrier—twenty aircraft had inflicted more damage upon the Italian fleet than was inflicted

upon the German High Seas Fleet in the daylight action at the Battle of Jutland.”

The Italians, rattled by the attack, pulled their major warships out of Taranto for a safer harbor at Naples, far to the north and no threat to the British convoys. They never again used Taranto as a major base for their battle fleet.

The strategic gain in the Mediterranean was diminished somewhat in 1941 when the Germans, no longer trusting the Italians, moved Luftwaffe bombers and fighters into the area in large numbers to block and harry the British.

Seldom in the history of warfare had a handful of old airplanes inflicted so much damage on an enemy, but Taranto never received the acclaim of other noteworthy battles. Little more was said after Churchill’s statement to the House of Commons about the balance of

power in the Mediterranean. Later, ruminating on the war on the southern flank and the 1942 Battle of El Alamein, Churchill said, “Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein, we never had a defeat.”

The Swordfish remained in service until 1945 and figured in one more major engagement. In May 1941, it was Swordfish torpedo bombers flying from the carrier *Ark Royal* that disabled the German battleship *Bismarck*, enabling British battleships and destroyers to finish the job and sink it.

Cunningham returned to Britain in 1943 as First Sea Lord, holding that position until his retirement in 1946 in the five-star grade of admiral of the fleet. Vice Adm. Inigo Campioni, commander of the Italian battle fleet, was relieved of duty and became governor of the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean.

Illustrious, attacked by more than 70 German bombers and

fighters in the Mediterranean in January 1942, sustained major damage, was repaired in the United States, and returned to duty. After the war, *Illustrious* served as a training carrier and troop transport until decommissioning in 1955.

The United States was slow to catch on to the significance of Taranto. In a letter in February 1941 to Adm. Husband E. Kimmel, commander of the US Pacific Fleet, the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Harold R. Stark, expressed the opinion that "a minimum depth of water of 75 feet may be assumed necessary to successfully drop torpedoes from planes." Pearl Harbor, where Kimmel's fleet was anchored, was 40 feet deep, about the same as Taranto.

That assessment was modified by a round-robin message dispatched in June 1941 by Rear Adm. Royal E. Ingersoll, assistant CNO, who said that in view of "recent developments"—specifically citing Taranto—the Navy could "no longer assume a requirement of depth of 75 feet for aerial torpedo operations." Incredibly, he added erroneously that the torpedoes at Taranto had been at depths between 11 and 15 fathoms, meaning 66 to 90 feet.

Preview of Pearl Harbor

The Japanese naval attaché discussed what he had learned at Taranto with Commander Minoru Genda, who planned the Pearl Harbor operation, and with Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, who led the attack. The report from the Japanese navy officers who visited Taranto was studied carefully.

Early on, Yamamoto's proposal for an attack on Pearl Harbor met with great resistance in military and naval circles in Japan, but Taranto lent strong support to his case. His decision to strike Pearl Harbor was made in December 1940. In January 1941, he assigned serious planning for the use of aerial torpedoes.

The Japanese did not use the spooled wire technique developed by the British for delivery of aerial torpedoes in shallow water. Their own experiments produced a torpedo with wooden fins which worked in 36 feet of water in tests between January and September 1941.

Forty of the Nakajima B5N bombers that Fuchida led over Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, carried aerial torpedoes. They were very effective along Battleship Row.

Reproduced from "The Air Raid at Taranto" by John T. Correll. Air Force Magazine. The inset on page 10 was extracted from "Swordfish: The Story of the Taranto Raid by David Wragg. ★

Letters To The Editor

*By Editor. As the reach of 'FlyBy' and our website increases, I frequently get letters or requests from folk including from overseas. The following letter was from **Bruce Dewald**, who was serving in the USN in June of 1958, and was able to spend a few days aboard HMAS Melbourne during RIMPAC '58. He wrote to share some thoughts of that experience sixty years ago.*

Aloha Webmaster Marcus, thanks for responding to my inquiry.

At the time of RIMPAC in June 1958, I was a Petty Officer 3rd Class Damage Controlman [Ship repair] aboard USS

RENSHAW DDE-499, home port Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. An appeal was sent out to Pearl Harbor ships to send exchange personnel to HMAS MELBOURNE for a one week underway period and host an equal number of RAN personnel in US ships.



I volunteered and very much enjoyed my stay aboard. At the time I was in the process of changing my rating from Damage Controlman to Aerographers Mate (Weatherman) or, as the mates working in MELBOURNE's Met Office translated, "Met Man". I spent many hours in the Met Office and even took a few weather/met surface observations, under close supervision.

Operation "REX 58" was a combined USN/RAN anti-submarine exercise, 16-19 June 1958, in the Hawaiian Op Areas.

I was one of eight men from RENSHAW who went on the exchange. We reported aboard MELBOURNE at 0800 16 June 1958, in port Pearl Harbor. Three of us were assigned to 4 Delta mess. AB "Spud" Murphy was our guide. During the afternoon I observed flight operations, Sea Venom's and Gannet's.

On 17 June I was taken on a tour of HQ1 and the switchboard room in the morning and took photos of flight ops in the afternoon. Quite the tourist! That evening I was stopped by the Commander for wearing shower shoes, inappropriate footwear in the RAN!

On 18 June, in the morning, there were simulated refueling ops alongside and I took photos of RENSHAW alongside and waved to my shipmates. Afternoon I visited the Catapult and Arresting Gear rooms and the Met Office.

On 19 June 0930 entered port Pearl Harbor and I departed MELBOURNE at 1030 and returned to RENSHAW. My brief "hitch" in the RAN was over. Not included above were hours of sea stories exchanged with MELBOURNE crew over countless cups of coffee and tea. I noted in my diary that I really enjoyed the cruise and I was happy that participated.

While in RENSHAW, earlier in 1958, at the end of a Western Pacific deployment, we had port visits to Melbourne, Sydney, Wellington NZ and Pago Pago, and returned to Pearl Harbor in May. So I was fresh back from my first WESTPAC deployment in RENSHAW when I made my cruise in MELBOURNE.

USS RENSHAW was commissioned in 1942, and made a port visit to Australia sometime during 1943. During WWII RENSHAW earned 8 battle stars, plus 5 battle stars in Korea and 6 in Vietnam. I made one more WESTPAC in RENSHAW, and visited Brisbane in July 1959, including two days roo hunting in Chinchilla. RENSHAW remained in commission until 14 February 1970, she never visited Australia again. I was

one lucky Sailor to have made two of her three trips to Australia!

I did become a Navy Met man and remained in the Navy for 30 years.

I Wintered Over at McMurdo Station, Antarctica in 1963 & 1966, returned to McMurdo in Summer Support in 1972 & 73. In 1972 I was designated as a Naval Aviation Observer (Flight Met). I served 18 Months in Saigon, RVN and an additional 6 months in Vietnam in USS VALLEY FORGE LPH-8. I was promoted to Chief Petty Officer, Chief Warrant Officer and retired in 1986 as a Lieutenant Commander (Limited Duty Meteorology). I am retired from a 2nd career in Security & Intelligence to Oro Valley, Arizona. I am a Docent at Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, AZ. Pima has on display: Fairey Gannet, RN XL482; Government Aircraft Factories, VH-HVZ, N22S Searchmaster in livery of US Customs Service; and a deHaviland Australia T.35 Vampire, A79-661 (3rd attachment), + 270 odd other aircraft on display, inside and out.

Thanks very much! Bruce. ✈

The Only Time?

During a "standard" alongside 'cocker-p' on HMAS Melbourne during RIMPAC '72 a discussion between myself and **LtCol Richard "Dick" Chapman** USMC came around to a "liaison visit" by HS817 aircrew to MCAS Kanehoe Bay. The question then came to the means of transporting c.10 members from the ship to the Marine station, the other side of Oahu and make it in time for "happy hour" on the Friday afternoon.

After some serious "mulling" over the problem Dick suggested he pick up said aircrew off the coast of Pearl Harbour prior to the ship entering. "Wings" (**Ken Barnett** if memory serves correctly) was approached and he - somewhat reluctantly (after discussion with the Captain) granted the OK.

Off went Melbourne to fight RIMPAC and signals flew between Marine and Navy. An agreement was reached whereby the CH53 Sea Stallion that did the Friday "Marine Islands Logistic flight" would land on the ship and pick up the liaison party.

Thus on the afternoon of Friday the 15th of September 1972 (c.1600 hrs), the good ship Melbourne was slowly moving along awaiting the arrival of said CH53. Time went by as I waited in Flyco. Wings and "Little F" were beginning to chuckle that the Marines had been "taking the p..." and it was all a setup, even the Captain made a comment to this effect. The group of aircrew waiting at the base of the island were making strange faces at me in Flyco.

Suddenly (and to my everlasting relief) the radio burst into life and "Marine Yankee-Hotel Ten" called up, apologised for being late and requested a landing.

As I boarded an arm flashed out of the cockpit and dragged me in. Dick put me in the right hand seat and said "You are driving" (after the takeoff of course). Liaisonees(?) all loaded off we went towards Diamond Head. I asked Dick "What speed?", he replied "145 knots". Immediately a Texas drawl from the back said "Scuse me Sir, we have just come below 36,000 pounds, you can use fast cruise". Dick immediately said "175 knots" - Skyhawk pilots eat your heart out!!!



The CH53 landing aboard Melbourne on 15Sep72. Photo: PJ Cannell

Having later in my career flown the Sea King, my assessment was that it handled just as well but was a lot smoother. We duly landed at Kanehoe and a fearsome amount of "comradeship" and "liaising" went on until late Sunday evening.

As a Post Script, Wings asked me some time later "By the way, what was the weight of the CH53 when it landed? - The deck is only stressed to 29,000 pounds". Unfortunately (possibly due to the amount of liaising I did), the weight change between normal and fast cruise escaped me at that point in time. Anyway, there was no point in upsetting Wings!!!

John "Bomber" Brown

By Ed. Does anyone know of any other time a CH53 landed aboard Melbourne? ✈

Looking for D.J. Terry



I have reason to believe my grandfather had helped out with the Jindivik operation as a pilot. Any information about what he did would be appreciated his name was **Denzil Vincent Terry** please if you could help me I would be grateful.

Thanks. **Cheyne Plummer**

By Editor. Denzil Vincent TERRY was a Flight Lieutenant in the RAAF. He enlisted in

May of 1942 and subsequently died in 1951, although it is not known if he was still in uniform at the time, or the nature of his death. The Jindivik program started in 1948 with the first manned aircraft (the Pika). Production of the unmanned Jindivik didn't occur until two years later, so Denzil would have Crossed the Bar by then.

*My research indicates the names of at least three Pika pilots: **J. Miles**, who carried out the initial tests; **Fred Knudsen**, who was injured when one of the two Pikas crashed, and **Fred Barnes** (later Air Vice Marshall) who saw the program through to its full 'unmanned' status. I have been unable to find Vincent's name in connection with the Pika program, but any additional advice would be welcome. Please drop the Editor a line [here](#). ✈*

Gannet XG796's Last Moments



In the last edition of FlyBy you mentioned the incident where Gannet 858 (XG796) flown by **Albie Fyfe** slid over the side of Melbourne on 22 February 1966. It hung suspended for a while before being lost overboard.

I happened to be on the aft signalling deck (where that Venom nose cone and radar was) that night so saw it all in vivid detail. Contrary to **Pete [Coulson's]** account, Albie on his approach was way off centre line and came across the deck from the starboard edge of the No 1 arrestor wire area to the port angle corner. He was given a wave off (big red lights either side of the mirror) and as he rotated the nose up to do so, of course the tail went down and lo and behold, got the No 6 wire. As I recall it, the aircraft came to a halt airborne and then slammed down onto the deck edge with propeller bits and pieces going everywhere like shrapnel. I put one of the 10" signaling lamps on and illuminated the scene for quite a while. The rear seat Sonar Operator was eventually taken out of the aircraft by the ship's crane that was subsequently unable to bring the aircraft back to the deck. The snap of the attachment breaking was very loud, and the aircraft slid over into the depths. The next instruction was to sweep the flight deck clean of any debris.

Cheers, **Max Speedy**.

By Ed. You can see photographs of the aircraft and read the accident report summary [here](#). ✈

You Can Get Lucky!

When reading the excellent piece Sycamore – History in Photos (March 2019 edition of FlyBy) I came across the photo of the borrowed USN HO3S-1 Sikorsky on the deck of HMAS Sydney with the borrowed USN pilot at the controls. That sparked my recall of my brush with the law in California in the 1970s.

While I was on exchange with the USN flying the Lockheed S3A, Glenys and I decided to enrol our oldest son in a private school in Coronado, as its curriculum seemed to offer more than the local public school. We were wrong and after discussions with the private school we removed our son to Coronado Elementary School. The private school demanded the remainder of the year's fees, we objected and were taken to court.

I attended in uniform, represented myself and, to my surprise, won.

After the gavel dropped the judge called me to the bench. I was expecting a dressing down for my Perry Mason impression. He asked; "You're Australian Fleet Air Arm, right?" He then continued to tell me about his awesome time in HMAS Sydney during the Korean War as a Sikorski pilot. You can be lucky! Cheers, **Phil Landon** ✈

Material Needed for this publication. Letters, articles or photographs, news and views. Don't just leave it to others to find stuff... your help is needed! Send anything you think might be of interest to the Editor [here](#).