FlyBy

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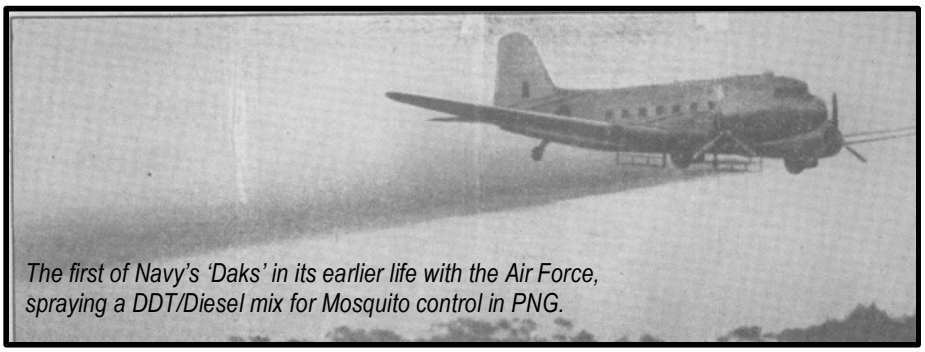
# The Douglas Dakota

Serving in the RAN for nearly 24 years, the faithful old 'Dak' was a force to be reckoned with…

*Image: Michael Van Bosch, Airliners.com*



*The first of Navy's 'Daks' in its earlier life with the Air Force, spraying a DDT/Diesel mix for Mosquito control in PNG.*

A65-43 was, like all four RAN 'Daks', second hand. It was originally acquired by the Air Force in early 1944, and had been used for general operations including being fitted with spray-boom equipment, for Mosquito control – a mixture of DDT and Diesel was deployed. Clearly environmental standards were different then!

The record notes that the aircraft was damaged on 01 March 1948 when the starboard mainplane struck a tree during spraying at Finschafen, PNG. It appears to have been destined then for QANTAS but was instead inspected by the RAN Fleet Air Arm on 05Jul49, and was transferred to the FAA free of charge on 30Nov49 and re-serialled N2-43 the following day.

By the time our first Dak arrived at Albatross the brand new Fleet Air Arm had been in town for a year or so, having been delivered off *HMAS Sydney* in May '49. Life at Albatross was pretty rough in those early days: the majority of the Carrier Air Group families lived in caravans with wooden packing cases attached as annexes in many cases.

N2-43, or "ORA" as it was universally referred to, became a flying classroom for Firefly Observers with eight workstations in the main cabin. N2-23 (VH-ORB) followed not long afterwards, similarly configured. The two Dakotas remained the only multi-engined aircraft in the fleet, until the Gannet arrived in 1956.

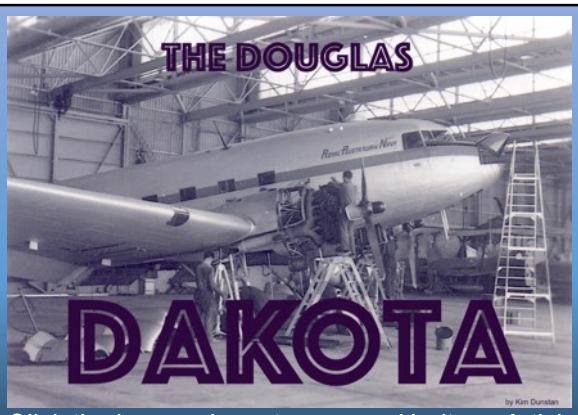
The era of the Sea Venoms and Gannets required more sophisticated training and ORA had a Sea Venom Radar installed in a distinctive pointy nose, and a Gannet radar in a retractable dome under the fuselage. This allowed back-seat crews to undertake airborne Navigation and Anti-Submarine training until those types were phased out towards the end of the '60s.

*N2-43's 'Pointy Snoot' was a feature that made it instantly identifiable. The aircraft survived to occupy pride of place in the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Nowra.*

Navy's final two Dakotas didn't arrive until 1968, some nineteen years after the first. They were primarily 'Communications Aircraft', which was a euphemism for "Hash and Trash".

By the early 70s the new generation of FAA aircraft – the Douglas Skyhawk and Grumman Tracker had arrived, together with two Hawker Syddeley HS748 aircraft for navigation and electronic warefare training, and the days of the Dak were over. Two of the four airframes were sold to commercial operators and the remaining two remained in the RAN. Both survived to the present day: one in the Fleet Air Arm Museum and the other recently bought by the Historic Aircraft Restoration Society (HARS) – hopefully to be restored to flying status.

The Dakota never had the sex appeal of other RAN types, but it served us for nearly quarter of a century and excelled at what it did best: as a general run-of-the-mill workhorse. It earned the respect of those who flew and maintained it: as one pilot said 'It was not so much an aircraft as a way of life.'




*Click the image above to see our Heritage Article on the RAN's Douglas Dakotas, including a History in photographs section, stories by people who flew the 'Dak', and the history of each airframe.*

The content and scope of 'FlyBy' will change next month. See page 14 for details.

# The First Australian Pioneer

By Kim Dunstan

**In the last days of 1903 Wilbur and Orville Wright made history by flying in a heavier-than-air powered machine. The two flights on December 17th were modest events measured in feet and inches, but they fired the imagination of pioneers around the world, most of whom had little engineering expertise.**

**Although they had won the honour of being the first men to fly, their early machines were not practical for general use. The period between 1904 and the beginning of WW1 just ten years later became known as the Pioneer Era of aviation. Much of this occurred overseas, where large populations provided popular support and there was funding to be had, but one name stands out – a young man from Victoria who designed and built the very first Australian engine-powered aeroplane.**

Born at Terang, Victoria, on 31 May 1882, John Robertson Duigan was raised in Melbourne and attended Brighton Grammar School before travelling to England where he gained diplomas in electrical engineering at Finsbury College London, and motor engineering at Battersea Polytechnic. After working for the Wakefield Light Railway, he returned to Victoria in 1907, to work at Weymouth Pty Ltd Electrical Engineers, in Melbourne.

In 1908, John Duigan joined his brother Reginald (b. 1889) who was the manager at Spring Plains, a family-owned grazing property, near Mia-Mia, south of Heathcote. It was here that John and his brother formed the idea of building an aeroplane. In 1909, having constructed a glider which gave them some experience, John then studied Hiram Maxim's book 'Natural and Artificial Flight,' which provided the data and calculations needed to design an aeroplane capable of powered flight.

After drawing up his plans and specifications John set to work in a shed at Spring Plains. To provide power, a light-weight four-cylinder European engine was obtained from Melbourne engineer (Mr J E Tilley) together with a 7 ft. propeller. The propeller was later replaced with an 8 ft model made by John to give a speed of 40 mph, which he considered necessary for proper flight. Although Duigan had never seen an aeroplane, his engineering and motor experience gave

*Captain John Duigan MC AFC in 1919*

*One of Dugian's early flights*

him the ability to assemble a flying machine - with Reginald providing much assistance.

All material had to be carefully weighed and assembled. Ash timber was used for the frame and rubberised fabric from Dunlop Rubber Company proved the most suitable to cover the mainplanes. The engine was mounted on a firm bed, driving the pusher propeller via a chain. Initial engine runs were rough but when a new carburettor was fitted it ran smoothly, producing more power, enabling the propeller to generate plenty of thrust – and clouds of dust.

The next step was to conduct flying trials. After moving over several fences and a creek, the first runs were held in a paddock surrounded by hills. When Duigan opened the throttle, the aircraft gathered speed along the ground and ran up a steep hill. After several runs and having gained confidence with the controls Duigan tried a run down the hill and found he could steer straight. With early difficulties overcome, and full of confidence, Duigan lifted the machine into the air to about 12 ft flying just short of 200 yards. After some changes longer and higher flights were achieved.

Unfortunately, the surrounding hills limited how far the biplane could travel. But, with the success of 'hop' flights and modifications, on 7 October 1910 Duigan gave a demonstration before a group of spectators achieving sustained flight. Thereafter John Duigan and his brother Reginald continued to fly reaching distances of over a mile at heights of up to 60 ft.

On 3 May 1911, assisted by Reginald, John Duigan flew the biplane at Bendigo Racecourse flying off and around the track on five occasions where several hundred citizens witnessed it. According to the Bendigo Advertiser of 4 May the exhibition flights were a success and helped to raise money for local charities.

Next, on 31 May 1911, with Reginald flying, a demonstration was conducted for the Defence Department and the Aerial League. The trial was to bid for a Government prize, for the design of an aircraft suitable for military purposes. In the event the bid was not successful. Eventually the prize expired and was never awarded.

In June 1911 John Duigan returned to England where he was granted an Aviators Certificate No 211, in April 1912, flying a biplane built by A.V. Roe. Returning to Melbourne in 1912, Duigan and his brother built a version of the Roe aircraft which was badly damaged on 18 February 1913, during its first flight at Keilor Plains, near Melbourne. The aircraft was repaired but never flown again. On 26 November John Duigan married Kathleen Rebecca Corney, at Caulfield.

During WW1, Duigan enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps and was commissioned lieutenant, on 14 March 1916. He was appointed B Flight commander of No 2 Flight – later No 3 Squadron. In October he sailed for England and saw action in France from December 1917 to May 1918. On a reconnaissance flight in a RE.8 Duigan was attacked by four German Fokker Triplanes on 9 May 1918. Although severely wounded he landed safely, saving the life of his observer Lt Paterson and was awarded a MC for gallantry.

After demobilisation in 1919 Duigan returned to Melbourne and resumed his career as an engineer. In 1928 he established a garage at Yarrawonga called 'Old Bridge Motors' which he ran until 1941 when he returned to Melbourne and joined the RAAF Quality Control Branch for the duration of WW2. He then retired in 1945 to live at Ringwood, where he died on 6 June 1951.

Duigan's original biplane is now in the collection of Museum Victoria.

# Air America's Black Helicopter

*The secret aircraft that helped the CIA tap phones in North Vietnam by James R. Chiles. AIR & SPACE MAGAZINE*

BLACK HELICOPTERS ARE A FAVORITE FANTASY when conspiracy theorists and movie directors conjure a government gone bad, but in fact, the last vehicle a secret organization would choose for a stealthy mission is a helicopter. A helicopter is a one-man band, its turbine exhaust blaring a piercing whine, the fuselage skin's vibration rumbling like a drum, the tail rotor rasping like a buzzsaw.

In the last dark nights of the Vietnam War, however, a secret government organization did use a helicopter for a single, sneaky mission. But it was no ordinary aircraft. The helicopter, a limited-edition model from the Aircraft Division of Hughes Tool Company, was modified to be stealthy. It was called 'The Quiet One' —also known as the Hughes 500P, the "P" standing for Penetrator.

Just how quiet was the Quiet One? "It was absolutely amazing just how quiet those copters were," recalls Don Stephens, who managed the Quiet One's secret base in Laos for the CIA. "I'd stand on the [landing pad] and try to figure out the first time I could hear it and which direction it was coming from. I couldn't place it until it was one or two hundred yards away." Says Rod Taylor, who served as project engineer for Hughes, "There is no helicopter today that is as quiet."

The Quiet One grew out of the Hughes 500 helicopter, known to aviators in Vietnam as the OH-6A "Loach," after LOH, an abbreviation for "light observation helicopter." The new version started with a small research-and-development contract from the Advanced Research Projects Agency (now the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) in 1968. The idea of using hushed helicopters in Southeast Asia came from the CIA's Special Operations Division Air Branch, which wanted them to quietly drop off and pick up agents in enemy territory. The CIA bought and then handed over two of the top-secret helicopters to a firm—by all appearances, civilian—called Air America. Formed in 1959 from assets of previous front companies, Air America was throughout its life beholden to the CIA, the Department of State, and the Pentagon.

The Quiet One's single, secret mission, conducted on December 5 and 6, 1972, fell outside Air America's normal operations. The company's public face—what spies might call its "legend"—was that of a plucky charter airline delivering food and supplies to civilians in Laos, and flying occasional combat evacuation missions in Laos and South Vietnam. While it did substantially more than that, and at considerable peril (217 of its employees died in Laos), Air America crews did not make it a practice to fly deep into North Vietnam.

The mission was intended to fill an information gap that had been galling Henry Kissinger, secretary of state under President Richard Nixon. Negotiations to end the 11-year war had begun in March 1972 but stalled in part because South Vietnamese leaders feared that North Vietnam would invade not long after U.S. troops left. A five-month Air Force and Navy bombing campaign called Operation Linebacker had brought the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table in Paris that October, but even that campaign could not force a deal. Kissinger wanted the CIA to find out whether the North Vietnamese were following the peace terms or just using them as a smokescreen for attack plans.

From its intelligence work a year earlier, the CIA knew about a weak point in the North Vietnamese wall of security: a telephone line used by the country's military commanders, located near the industrial city of Vinh. A patrolled bicycle path ran alongside the string of telephone poles, but at one spot, about 15 miles southwest of Vinh and just east of the Cau River, the phone line went straight up a bluff, over a ridge, and down the other side. The terrain was too steep for bikes, so the path followed the river, which flowed around the bluff, rejoining the telephone poles on the bluff's far side (see hand-drawn map, p. 67). This would be the best place to drop off commandos to place a wiretap.

Because the Vinh tap would be sending its intercepts out of North Vietnam, across Laos, and into Thailand, it would need

*Pilots viewed the terrain imaged by the FLIR on the screens in the cockpit (Shep Johnson)*

a solar-powered relay station that could catch and transmit the signal, broadcasting from high ground. The station would be within earshot of enemy patrols, so both the tap and relay would have to be dropped in by helicopter—a very quiet one.

**Disturbing the Peace**

The Hughes Tool Aircraft Division had started working on such a helicopter in 1968; that year an affluent suburb of Los Angeles had bought two piston-powered Hughes 269 helicopters for police patrols. Citizens soon called to complain about the noise of the low-flying patrols, and the city told Hughes to either make them quieter or take them back. An emerging market for police patrols was at stake. Engineers at Hughes identified one of the worst of the noisemakers: the tail rotor. By doubling the number of blades to four, Hughes was able to cut the speed of the rotor in half, which reduced the helicopter's noise.

The Quiet One's modifications included an extra main rotor blade, changes to the tips on the main blades, and engine adjustments that allowed the pilot to slow the main rotor speed, making the blades quieter. It also had extra fuel tanks in the rear passenger compartment, an alcohol-water injection system to boost the Allison engine's power output for short periods, an engine exhaust muffler, lead-vinyl pads to deaden skin noise, and even a baffle to block noise slipping out the air intake.

Coincidentally, the Advanced Research Projects Agency was hunting for contractors who could cut noise from military helicopters of all sizes. After hearing about Hughes' work on the police helicopters, ARPA offered the company $200,000 in 1968 to work similar magic on a Hughes OH-6A light helicopter. Hughes Tool made a short movie about the modifications, which included a new set of gears to slow the tail rotor, and showed it to ARPA. "ARPA came back and offered a blank check to do a Phase Two of the program with no holds barred," recalls Taylor, the project engineer. "Each and every noise source in the helicopter was to be addressed in an attempt to reduce the signature to an absolute minimum." ARPA gave the project the code name *Mainstreet*. Even before work was fully under way, the CIA ordered two (later registered as N351X and N352X) for use in the field. Test flights began at Culver City, California, in 1971, followed by a brisk training program for the U.S. instructor-pilots who would later train mission pilots.

Flights of the Quiet One included low-level work at the secret Air Force base Area 51 in Nevada and touchdowns on peaks in California to familiarize pilots with close-quarters maneuvering and landing in darkness. Pilots needed at least eight hours to get comfortable with steering by sole reference to the comparatively narrow view of the forward-looking infrared (FLIR) camera, which was mounted just above the skids. Says Allen Cates, an Air America pilot who flew one in 1973: "When you saw a person, it was like looking at a photo negative. Or you'd see just the hood of a car, glowing from heat off the engine block.… And when you were landing, a blade of grass looked as big as a tree."

The slapping noise that some helicopters produce, which can be heard two miles away or more, is caused by "blade vortex interaction," in which the tip of each whirling rotor blade makes tiny tornadoes that are then struck by oncoming blades. The Quiet One's modifications included an extra main rotor blade, changes to the tips on the main blades, and engine adjustments that allowed the pilot to slow the main rotor speed, making the blades quieter. The helicopter also had extra fuel tanks in the rear passenger compartment, an alcohol-water injection system to boost the Allison engine's power output for short periods, an engine exhaust muffler, lead-vinyl pads to deaden skin noise, and even a baffle to block noise slipping out the air intake.

The extensive alterations did not blank out all noise, Taylor says. Rather, they damped the kinds of noise that people associate with a helicopter. "Noise is very subjective," he says. "You can reduce the overall noise signature and an observer will still say, 'I can hear it as well as before.' It's related to the human ability to discriminate different sounds. You don't hear the lawnmower next door, but a model airplane is easily heard. It has a higher frequency and seems irritating."

*At a secret base in Laos, Air America's Thomas 'Shep' Johnson trained local commandos to set a wiretap. US pilots then flew them to the wiretap site, far behind enemy lines (Shep Johnson)*

Hughes shipped the two Quiet Ones to Taiwan in October 1971. Under the CIA's original plans, the Vinh wiretap mission would be flown by pilots from the Taiwanese air force's 34th Squadron. This would offer the United States some deniability, however flimsy, if any of the helicopters were captured. The pilots' U.S. instructors included two veteran helicopter pilots with experience flying low-level missions in Vietnam: Lloyd George Anthony Lamothe Jr. and Daniel H. Smith. The two had joined Air America six months earlier for that purpose.

**The Decoys Arrive**

Meanwhile, Air America's fleet in Thailand accepted delivery of two more Hughes 500 models—standard ones—and used them for air taxi operations. The job of these plain-vanilla Loaches was to distract attention from the Quiet Ones before they even landed in Laos. Loaches were common in Vietnam but not in Laos, so Air America needed to start using them in full view of North Vietnamese sympathizers. That way, if an enemy observer later saw the modified Loaches flitting past on a moonlit night, he might not consider the event worthy of comment.

Initial flight training on the Quiet Ones, conducted in Taiwan, was complete by June 1972. The two helicopters and their gear traveled on a C-130 transport to an isolated airstrip in Thailand called LS-05. Mechanics pulled them out, swung the rotor blades for flight, and filled the tanks, and the two helicopters flew by night to an even more obscure base, a secret one in southwest Laos known to insiders as PS-44. PS stood for "Pakse Site," a reference to the garrison town of Pakse, 18 miles to the southeast. PS-44 had been built to house Laotian commandos and the aircraft that flew them around. Its dirt strip and three tin-roof buildings sat on the edge of a plateau, surrounded on three sides by steep ground that was unusual for its expanses of bright beach-like sand, eroded from nearby cliffs of white sandstone.

It appeared to be far away from everything, but it was not far from the enemy. By late 1972, units of the North Vietnamese army were ensconced 20 miles to the north. To offer some peace of mind, the CIA had Air America keep a turbine transport helicopter, the Sikorsky S-58T "Twin Pack," handy for evacuations. More reassuring, the terrain was so steep and overgrown that the enemy could have stormed it from only one direction: the west. The base also relied on a perimeter of six guard posts staffed by Laotian soldiers, and reinforcements could have been called in from a base lying southwest, along the Mekong River.

**No Pictures Allowed**

Cameras were discouraged at PS-44, and photographing the Quiet One was strictly forbidden. Crews already knew the risk of telling tales in the bars and brothels of Southeast Asia, but even inside the base, the code of silence persisted. "You just didn't come up and introduce yourself at PS-44," says Dick Casterlin, an Air America pilot who came to the base often. "Nobody talked about their personal background or where they were from." Men who worked closely for months knew each other only by first names or nicknames. The CIA itself had its own nickname at PS-44: The men called it simply "the Customer."

Casterlin flew an S-58T helicopter during some of the wiretap attempts, accompanying the Quiet One in order to rescue the wiretap teams if that became necessary. Casterlin had a security clearance for special missions, but even he wasn't told where the CIA had hidden the Quiet One.

According to base manager Stephens, the Quiet One was kept out of sight about 600 yards northwest of PS-44's main building, reachable down an unmarked, narrow forest trail. Because of the distance, the forests, and the quieting gear, the helicopter couldn't be heard from the porch of the base's main building unless it was flying overhead. Even then, at night, it sounded like a far-off airplane. The helicopter had its own hangar so Soviet spyplanes and satellites could not get a look at the peculiar profile produced by the extra main rotor blade, a tail rotor with blades in an odd scissored configuration, and big muffler on the rear fuselage.

Between June and September, Lamothe and Smith tried to train the Taiwanese crews to fly the mission, but after months of poor performance by the trainees—including a botched night landing that demolished one of the two Quiet Ones—and bickering over who would be the chief pilot, the CIA managers got fed up and sent the whole contingent home. Lamothe and Smith prepared to fly the mission themselves.

At the same time, the agency placed the project under new management. James Glerum arrived in Pakse to direct operations. Glerum had been the CIA's assistant base chief at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base when the Quiet Ones landed in Laos. The new assignment demonstrated how urgently the state department wanted the wiretapped information, according to Air America chief helicopter pilot Wayne Knight. Glerum, he says, was a CIA "super-grade," outranking many careerists at headquarters.

Soon after his arrival, Glerum quizzed Smith and Lamothe on their cover story. When he realized they had none, he provided them with false identities and a story to go with them in case of capture.

More help came from Air America, which was offering up its best aircraft (the term used was "gold-plated") and its most experienced men to support the mission. One was Thomas

"Shep" Johnson, a rangy Idahoan with a background in smoke-jumping. Johnson had started with Air America in its first year, 1959, rigging bundles with parachutes and pushing them out of aircraft. A year before, he had been one of only three men to survive a North Vietnamese attack at another Laotian air base. Johnson's main responsibility was to train a squad of eight Laotian commandos for the Vinh wiretap mission. For years, the commandos had been fighting communist forces and had reported on enemy traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in eastern Laos. A group of 100, they lived in a separate part of PS-44 and manned the perimeter.

*It was rare for The Quiet One, designed for flight at night, to see the light of day. (Shep Johnson)*

The CIA had hoped to get the wiretap in place before monsoon season, but a series of mishaps and equipment malfunctions, compounded by the monsoons starting early, delayed the mission. "We had a string of unbelievably bad weather," says Glerum. "Normally, November to January is the rainy season. It had started right as I got there [in October]." Twice Lamothe and Smith took off from PS-44 to fly the wiretap mission, refueling in eastern Thailand and heading into enemy territory, only to turn back after running into clouds in the passes or fog at the wiretap site. "The preparation for the mission was a very hectic time," says Stephens, "but it also seemed like it dragged on forever."

**TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES**

Hughes technicians toiled over the troublesome infrared camera; problems with it had forced cancellation of an October 21 attempt. "The FLIR [forward-looking infrared] required a lot of work," recalls Glerum. Other gadgetry included SU-50 night-vision goggles (their first use in Laos), which worked only when the moon was a quarter to a half full. The helicopter also had a long-range navigation system (LORAN-C).

Any mishap during the night flight into North Vietnam, particularly while the crew maneuvered among trees and telephone poles, would doom the mission and probably its participants. By day Lamothe and Smith studied photos and maps marking the stealthiest route to the target. By night they practiced by using LORAN to navigate from the hangar to a nearby training ground they called the Hole. The topography of the Hole was an "astonishingly accurate duplicate" of the actual wiretap site, according to Glerum. Flying into and out of it was "no problem in the daytime, [but] it could be a bugger at night," recalls Casterlin. Smith and Lamothe dropped the commandos near a simulated telephone pole (a tree stripped of branches and equipped with a cross arm) and flew to a pre-selected tree, where they laid out the radio rig called the spider relay.

The spider relay was to be deployed as the helicopter hovered over a tree. With its solar panels, electronics boxes, and antennas sprung open to a width of almost 10 feet, the relay perched atop the branches with a fishnet-like webbing. It was nearly impossible to see from the ground. The relay could be folded into a compact package that fit between the helicopter skids, but there was so little ground clearance left after it was attached, the pilots could land only on a hard, flat surface.

When each night's practice was complete, Lamothe and Smith flew back through the darkness to the concrete landing pad, which was shaped like an old-fashioned keyhole. The approach to landing was memorable because the Quiet One used no landing lights; it relied on an infrared floodlight on the nose. The light cast an eerie, ruddy glow.

Some of the biggest threats to mission success came not from North Vietnamese army spies but from plain bad luck. One flight opportunity was lost when a scorpion bit a wiretap team commando, setting off an allergic reaction. On one of the training flights at the Hole, after Lamothe and Smith deployed the spider relay used for practice, it slid off the branches and crashed to the ground, with pieces scattering. Training for the mission could not proceed without the relay, and joyful speculation spread among the ranks: It would be a month or more until a new spider could come from the States, so the men could go on leave.

But no: Stephens flew to the spot by helicopter, slid down a rope, and helped technician Bob Lanning bag up the pieces. Back at camp, Lanning laid them out on a floor and said he could get the relay working if he had some new parts. "Jim Glerum sent a cable," says Stephens, "and in three days we had the parts by courier. Bob worked two and a half days, almost nonstop, and put it back together. So we only lost a few days."

With the moon entering the favorable phase, the rescue crews moved to a forward staging base in eastern Thailand while Lamothe, Smith, and the Quiet One remained at PS-44. An attempt was scheduled for the night of December 5, amid rising doubts among Air America veterans as to whether the scheme would ever work.

That night, the Quiet One flew to a refueling base at the Thai-Laotian border, where it met a de Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter with the Laotian commandos. Two commandos with guns and the wiretap equipment climbed aboard the Quiet One, and the rest stayed on the Otter with parachutes and more guns in case they were needed for a rescue. Accompanied by an armed Twin Pack flown by Casterlin and Julian "Scratch" Kanach, the Quiet One set course for the northeast. The Twin Pack broke away at the North Vietnamese border and took up a slow orbit over Laos, out of radar range but on call if needed. Despite the Twin Pack's readiness to play the rescue role, security was as tight as ever. "I did the LORAN navigation, but I didn't have the coordinates of the wiretap location," Casterlin says. "I assumed they'd tell me if I needed to know, or maybe Scratch knew."

Leaving the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and without being targeted by the anti-aircraft defenses along it, Lamothe and Smith climbed to cross the Annamese mountains, then dropped to follow the nap of the earth, following streambeds when possible. When the pilots identified the wiretap spot, they hovered, and the two Laotian commandos jumped a few feet to the ground.

Lamothe and Smith then flew west across the Cau River to a 1,000-foot-high mountain to set the spider relay. Finding the ideal tree for the relay had taken months of intense photo-reconnaissance work. The tree had to be tall, on high ground with a clear view of the western horizon, and flat at the crown. An Otter orbited over a receiver relay, which was already in place atop another mountain halfway into Laos. Inside the Otter, technicians were watching an oscilloscope measure a test signal from the spider relay.

Meanwhile, the Laotian commandos at the wiretap site found that the poles were concrete rather than wood, so they couldn't use their pole-climbing boots to get up them or a stapler to attach the antenna. The men shinnied up instead. After splicing into the phone wires, they put the tap in place; it was concealed in a glass insulator of the same color used on the French-built line. The commandos began taping up the short-range antenna and installing narrow solar panels atop the pole's cross-arm. This would power the tap's transmitter.

When Lamothe and Smith heard from the Otter that the Thai oscilloscope was getting a clear signal from the spider relay's transmitter, they threw a switch that released the last cables connecting the spider relay to the helicopter and flew the Quiet One to a streambed to wait for the commandos to finish attaching the solar panels. At the scheduled time, Smith restarted the helicopter's turbine; he picked up the commandos at the wiretap site and the team returned to Laos without incident. Those listening to progress reports at PS-44, Udorn, and the Lima 40A refueling site were pleasantly startled to hear that the crew was on its way back and the tap was in place without a firefight, recalls Wayne Knight.

"What makes the Vinh tap so special is that they pulled it off," Knight says. "It had to be right the first time."

**Disappearing Act**

Lamothe and Smith left the Quiet One at PS-44 and flew to the CIA's regional office at Udorn by conventional aircraft. Much celebration at ensued there—perhaps too much. During the subsequent R&R, someone at the Wolverine Night Club in town bit off part of Smith's ear. If a reprimand for attracting attention was ever entered in Smith's secret personnel file, it didn't matter: The CIA had no plans to send the Quiet One up again, and within a week all the Americans connected with the mission and their equipment were on their way out of Laos.

Recollections differ on how long the Vinh tap worked—perhaps one to three months—and why it went silent. But allegedly it yielded enough inside information from the North Vietnamese high command to help nudge all parties to sign a peace pact in late January 1973. Exactly what Kissinger eavesdropped on remains classified.

"I was not aware of any specifics Kissinger and company were looking for," Glerum says. "Since the land line [at Vinh] was understood to hold the command channel, virtually anything would have been welcome."

The one flyable Quiet One relocated to California. Air America pilots Allen Cates and Robert Mehaffey trained on it at Edwards Air Force Base, achieving proficiency in early 1973. Then, before any special-mission training began, and with no explanation, Cates and Mehaffey were sent back to their old piloting jobs at Air America. Mechanics pulled most of the special features out of the Quiet One, and its trail of insurance and registration papers ends in 1973, after it was transferred to Pacific Corporation of Washington, D.C., a holding company used as a screen for CIA-backed companies and assets.

"The agency got rid of it because they thought they had no more use for it," says Glerum. At least one of the ex-Quiet Ones surfaced years later at the Army's Night Vision & Electronic Sensors Directorate in Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

But according to the participants, no more were built. It's puzzling why the CIA did not keep a stable of Quiet Ones, at least while the technology remained under wraps. And it remained a secret for more than two decades, until Ken Conboy and James Morrison told the story in their 1995 book *Shadow War*.

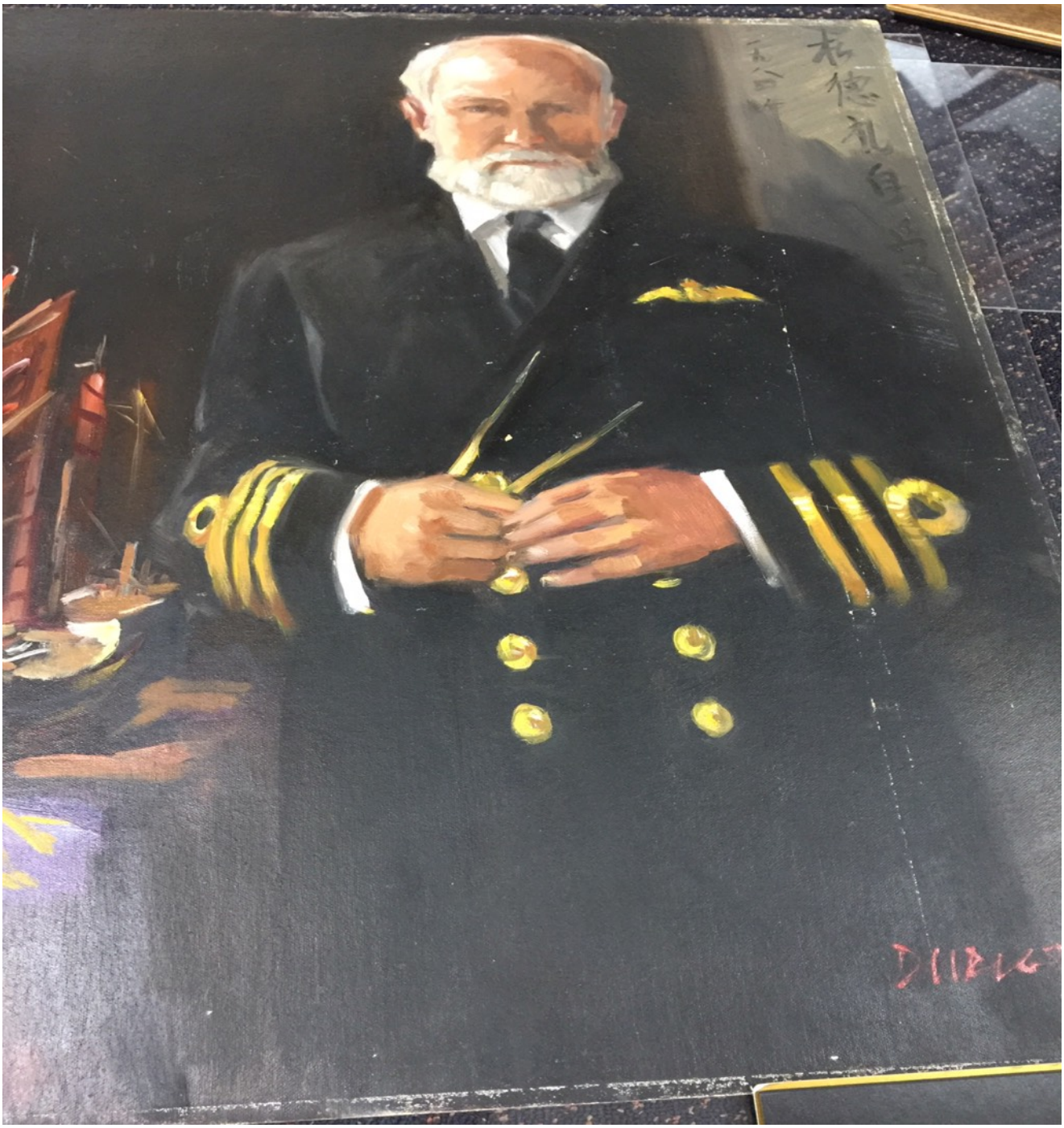
But there were valid reasons for dropping the Quiet One from the spymasters' catalog.

"In the long run, the 500P was not the best for setting wiretaps," says Casterlin. "It was not good for high-altitude work." It was a light helicopter and had to be loaded with gear that cut into its payload capability and operating altitude. The Twin Pack was much louder but also simpler to run and more powerful, so Air America used it for later wiretap missions in North Vietnam. At least one tap, placed on the night of March 12-13, 1973, was successful.

Some of the Quiet One's innovations did show up on later helicopters, including the Hughes AH-64 Apache, which has a scissor-style tail rotor. And Hughes engineers' interest in modifying the tips of the main rotor blades to cut the slapping noise caused by blade vortices has been taken up by other experts. Aerospace engineer Gordon Leishman and his team at the University of Maryland, for example, are developing a blade with curved tubes at the tip to divert the air, thereby countering vortex formation. But, thanks to its many unusual modifications, the 500P still holds the title that Hughes gave it in April 1971: "the world's quietest helicopter." Read more **here**.


*Here's a nice picture forwarded to me recently by Max Speedy, although I don't know the name of the pilot featured in it, nor who took the image…perhaps some reader might help?*

*Don't forget also to send your interesting pictures to the webmaster, who is always on the lookout for topical subjects or those that invoke memories of the FAA. You can email them to him **here**, or ask him for a mailing address if you prefer to send hard copies (they will always be returned to you).* ✈



*Can anyone help with identifying this? It's a painting recently spotted in a framer's shop in Canberra. The owner is Captain John Dudley RAN and the portrait is of his father…but we are intrigued by the metal wings. Not sure if he was in the RN or RAN, but would welcome any thoughts, knowledge, history or even theories! Contact the editor **here**.* ✈

# Frank E. Evans Commemoration

On the 8th of June 1969 the American Destroyer Frank E Evans cut across the bows of HMAS Melbourne during flying stations, and was cut in two with the loss of 74 lives.

The 50th anniversary commemoration will be held at the Garden Island Chapel. The organiser is Andrew White who can be contacted by email **here**, or on his phone at 0459 984 356. ✈

## DFRDB UPDATE - March 2019

On Wednesday, 27 March, Herb Ellerbock and I met with Minister Darren Chester. We were told we had 20 minutes but our meeting lasted 35 minutes, on what was a very busy day for the Minister. The meeting was also attended by:

- The Department of Defence Department Head responsible for DFRDB;
- The Department of Defence DFRDB subject expert;
- Senator Bridget McKenzie's senior advisor;
- National Party candidate for the Federal seat of Indi; and
- The Minister's executive assistant.

Herb delivered a 15 minute PowerPoint presentation based on his revised paper *'The Denial of Benefits in the DFRDB Scheme*'.

The presentation made clear that we are seeking:

1. The restoration of our benefits to the Fair Indexation baseline;
2. The removal of the partial indexation provisions which exclude from indexation an amount of our retirement/invalidity pay and our widows' pensions; and
3. The restoration of Commutation to a proportionate arrangement, by ceasing retirement pay reductions when we reach our notional retirement age, and refunding retirement pay reductions which exceed the amount commuted.

Herb's evidence in support of these goals was compelling. While the matter of Partial Indexation was news to the Minister and DoD personnel, the Minister seemed to understand and asked pertinent questions. His summed up by saying he understood that fundamentally, DFRDB members are seeking fairness. He suggested that the impending inquiry would go some way toward achieving that. Unfortunately, we were not able to address the Inquiry Terms of Reference (TOR). That will be left in the hands of DFWA at the upcoming ESO Round Table (ESORT) meeting with the Minister, so we are not sure of what outcomes the Inquiry is likely to lead to.

As the subject matter experts we have already been asked to provide input to the Terms of Reference at the ESORT pre-meeting, but that request has been denied by the Secretary for ESORT. This attitude from DFWA national is why we felt compelled to form the Australian Defence Force Retirees Association to address our DFRDB concerns. We followed up our meeting with the Minister with this email, and regardless, will be putting a major submission to the Inquiry.

Herb advised the Minister that his paper has also been forwarded to:

- The Commonwealth Ombudsman under covering letter;
- The Australian Financial Complaints Authority under covering letter; and
- The Australian Human Rights Commission under covering letter.

There is still much confusion over Commutation among DFRDB members, much of it based on incorrect assumptions being spread around, with some suggesting it is the only issue worth pursuing. But Herb's analysis of the individual details of almost 1% of the total DFRDB recipient population, shows that for the vast majority of DFRDB retirees, our annual losses due to unfair and partial indexation are far greater than the amount of the annual losses from Commutation for those of us who have reached our notional life expectancy.

If you are have commutated your DFRDB and haven't joined in the action, I urge you to do so, following Jim's advice below.

We are still well short of our target number of Case Studies we are seeking in support of our claim. The information we require is:

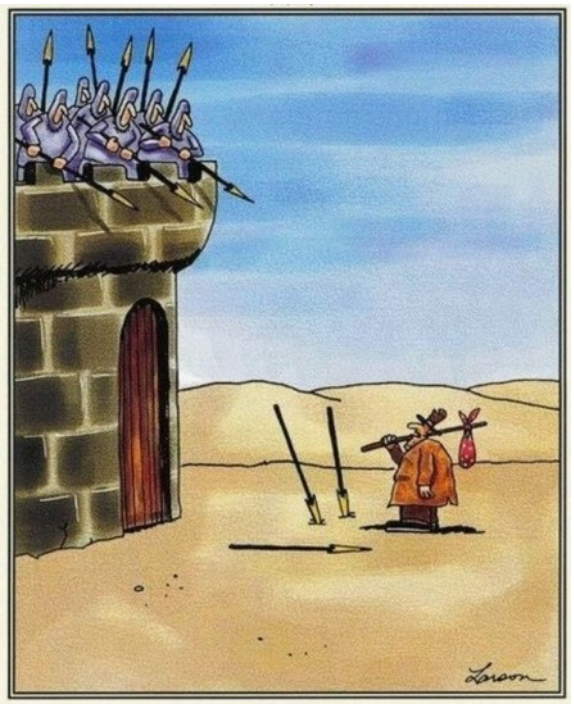
- Date of Retirement;
- Effective Years of Service;
- Initial Retirement Pay Entitlement;
- Total Amount Commuted;
- Gross Reduced Rate of Retirement Pay;
- Current Rate of Retirement Pay;
- Date of Effect (of Current Rate of Retirement

If you don't have these details they can be obtained from Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation (CSC) by emailing them here.

You can get your Current Rate of Retirement Pay from your latest ComSuper CPI Advice or the DFRDB Members web site here.

Ensure you are registered on our website here. When you have your details, Login to this website and enter the details on the Case Study or Case Update page.

Regards, Jim Hislop.



"Hold on there! I think you misunderstood— I'm Al Tilley ... the bum."

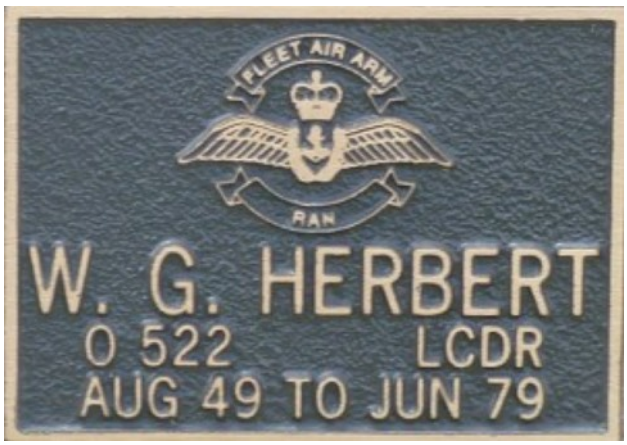
## Wall of Service Update

Order No 42 remains open for applications. 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 |
| CPOA G. Jesser | POWTR T. Atkins |

We have also received payment from **Greg Ryan** but have no paperwork from him. If you know how to contact Greg please ask him to contact the webmaster on 0413 250 969.

The Wall of Service is a place where current or previous members of the FAA may secure a permanent record of their service by means of a brass plaque (see photo below). You don't need to be a member of the FAAAA to apply.




The Wall is fittingly situated outside of the front doors of the Fleet Air Arm Museum at HMAS Albatross. More information on the Wall, including eligibility requirements, cost and how to apply can be found **here**.

## "Missing" Vietnam Vet Awarded Citation

Those who served on the RANHFV are a tight-knit group, but there are still a few whose whereabouts is not known. Until recently one of these was Willem (Bill) Oppenhuis, but he was tracked down in a clever piece of detective work by our resident historian, **Kim Dunstan.**

Bill was in the first contingent of the RANHFV which served in Vietnam from September 1967 to October 1968. He said that apart from his normal duties as a Steward he was involved in 'extracurricular activities' including perimeter guard duties, and occasionally did duty on helicopter flights. The AWM photo of Bill (above right) shows him with a M60 machine gun in a weapons pit at Camp Black Horse, Vietnam in May 1968.

Bill emailed us recently to say that he's now received his RANHFV Unit Citation for Gallantry, which we are delighted to hear.

If you know the whereabouts of any of the remaining missing RANHFV members, please contact the webmaster **here** as we will do our best to ensure they too receive their Citations. They are (with their RANHFV contingent number in brackets):

**Hawkins**, Raymond Basil (2)
**Homer**, Raymond Harold (1)
**Jones**, Raymond Marshall (1)
**Malcolm**, Peter Robert (4)
**Mills**, Francis John (3)
**Montgomery**, James Henry (3)
**Morris**, Garrie David (3)
**Terrell**, Graham Victor (3)
**Varley**, David Nelson (1) ✈

### HAVE THINGS CHANGED?

*Not so much, apparently. The photo at the top was taken in the 1930s, and that below last year. Only the media has changed.*

# FlyBy Newsletter to Change Content

This 'FlyBy' newsletter was started by Marcus Peake (who is also the Webmaster) some 18 months ago. The intent was to provide information that could not necessarily wait up to three months for "Slipstream", our premier publication, and to provide information to non-FAAAA personnel.

It was always important that FlyBy and Slipstream existed in harmony, and so the newsletter was designed to do that. It grew rapidly from what was essentially an 'Info Email' to a fully-fledged publication of some 20 pages of closely typed articles, advice and information. In fact the last dozen or so editions of 'FlyBy' all exceeded Slipstream in terms of the number of words.

Slipstream magazine now has a new Editor, whose first edition will hit the streets towards the end of June. In keeping with the Editor's prerogative, he's decided to change the scope of the magazine to include more material than before. It will remain a quarterly publication and will be disseminated to FAAAA members in either the 'hardcopy' or softcopy' option depending on their preference. The change to Slipstream's style and content necessitates a change to the scope of this newsletter to ensure no overlap.

The content of FlyBy will therefore change with effect from the next edition. Rather than have lengthy articles, it will essentially provide timely advice on matters that need to be disseminated inside Slipstream's three-month cycle. It will also provide links to supportive information on our website - which can now be picked up and dusted off from its period of relative inactivity (the webmaster's time was being consumed by this newsletter).

The Editors of both Slipstream and FlyBy remain committed to producing high-quality material and will welcome ideas, thoughts and contributions. ✈

## New Mystery Photo (Number 52)

There was no Mystery Photo last month as the editor's Handy Billy was empty, but Ray Godfrey came to the rescue.

This month's photo features a smart looking 1940's fighter in transit from somewhere to somewhere else. The editor would like to know:

- **What type of aircraft is it?**
- **What is the ordnance under the wings, and**
- **Why was it carrying that particular type of ordnance?**

You can see a larger image of the Mystery Photo here, together with simple instructions on how to submit your thoughts. There is a link that also lets you see the answers to all previous MPs. ✈

## Attention QLD Members!

The Secretary of QLD Division, **John Stewart,** has advised that he has one Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) payment which has no identifier with it, so he doesn't know who it is who paid his 2019 subscription.

For the QLD member who paid his subs by EFT or Direct Debit on 01 March this year, possibly at the Newstead Branch in QLD, could you contact John on 0422 210 522 or email here.

We value every member who continues to support the FAAAA – but PLEASE remember to put your name or membership number on your cheque or as a reference to your EFT.

## New Slipstream Editor

**Ron Batchelor,** our long-standing Slipstream architect, has hung up his editorial running shoes for the last time – a bit thank you for his time and effort over many years.

**Paul Shiels** from the SA Division has taken up the mantle as the new Slipstream Editor and his first edition will hit the streets towards the end of June. Prior to joining the Navy he was a Newspaper Compositor, which gave him experience in 'layout and design' of newspaper pages. On leaving the RAN he completed a Diploma in Freelance Journalism and worked as a Journalist with a large corporation for some years.

Paul has some new ideas regarding both the content of Slipstream and perhaps the way it can be promulgated for "softcopy" members, so we look forward to that. Hard copies will still be available for those members that wish to receive it in that format.

Putting together any publication is hard work and you can help by forwarding any material you think is suitable, as well as your thoughts ("Letters to the Editor"), photographs or anything else you think might be of interest.

Paul can be contacted **here**. ✈

## Letters To The Editor


Dear Editor

I have a request from a John Conway from the VHPA Museum for items relating to the 135AHC/HFV (see left). He is legit. Could you please add this to your next *FlyBy*?

Thanks, R.G.

*By Editor. If you wish to participate, please contact John Conway directly by emailing **here**.* ✈

## HARS Navy Historic Flight Update

This week, ending 28 April19, has continued to be very busy for the Sea Fury project team, culminating in the successful move of the Sea Fury from its holding position for the last few months with our Major Sponsor Air Affairs, to move by road with Police and RMS escort to HARS Main base at Albion Park, arriving last Friday morning 26 April.

The main activities that have been achieved this week are now listed- NOT in any order of time sequence of events or of relative importance:

**Trackers 844 and 845**


These are now located at Air Affairs secure areas at the Albatross Aviation Technology Park (AATP), where 844 is in temporary open but secure storage within the grounds of our major sponsor Air Affairs, and is receiving its regular weekly run-up and engineering checks by HARS volunteers to maintain its engineering readiness status. I am pleased to report that 844 is running very smoothly, but we are still waiting for formal Navy/ ADF approval to fly the aircraft in Navy colours, and also for 844 to use the runway at HMAS Albatross for its delivery flight up to HARS Albion Park. Tracker 845 is in temporary storage at AA with no immediate plans to work on it or to move it short term

**Dakota C47**

The aircraft fuselage of N2-90 is at AA in secure short-term storage, and at this stage the wings are being stored separately to the fuselage. There has been no planned work on this airframe in this last week

**Wessex**

Wessex 832 was been on display at HARS Albion Park- where our HARS volunteers have this week refreshed the paint on the roundels and safety markings, and it will be on display at Wings Over Illawarra next weekend

Wessex 813 is at HARS Parkes on long term display with no update report received this week

**Sea Venom**

The completely dismantled Sea Venom has now been fully unpacked from its containers and the dismantled airframe is laid out in a dedicated space in HARS Albion Park Hangar 3.

**Sea Fury**

Sea Fury WG 630 airframe was successfully transported by road to HARS Albion Park – where a dedicates space in Hangar 1 has been allocated for the Sea Fury display.


*Sea Fury WG630 aboard a low-loader for its journey from Albatross to HARS' facility at Albion Park. It is intended that it will fly again.*

Thanks to the continued major sponsorship of Air Affairs, a crane unloaded the airframe off the truck on 30th April, allowing Project Leader Mark Thurstan and his team to rapidly reassemble the exterior to have the aircraft on display for the forthcoming "Wings Over Illawarra" airshow. At the Air Show we will be commencing a major fundraising appeal to start the rebuild of this magnificent historic airframe back to flying status.

**Hueys**

Iroquois UH-1B Numbers 893 and 898 are at Air Affairs at AATP in secure storage and there has been no change in their status for the moment.

Once again we have had a busy week of very positive list of achievements, and I continue to pay my tribute and sincere thanks to all who have so actively and enthusiastically been

involved in undertaking and completing a very significant project- the removal of 9 airframes and associated stores from the operational Navy base to either a sponsored short term location (e.g. C47) through to a direct move to a 'home' either with a sponsor (e.g. Hueys at Air Affairs), or the HARS main base at Albion Park and /or HARS Parkes.

Michael Hough
Navy Heritage Flight Project Leader
28 April 2018. ✈