

SKYHAWK

The Story of the RAN's McDonnell-Douglas A4s

About four years ago the Webmaster posted the first of our "Heritage" articles, which was on the McDonnell-Douglas A4Gs of the Fleet Air Arm. Since then a dozen articles have followed, each growing in size and complexity to tell the story, in words and pictures, of one of our foundations.

Looking back, the A4 Heritage piece didn't do justice to the Skyhawks of the RAN, which earned their place not only because they, together with our S2 Trackers, brought resurrection to the FAA at the end of the 60s; nor because they marked the end of the fixed wing era some 20 years later – but also because they were, arguably, the best loved of our fighters and their story was rich in the telling.

So, the webmaster and others have been busy piecing together a brand-new Heritage piece that is now available on the website to peruse. It is the biggest and most ambitious article we have ever produced, telling the story in words and in pictures, giving details of the life and times of every airframe, bringing facts and snippets about the aircraft to en-

rich the story, and by providing a host of 'peripheral' information that we feel sure will be of interest to everyone.

New too, is the innovative navigation interface (see next page) that allows readers to jump into, forwards or back to any of the 34 pages of information and photographs, including 'pop-ups' to further educate and dazzle!

So – check it out! It is there to be read and enjoyed and, of course, to be built upon by any additional photos or stories you may wish to contribute. Click on any box in the figure on the next page to start. ✈

WANTED

A new National Secretary and National Treasurer for the FAAAA (old ones retiring). Here is your chance to give something back by helping your Association.

If you are interested, contact the National Secretary (Dick Martin) [here](#). ✈

Last Month's Mystery Photo (No 54)

Last month we asked readers what the late LCDR (later CMDR) **Barry Bromfield**, on the left in the photo below, was doing, and why?



Although the quality of the image is not particularly good (see a larger copy [here](#)), discerning readers will have spotted that the cylindrical object held by the guy in the lumberjack shirt is a Sonobuoy, which had fallen from a Tracker on finals to RAAF Fairbairn. When the aircraft landed the loss of the sonobuoy was noted and shortly afterwards RAAF authorities received a call from Snowy Welding, in Queanbeyan, to say their factory had been struck by the buoy. You can see the dent in the metal wall of the hangar between LCDR Bromfield and the foreman of Snowy Welding.

Frankie Siska responded to the Mystery Photo and advised: "I well remember this incident. I had just joined VC851 SQN mid 1980 as a then young SMNATA from the then ALB ATA category training school. I had just been authorised ATA-QM1 on the S2G Tracker when on this day I carried out the morning ATA Daily Before Flight Inspection. It would have been late Sep/Oct 1980 when the aircraft dropped the pictured buoy inadvertently in flight on approach to RAAF FAIRBAIRN, Canberra, ACT. It ended up going through a small engineering business and landed near a worker who was shaken not injured. I remember being told to talk to the then Safety Investigators about the issue. From memory, I believe it was a faulty/worn securing latch on the release armament system. Hope this may shed some light on the said past incident of our FAA History." ✈

Ah, What Bliss!

Last month I asked if anyone could tell me what a BLISS Arrestor was, as an entry in the very early days of 805 Squadron's Diary had mentioned the Senior Pilot using the equipment during a take-off from Nowra.

A few folk went to a deal of trouble to respond, so thank you! **Clive Blennerhasset** advised that the Bliss Arrestor

SKYHAWK WEBSITE PAGE MAP

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Web page design by Marcus Peake

† REST IN PEACE †

Since the last edition of 'FlyBy' we have become aware of the loss of **Ian "Taff" Strathie, John Senny and Tony Schubert**. You can read a little more of these sad events on our Obituary pages [here](#), and, if you are a member of the Association, you can leave a comment there if you wish. ✈

gear replaced the old anchor chain arrestor system at Albatross after the introduction of the A4 and Tracker. It was a two-way system (i.e. it could be used in either direction) with gear installed each side of the runways at both ends.

A feature of the system was that it used disk brakes to slow and stop the drum, and the arrestor cable (actually a thick tape attached to a steel cable across the runway) could be disconnected as necessary. A valve system operated by the rotation of the cable storage drum increased the amount of hydraulic pressure going to the disk brake, increasing the braking effect. When the aircraft was almost stopped the hydraulic pressure was almost zero so the system bottomed out (at very slow speed) if the aircraft did not have brakes. Ground crew had to disconnect the aircraft from the cable as there was no kick back as with Melbourne's gear.

Phil Thompson provided a wealth of information including technical drawings of the device. Expect a website article on the subject in the near future. ✈



Above: HARS has made considerable progress in the assembly of the dismantled Sea Venom of the late RAN Historic Flight, using a team of volunteers led by Bob De La Hunty. The Venom will not fly again, but will be restored to fine static condition. Unfortunately the aircraft was poorly disassembled and stored following the demise of the RAN Historical Flight and became exposed to moisture and the elements. Plywood de-lamination in the fuselage also occurred with some fuselage metallic dings. Both engines (1 + spare) are beyond repair through corrosion (largely surface) and will be inhibited against further damage. One engine turns. The aircraft is also missing a number of original bolts and fasteners. The most we can expect is wing fold with an external hydraulic source. Photo: Michael Hough, HARS. ✈

Short Quiz

- How many Trackers ditched whilst in the Service of the RAN?
- When the decision not to refit Melbourne was taken in 1981 the Brits offered to sell us two carriers to replace her. What were their names?
- 06 May 2017 is a date of special significance to the RAN FAA. Why?
- What is the name of the aircraft shown in the photo on the right?
- In 1933 this man (below) was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross. Who was he?



Answers can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Wall of Service Update

Order No 43 is still open. Names so far are:

LCDR M.R. O'Leary	LEUT N.G. Forbes
NAM(O) K.E. Bellert	WOATA F. Siska
AB M. Ruysenaers	SGTNP R. Rae

We require a few more names before an Order can be submitted to the Foundry, so get your application in now if you wish to get your name into the next batch. You can find information on what the Wall of Service is, and how to order a plaque, [here](#). ✈

Slipstream Errors

Recipients of hard copies of Slipstream would have noticed a formatting error in the last edition, which resulted in a line or two being omitted at the end of each page.

The problem, which we understand was caused by template incompatibility at the printers, has now been resolved and future magazines will be complete. Furthermore, the Slipstream Editor (**Paul Shiels**) has advised that the truncated stories contained in that issue will be reproduced one at a time in future editions, subject to space. ✈

Missing Person Wanted

We have been asked to help track down Robert Leslie YOUNG, also known as 'Bob', whereabouts unknown. Robert

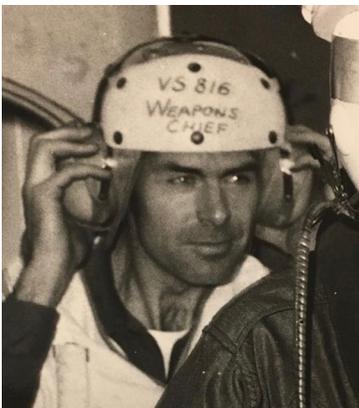


A reminder of the reunions coming up:

LAST CHANCE TO NOMINATE. Vietnam Veterans' Day Old Bar: 16-18 August 2019. 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. Note that some of the arrangements have recently changed to make sure you read the website page!

Tracker Reunion 23-24 October 2019. Venue: HARS at Albion Park, over two days. This event is being organised by Bruce Saville, who runs the "Friends of the RAN Grumman Tracker" Facebook page. You can register interest in attending the reunion by going [to that page](#) and clicking on the poll.

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. ✈



was also known as Bob. Service number R63166 and he was an Air Technical Weapons Ordnance rate, reaching the rank of CPO. He served on HMAS Melbourne during the following times: 14-Nov-64 to 10-Jul-65, 06-Jan to 01-Aug in 1969, and his last time during 04-Jun-73 to 09-Jul-74.

If you know Bob, or can assist in where he can be contacted, please email the Editor [here](#). ✈

Answers to Quick Quiz

Q1. Two Trackers ditched whilst in the Service of the RAN. The first was S2-E Bu151646 which had been acquired incomplete as a training aid and was shipped to Sydney aboard the US freighter "Australian Surf". On Nov 9th 1966 a floating crane was lifting it from the Pyrmont wharf onto a lighter when a sling broke and the aircraft fell into Sydney harbour. Navy divers recovered the aircraft after it had been immersed for four hours. It was subsequently trucked to Nowra in pieces, and the centre section served as an undercarriage retraction training aid. The severed nose section is in the FAA museum to this day, ironically bearing the number "853" which was the side number second tracker to ditch, some nine years later. This second ditching, involving S2-E Tracker Bu153608, occurred on the night of 10 Feb 1975 when it struck the sea during a 'Bolter' off HMAS Melbourne. The crew (Bromfield, Rulfs, Palmer and Kroger) were all rescued without serious injury. An extract from the DSTO report into the accident can be seen [here](#).

Q2. HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*.

Q3. 06 May 2017 marked the **100th anniversary of the start of Australian Naval Aviation**. You can see the story [here](#).

Q4. The aircraft shown is the **TSR-2**, a British supersonic low-level bomber of the cold war era. The story of this remarkable aircraft and its untimely demise, including many photographs, can be seen [here](#).



Q5. Eugene Ely was the first man to take off from and subsequently land on a warship. He was a 'barnstormer' pilot who by June 1910 was thrilling crowds at fairs and other events around the USA. The USN was becoming interested in the idea of aviation at sea but had no machines of its own, so canvassed first the Wright brothers (who scoffed at the idea), and then Curtiss, who suggested young Ely. The story of these first steps into Naval Aviation is a fascinating one, particularly as Ely couldn't swim and had never seen a warship before. He even had to fashion a way of slowing his aircraft down – the forerunner to the arrestor system. You can see the full story on our website [here](#), including extraordinary pictures and details of his tragic death, and the subsequent DFC award many years later. ✈

LIST OF NATIONAL SECRETARIES

ACT Division. [Mr. George Sydney](#).
 NSW Division. [Mr. Terry Hetherington](#).
 QLD Division. [Mr. John Stewart](#).
 SA Division. [Mrs. Jan Akeroyd](#).
 TAS Division. [Mr. Graham Nicholas](#).
 VIC Division. [Mr. Mal Smith](#)
 WA Division. [Mr. Keith Taylor](#) ✈



Above. Who are they? Believe it or not, it isn't often we get photos of life aboard the good ship Melbourne and we'd like to know who each of the 18 people are, and what the occasion is...although the LCDR's "MBE" medal sort of gives a hint! If you click [here](#) you can find a bigger image and use the "Contact Us" box there to let us know any names. ✈

COMFAA Updates



Although we have been unable to bring you recent updates on what's happening in the FAA, the Commander Fleet Air Arm (COMFAA) **[CDRE Don Dezentje]** has just re-confirmed that he is looking at ways of providing them from time to time, perhaps along the lines of his predecessor. Hopefully future editions

of 'FlyBy' will have these updates soon – watch this space. ✈

Attention – Those Who Likes Blowing Things Up!

YouTube video clips are ten a penny nowadays, but every now and again a snippet comes up that is of interest. This one was sent to me recently and answers the question: "What happens to an army tank if it exposed to a nuclear detonation?" It's topical, too, as the event took place in Australia during the Emu Plains atomic tests in the '50s, and the tank in question is – well, you'll have to watch the clip to find out! The video runs for five minutes and you can see it [here](#). ✈

Have You Paid Your Subscription?

At the time of going to press there were 89 people who have yet to renew their Association membership. Please help by signing on for another year!

If you need advice whether you are current, or how to pay your subscription, please contact the Database Manager [here](#). ✈

What's Happening to Tracker 844?



Tracker 844 is one of the two S2 airframes acquired by HARS from the extinguished RAN Historic Flight. The aircraft is currently in open storage near "Air Affairs" on the

Western side of Nowra airfield and is being given regular engine runs in preparation for flying to its new home at Albion Park.

The Tracker is currently awaiting the delivery of specialist batteries as part of the final preparations before flight. We'll keep you informed. (Info courtesy of Michael Hough, HARS). ✈