



Warbird Flies Again

There are said to be only four Fairey Fireflies in airworthy condition in the world, and WB518, pictured above, is one of them – and it's just been given a third lease on life.

Manufactured in June of 1950, this aircraft had a Service life of 16 years. It was shipped to Australia aboard HMAS Sydney in October 1950, landing at Jervis Bay two months later for service initially in 816 Squadron, then 817 including service in Korea. It's RAN history was relatively uneventful – a few



WB518 as a target-tug towards the end of its RAN service in 1959. It was subsequently sold to a private collector for \$400.

pecks and scrapes here and there before it was assigned as a target towing aircraft in '59.

From there it got interesting, as it was bought by a private owner for \$400 in July 1966, and after languishing in a trucking yard for a while was mounted on a pole at the RSL Griffiths for some twenty five years, suffering, amongst other things, the indignity of having a large inflatable 'Snoopy' stuck on its canopy by an anonymous wag.

In 1991 it was retrieved from the pole and the forward fuselage was used to repair WD828 by the Classic Aviation Company in Bankstown. In turn the forward part of 828 was fastened back onto 518's rear fuselage, which was returned to the Griffith pole - where we believe it still remains.

By 1993 Classic Aviation's restoration had stalled, however, and it was offered for sale 'as is'. It came to the notice of Captain **Eddie Kurdzeil**, a veteran USN pilot. He had become interested in Fireflies some 20 years earlier, but was now in a position to own one. He purchased the restoration project and had it shipped to QG Aviation Ltd, based in Colorado.

On inspection, Kurdzeil and his team found that much of the previous restoration would need to be undone if the result was to be an authentic product. It was to be a long job – in fact it was eight years before the completed machine was ready to take to the sky. You can read the story of the restoration [here](#).



Above: WB518 on its pole outside Griffith RSL, some time between 1966 and 1991. The inflatable Snoopy was added by some athletic wag. **Below:** Nearing the end of its first restoration in a Colorado hangar.



A description of the first test flight was captured by Bruce Correll, a friend of Kurdzeils, as follows:

"After 8 years of lies and gross exaggerations, Capt Eddie Kurdziel's Firefly did in fact depart the earth. It was a MAGNIFICENT sight!!! A British test pilot was brought in to conduct the maiden voyage of this impeccably restored British warplane. After several delays and adjustments following runup the plane lowered its wings and roared down the runway. It was a dramatic moment. You could see the stressful anticipation in Eddie's eyes as he stood on the taxiway mid field where a large crowd had gathered despite his attempt to keep the test flight a secret. As the Firefly roared down the runway towards us, you could feel the ground shake from the sheer power of the engine. The plane departed impressively. It was one of the most beautiful moments I have ever experienced in my aviation career. Pieces of various Fireflies from all over the world had been carefully crafted into perfection by a very talented team of experts spending tens of thousands of hours over eight years. After departing the



An expensive and heart-breaking moment when WB518 does a wheel-up landing. It was to take another five years to restore the aircraft to airworthy condition.

runway, Don, the test pilot, tested the flight controls briefly before making a 180 back to the field to make a low pass to show his confidence in this powerful bird. As we stood there and watched this warbird descend upon us, you could feel the intimidation of those who may have suffered its fury. We were speechless!"

The Firefly subsequently made its long-awaited debut at Oshkosh in 2002, almost forty years after it was paid off from the RAN. It immediately scooped several awards including Grand Champion Warbird Post WWII, and the Oshkosh Golden Wrench award for QG Aviation.

When asked what it was like to fly, Kurdzeil remarked:

"Like all aircraft of its vintage, the Firefly has bags of character and certainly provides its pilot with a unique environment. I really had no preconceived ideas about what the experience would be like. The smells and sounds are certainly intoxicating. The Griffon has a sound like no other. It is deafening without lots of hearing protection in the front cockpit and the heat the engine produces is oppressive especially with high outside air temperatures - the front cockpit becomes a veritable oven. Once at altitude with lower outside air temperatures you finally begin to dry out and cool off!"

But disaster was to strike. In 2012 the aircraft was severely damaged when the undercarriage failed to lower at the 'Wings Over Gillespie' airshow. It was back to the workshop for repair, and another five years before it was given its third lease on life.

Today, WB518 is badged as WB377, as Kurdzeil explains: *"The aircraft has been painted to represent WB377 which was loaned to 817 Squadron aboard HMAS Sydney by the Royal Navy for duty in Korea. The Australians had damaged most of their original aircraft in accidents. WB377 '201' in the commanding officer's colors was no exception, being damaged in Typhoon Ruth in October of 1951. I picked the wartime guise of 201 not only for aesthetics, but because I had most of the representative equipment of the period i.e. rocket rails, drop tanks, etc. The Firefly had such a long life it is only possible to 'fix it in time'. Ron Mahle the painter commuted more than twenty times from Minnesota to Colorado to complete the striking scheme. It is original even in the duplication of the luster. Ian Huntley generously provided the finishing info."*

So, there you have it! One of our few surviving Fireflies, albeit an amalgamation of various aircraft bits, has survived and is still flying nearly seventy years after it came out of Fairey Aviation's plant in the UK. May it long continue to do so.

You can read all about our Fireflies, including a record of every airframe and which ones survived, on our website [here](#). ✈



Ex Historic Flight Tracker Takes to the Skies

The FlyBy Editor was away overseas when Tracker 844 (Bu152333) took to the skies again, so it's hardly breaking news here. But it is worth a look, and acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the Historic Aircraft Restoration Society (HARS) and its group of volunteers who made it happen.

For many years it seemed 844 led a charmed life. It was assigned to the RAN Historic Flight and was therefore spared the ignominy of the Tracker graveyard by the Albatross bomb-dump, and the subsequent slow death of many of its fellow airframes in Peter Hookway's yard at East Sale. Over the years 844 was restored to a point where it was technically airworthy – in fact it did a ground run and taxi at the Albatross Air Day of 2008 – but there was no appetite to allow it to fly, and it was locked in a hangar the following year when the Flight was disbanded.

Like the other Historic Flight aircraft, it was allowed to gradually deteriorate over the next decade whilst debate raged what to do with them. For a while there was hope that Navy and HARS might form a partnership, whereby the aircraft would continue to be owned by the Commonwealth but operated by HARS. That prospect collapsed when risk and liability issues came to the fore, and the HF aircraft were subsequently offered for Sale by Tender towards the end of 2018.

There were fears that the collection would be split up and 'cherry picked' by various organisations keen to bolster their

collections with specific airframes, but the then COMFAA, CDRE **Chris Smallhorn**, was influential in getting a preferential clause included in the Tender documents for any purchaser looking to keep the collection intact.

In the event, this was the case. HARS won the Tender and the Historic Collection, including 844 and 845 (Bu153600), was transferred to their name.

Eagle-eyed viewers would have noticed that the word "Navy" was blanked out during 844's short transit flight. This was a

Defence Disposals requirement. It has now been reinstated and any future flights will have NAVY prominently featured, as per the original livery.

Tracker 845 remains on the ground at Albatross (courtesy Air Affairs), but HARS hopes to move it to Albion Park by road during October, in time for the Tracker reunion event. That would give them three S2 airframes to display: 851, 844 and

845. The longer term intent for 845 is to repaint it as a static display and place it on the land immediately adjacent to the Fleet Air Arm Museum, should HARS be successful in being granted a lease there.

HARS is seeking sponsors or one-off donations, however small, to help with the cost of insurance on these aircraft. If you can help, please contact **Michael Hough** [here](#), or though the HARS Facebook page. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible. ✈



844 Landing at Albion Park after its historic ferry flight in September 2019.



Do you have any photos stashed away? **Joe Mumford** was kind enough to send this one to the Editor. It was in a photo album and shows Firefly WB521 after striking Barriers 2 and 3 on HMAS Sydney on 4Jun52. The aircraft was subsequently repaired at Bankstown and did two more years' service before being scrapped in '55.

If you have any old photos, particularly if they have captions or dates, please send them to the Editor [here](#), or at 3 Bonaira Street KIAMA 2533. All original material will be returned, if requested.

Update on ASM(CT) Medals for Op Bursa



In the last FlyBy we gave an update on the progress of the ASM(CT) for those involved in **Operation BURSA**. In it we said: *'As always, there is no guarantee of the above trajectory'*.

Unfortunately this has proven to be correct as another (?) bunch of lawyers have got involved in ASM and other campaign medal regulations, and have stipulated that Defence cannot say 'participated in an Operation' (i.e. Bursa) but must use the terminology 'Defence activity'. Their logic is that such things as Malaysia and FESR were not Operations, and for that matter neither was involvement with the TAG.

In theory this throws into doubt the eligibility of previously awarded medals so there is a scramble to get a change in wording to the Queen for sign off, to get around issue.

The pack for this change was due to leave Defence in October via the Minister, PM, PM&C and the Governor General, and thence to the Queen - and then in reverse. This process has been estimated by Defence to take 3-4 months, but, once again, there's no guarantee of that trajectory.

This is disappointing news for those that have been working hard to get the CT issue resolved for Bursa, but rest assured we'll continue to apply pressure - and will give updates when we can. Our view is that, with Christmas in the way, we shouldn't expect to see much movement before April next year.

When final approval is obtained, an initial batch of individuals

should receive the medal. This 'batch' approach reflects the way we approached this matter. At the start the process a small group of aircrew provided proof (by means of flying log book entries, Squadron memos and other documentation) that they had indeed been directly involved in Operation Bursa...a Defence activity. This group became the 'Test Batch' referred to above. The concept was that, if this batch was accepted as meeting the qualifying criteria, then the groundwork would be set for others. ✈

Wall of Service Update

Order No 43 was submitted to the Foundry in October with the following names:

LCDR M.R. O'Leary	LEUT N.G. Forbes
NAM(O) K.A. Bellert	WOATA F. Siska
ABMTD M. Ruysenaers	SGTNP R.M. Rae
LEUT W. Stone	CMDR N. Gunn
LEUT(O) D. J. Turner	SBLT SLEX W. Spee
LCDR GLEX (P) G. Vidal	CPO G. Willmott
WOMED A.G. Hutchings	

Order No 44 is now open, 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](#). ✈

† REST IN PEACE †

Since the last edition of 'FlyBy' we have become aware of the loss of **Don Roberts, Graeme Fry, Kevin Longford, Karl Fellenberg, Robert Porter and Robert Crawford**.

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. ✈



Did you know that HMAS Sydney was fitted with a system to retain the catapult bridles? This was well before the far more elaborate "Bridle Horn" was fitted to HMAS Melbourne in 1969 to achieve the same purpose (smaller photo to the left).

Our friends at ADF Serials sent us the above photo (courtesy Kas Grigonis), which we'd not seen before. It shows the bridle recovery system in place as Firefly WD832 of 817 Squadron launches from HMAS Sydney in the early 1950s.

After much testing it was discovered that the expensive bridles could be used a number of times, so the bridle was threaded through the eye of a holding cable (on the left), the other end of which was anchored to the deck. As the aircraft passed over the bow the bridle detached from the aircraft hooks and the holding cable stopped it from being lost.

An enlargement of the top picture (below) shows more detail on the cylinder falling from the aircraft. It could be either a Sonobuoy or Marker Marine detaching from a stores rack, but there seems to be a second cylinder above it, fixed to the aircraft. Any theories from readers would be welcome: send them to the Editor [here](#). ✈



SLIPSTREAM is our premier publication but like any successful magazine, depends on input to make it more topical and interesting.

All members are invited to contribute. You might have a short story on something you've seen or heard; what it's like flying different types of aircraft; what it's like working on different aircraft; working in the Fire, Salvage, Met, SE, Phot Sections etc; a book you may have read might prompt you to write a book review; a scary moment on flight deck operations etc.? There's so many stories out there! **ALL Aviation branches of whatever rank held previously** must have some stories hidden away?

Simply drop an email to the Editor [here](#). ✈



Is the AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE VETERANS' COVENANT

*We, the people of Australia, respect and give thanks
to all who have served in our defence force and their families.*

*We acknowledge the unique nature of military service and the sacrifice
demanded of all who commit to defend our nation.*

*We undertake to preserve the memory and deeds of all who have served
and promise to welcome, embrace, and support
all military veterans as respected and valued members of our community.*

For what they have done, this we will do.

Covenant Getting Closer?

Editorial by Marcus Peake

This newsletter has, from time to time, highlighted the matter of a Defence Covenant. It's an initiative that has been championed by the Defence Force Welfare Association (with whom we are affiliated), and has been ten years in the making.

So, firstly, what is a Defence Covenant? Put simply, it is a succinct statement acknowledging the sacrifice that Defence Veterans have made, and recognising

they have have a unique place in the community by virtue of their Service. It does not create or give rights, but it is a statement of tacit appreciation for Veterans and what they have done.

The proposed Covenant does not construe any additional entitlements or reward, nor recognition on a personal level. It is there to make the point that service in the ADF is like no other, and the Government acknowledges that.

So what is the practical use of such a document? By way of an example, I served the last 10 years of my military career

in PERS jobs - and was frequently warding off approaches from the (civilian) department of Defence who were (in my view) trying to essentially turn us into a uniformed public service by chipping away at conditions of service that were essential for our operational capability. We constantly had to make the point that the ADF is unique insofar as there is no other arm of Government that is required to apply lethal force at the National level, nor to put themselves into harms way the way that our ADF people do. Having made that point we then had to demonstrate why the ADF needs subsidised housing, medical, dental benefits and other support and training functions (viz: to ensure our people can maintain operational readiness). It would have been extremely useful if there had already been existing acknowledgement of the special nature of ADF Service at Government level.

Further, it's a regrettable fact that statistically, Veterans are more likely to experience mental health issues than the broader community. This can lead to stress, broken relationships, unemployment, homelessness and even suicide. Whilst a Covenant in itself won't guarantee better outcomes for such people it is, nevertheless, a moral agreement that sets a footprint in the sand. A Covenant between our nation and our armed forces would be constitutive of our values as a people and in turn the values on which our shared democratic institutions rest. I see it as a powerful lever towards driving better support and services for Veterans who, up to now, have struggled to get recognition for what they have done and the price they have paid.

So, where are we at? Well, the **Australian Veterans' Recognition (Putting Veterans and Their Families First) Bill (2019)** is about to pass into Law. The legislation includes an oath, lapel pin and Veteran Card for eligible veterans.

The new Veteran Card, which is a redesign of existing DVA health cards, continues to provide access to treatments and benefits and will soon provide access to thousands of offers from businesses across Australia as part of a new benefits program. DVA is expecting to launch this soon and will send out information packs to Ex Service Organisations, which will include promotional material. **You must register to receive the Covenant/Pin and new card, which you can do through [MyService](#), or by calling DVA on 1800 555 254.**

You can see details of the Covenant debate [here](#). It's compelling reading for anyone who thinks Veterans deserve greater recognition than they have had in the past.

The views expressed above are not necessarily those of the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia. ✈

Federal Council Meeting - Thumbnail

The Federal Council is the premier meeting of the year, when every Division and the National Executive have an opportunity to get together to discuss the Association's business.

This year was a special year as all National Executive positions were 'spilled' and nominations considered as to who should fill them for the next three years.

A more complete report can be found on our website [here](#), but the main outcomes of the meeting were:

National Executive Office bearers appointed:

National President: RADM Mark Campbell
National Vice President: Mr Phil Carey
National Secretary: (Temporary) Mr Dick Martin
National Treasurer: Mr Jock Caldwell
National Database Manager: Mr Paul Norris
National Welfare Officer: Mr David McKean
Webmaster: Mr Marcus Peake

Setting of Fees at the National Level. The meeting agreed to the following levies:

Registration Fees: \$10.00
Capitation Fees: \$5.00 per head per annum
Slipstream Fee: \$5.00 hard, \$2.50 soft.

Award of Life Membership:

Mr Dick "Pincher" Martin was awarded Life Membership for his long and distinguished Service in the Association.

Discussion:

Considerable discussion centred around the duties of the National Welfare Officer and also about action needed to arrest/reverse our declining membership. These matters remain as ongoing action. ✈

What Do You Know About Vampires?



The 'Heritage' series of articles on our website capture aircraft that served in the Fleet Air Arm over the years. Typically, these articles go into great detail including, in many

cases, a "History in Photos" section of the type concerned. You can access the library [here](#).

We add to the list as time and energy permit, and are currently working on the **De Havilland Vampire**.

We have the basis of the history but are struggling to find any useful information about the training of RAN pilots on this aircraft. For example, how many hours would a Sea Fury pilot converting to a Vampire need to do with an instructor before going solo? How many hours (total) did Sea Fury pilots need to do in the Vampires to get Vampire endorsement? Was the Vampire helpful in converting to the DH Sea Venom? What are the notable/important things and differences that you were able to learn from flying the Vampire trainers? Did you fly the T-34 and the ex-RN T.22 and what were the differences?

We'd also love to hear from anyone who worked on these aircraft: were they easy to maintain? What was good about them and what was not? What particular maintenance problems were common?

We'd also covet any Vampire era photos you might have tucked away in a box, album or flying log – especially if it has some details about where it was taken or when, and the names of people in it.

Simply email the Editor [here](#) and let him know if you have anything. ✈

Venom On The Move

We try to keep an eye on where our surviving FAA aircraft go, although it isn't easy particularly if they are in private hands.

A few months ago we reported that the collection in the Classic Jets Fighter Museum at Parafield SA was being sold off, including **Venom WZ939** – beautifully restored to static display status.



We still don't know who has bought her, but we know that she was placed on a low-loader in mid September 2019 and carted off to her new home, wherever that is. Perhaps any reader with more information can help us out? (Image: David Rasmus). ✈

Can You Help?



NSW member **John Wakefield** is assisting in the building of an ultra-light BD5 aircraft. The project started in 1975 and is one of many such aircraft builds not completed.

Some readers will remember the aircraft from the opening scene of the James Bond movie "Octopussy", although that was jet-powered and apparently capable of outrunning a SAM. If you have time on your hands you can watch that clip [here](#).

Anyway, John tells us the type of construction is with flush pop-rivets and pro-seal bonding. The proposed engine is a Norton Rotary 85HP driving a composite pusher prop.

John is interested in making contact with any other BD5 builders (aircraft pictured above). He can be contacted [here](#). ✈

The Exploding Pie Oven

For some reason I also remembered another incident involving an exploding pie oven in the hangar or aft cross passage of HMAS X when I was working up the Flight. A boffin was using the pie oven to heat up the first Australian-produced Close In Weapon System (CWIS) ammunition (ie non DU). Heating was required for environmental trials...the idea being heat the ammo up then run it through the weapon to see if all was OK. I had a look at the oven and saw that there was only one thermostat and one temperature gauge and contained maybe 20 to 30 rounds of 20mm ammo (at a guess).

The Flight was doing spreading and stowing drills and was therefore quite close by. I went and saw the CO on bridge and said in my humble opinion this was not a good idea. He told me to bummer off as the boffin knew what he was doing and he (the CO) was busy-couldn't I see that?

A couple of hours later the oven exploded due to some of the ammo cooking off. Shrapnel etc was produced. We put the fire out. No one hurt which is surprising.

My notable achievement was to finally use fully, right to the bitter end, one of those huge CO2 extinguishers that I had been lugging around flight decks forever but never used in anger. After extinguishing the fire the Chief Stoker admonished me about my profligate use of the extinguisher demanding to know if I, as a typical f-ing birdie, had any idea how difficult it was to get the item recharged through the dockyard. And he was quite right to ask as I had no idea at all. (Name withheld by request)

You can see other little stories/anecdotes on our website [here](#). Any contributions welcome.

Tracker Reunion A Great Success

Word on the grapevine is that the Tracker Reunion held at Albion Park on 23/24 September was a great success.

The reunion was organised by **Bruce Saville** and was held at HARS, based at Albion Park airport in the Illawarra.

No less than 75 ex-Tracker maintainers and aircrew attended, which was a great turn out.

The star of the show, of course, was Tracker 833, recently liberated from the defunct Navy Historic Flight by the Historic

Aircraft Restoration Society. After purchase it was placed in Air Affairs hangarage where a team led by HARS Engineer Bill Smith brought it to airworthy standard. During the reunion it did engine start, run ups, wing unfold, taxi and three full circuits. Wonderful to see!

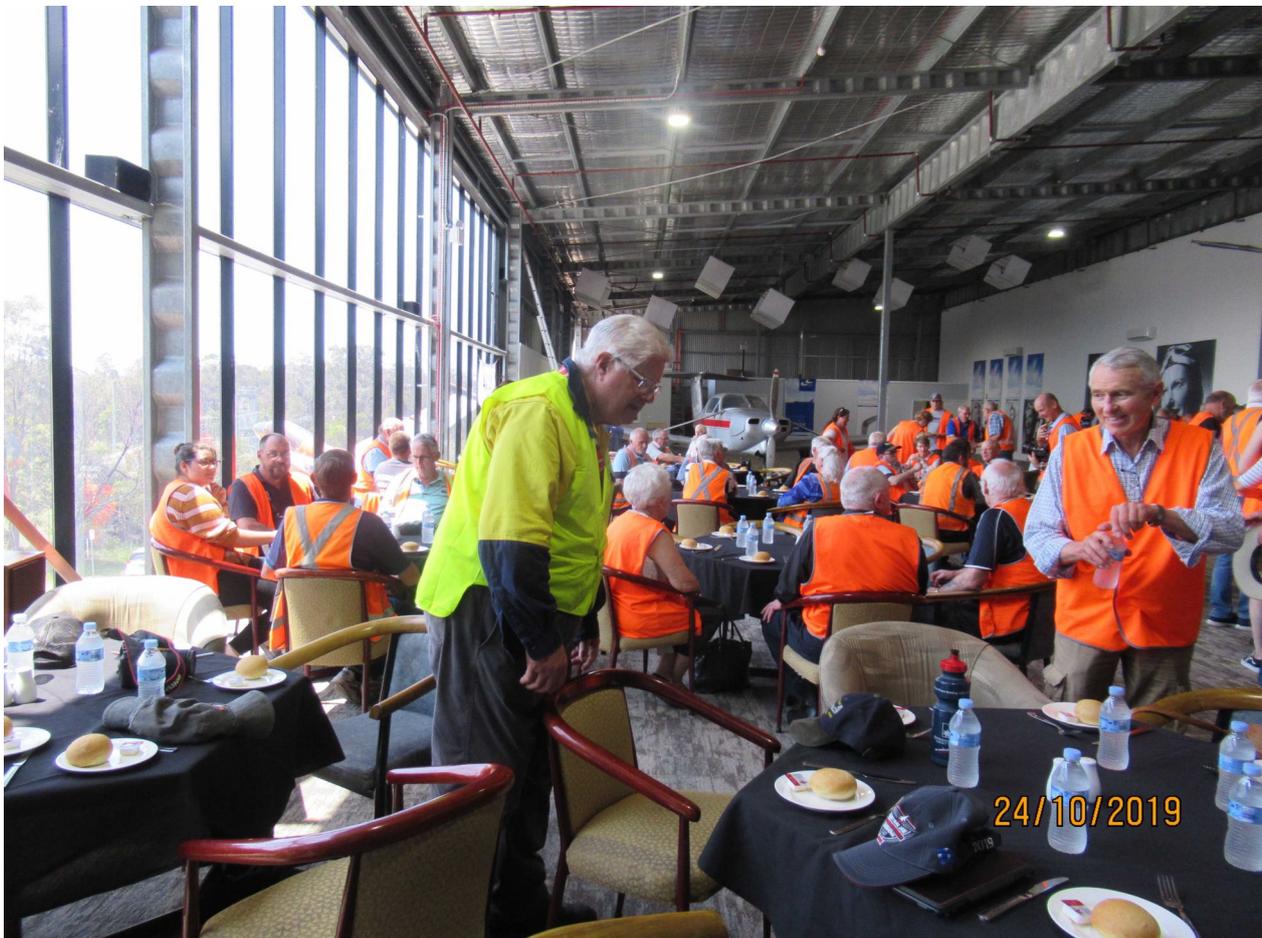
If anyone has photos, could they share them with the [webmaster](#), so a good article can be placed on the FAAAA website? In the meantime, you can see the ABC regional report on the reunion [here](#). ✈



Above: Tracker Reunion Arrivals



Left: The team who restored and flew Grumman Tracker 844 to the HARS museum. L-R: Steve McMahon, Terry Hetherington, Harry Hollaway, Keith Boundy and Owen Nicholls. (ABC Illawarra News, Jessica Clifford)



Some of the Tracker Reunion Delegates (HARS)