



Sixty-six years ago this month the first three Bristol Sycamore Helicopters took to our skies. They were not graceful craft with their pod fuselage, spindly legs and drooping tail. Nor were they easy to fly, being variously described as underpowered and cantankerous. But they introduced a vital new capability into the Fleet and laid the foundations for today's rotary wing operations.

In the 40's and 50's, Australia bought British. The carriers Sydney and Melbourne were rolled out of British shipyards, and the Hawker Sea Fury, De Havilland Sea Venom and Fairy Firefly and Gannet were the product of a booming British aerospace industry. It seemed only natural that our first helicopters should come from the same source. Fortunately, the Bristol Aeroplane Company had been working on an all-new helicopter from the end of WW2, which closely matched the RAN's requirements. It featured a five-seat capacity, a hydraulic rescue winch, folding blades, a rotor brake and a hydronalium alloy construction that was resistant to sea water corrosion. With a top speed of 110 knots and a range of over 250 miles it was well suited to the role the Navy had in mind.

The first three Sycamores arrived on HMAS Vengeance on 11 March 1953, and within two weeks had conducted their first rescue – an injured lighthouse keeper from Point Perpendicular. Less than two years later they saved over 100 people during the NSW floods, capturing the imagination not only of the grateful citizens of the region, but of the Nation as a whole.



The RAN bought a total of 13 Sycamores, spread over a period of 10 years. Eight of the thirteen were lost to accidents, and although there were injuries, no aircrew ever lost their lives to one.

By modern standards the Sycamores were rudimentary – for example, there was just one collective lever (see page 5)



The Fairey Gannet A/S 1 aircraft was introduced into the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Fleet Air Arm (FAA) in 1955. When embarked in the newly acquired HMAS Melbourne, Australia's Naval Air Anti-Submarine power during the fifties and sixties was the most modern and technically advanced in the whole of South East Asia.

Not a 'glamour' aircraft by any stretch of the imagination, the Fairey Gannet was perhaps one of the most interesting at that time. Its unique engine arrangement, mission profile and capability, and large size and beautiful inverted gull wing still attract admiration and attention from aviation aficionados and enthusiasts alike. A twin turbo-propeller aircraft; it was fitted with an Armstrong-Siddeley Double Mamba turbine engine, driving the contra-rotating propellers via a central shaft and gear box, which in turn was lubricated by engine oil from a single oil supply tank. Herein lay one of the two stings in the tail of the Gannet upon which I shall enlarge a little later.

I seemed destined to set off a string of 'firsts' when, in 1953, having been selected for National Service Training, our course would be the first to undergo Flying Training, and I was selected in this first training group to be trained on Tiger Moths to Private Pilot License standard. Upon completion of NST I decided to join the RAN Fleet Air Arm and continue training to Wings standard. Upon graduation, I was awarded the Weapons trophy and the Goble Trophy for the Most Proficient Pilot on course. Having been trained in the Tiger Moth, followed by Wirraway, Firefly Mk V1 and Sea Fury FB11 aircraft, the shock and awe upon being confronted by the increasing size and complexity of each succeeding model was difficult to overcome. However, the sheer bulk of the Gannet was something to behold when standing next to it trying to work out how to gain entry to the cockpit!

It had a crew of three, pilot in front of course, Observer (Navigator/Tactical operator) in the center cockpit, and Radio Operator in the rear cockpit – facing rearwards. The fuselage was a huge, slab-sided affair with the cockpit some ten feet above the ground. Entry was by means of a three-step ladder, which

was lowered and raised by hand, followed by a series of indented foot/handholds ascending in a large diamond pattern. When commencing training on this aircraft the very first lesson was to establish which foot to place in the lowest step in order to ascend successfully into the required cockpit! Start with the wrong foot and one could easily find oneself led into the wrong cockpit. One could only undo this error by descending and re-commencing with the correct foot!

I was very fortunate in that my Flight Instructor, Lieut. Herbie Becker, was an excellent instructor who knew the aircraft inside out and was able to pass this knowledge on to me. I am sure that had it not been for him I would almost certainly not have had the in-depth understanding of the Flight Fine Pitch Stop system in the Gannet which stood me in such good stead later; knowledge which went a long way towards saving my life and those of my crew.

When embarked, the Gannet aircraft routinely averaged sortie times of around 3-4 hours. Anti-Submarine equipment was not much more than the MK1 Eyeball! A basic radar (ASV19B), a mix of mainly non-directional and a small number of directional sonobuoys, and a small number of hand launched smoke markers completed the A/S detection kit. It was also possible to carry two homing torpedoes, a few depth charges or a small number of 250 lb. bombs either in the bomb bay or on wing racks, and occasionally 60lb rockets. That completed the ASW capability.

Engine failures

Standard operating procedure called for normal cruise configuration to be on single engine in order to conserve fuel. Anti-submarine search operations were routinely below 1500 feet in all weather, day and night. The single-engine cruise protocols called for the operating engine to be swapped hourly in order to even out the running hours. Operations were normal for the first year or two utilizing the above-mentioned protocols. However, it was not long before aircraft began suffering engine failures at a disturbing frequency, almost always pre-

ceded by a rapid loss in oil pressure. This resulted in an increase in single engine deck landings, something to which pilots did not look forward, particularly in heavy seas and/or bad weather. Eventually Fairey Aviation discovered that the prolonged single engine cruising was causing 'Brinelling', or pitting, of the propeller bearings in the feathered propeller. This in turn was causing metal particles to be distributed through the oil into both engines and propellers due to the single oil supply tank ... the first of the two stings in the Gannet tail!

The quick fix was to change the single engine cruise protocol to ensure equal distribution of the time in the feathered position; rotating the feathered engine slightly every ten minutes, and changing operating engines every 30 minutes. All this had to be accomplished while possibly actively tracking a submarine, often at 300 feet on a pitch-black night and possibly in bad weather – and no co-pilot to assist! There were many single engine landings, both day and night on board Melbourne, caused almost exclusively by this problem. This was worrying enough without the knowledge in the back of the pilot's mind that the pieces of metal in the joint oil supply could result in the second engine failing at any time! Many times the pilots missed the wires due to float, deck movement or both – resulting in a BOLTER. However, on 6 June 1958, on completion of a night flare dropping exercise, I again experienced an engine failure – which resulted in a dreaded night BOLTER followed by a successful recovery. Another 'first'.



Landing on USS Phillipine Sea May 1958

Night BOLTER

It was a very warm night in South East Asia and the sea was relatively flat with only about 10 knots of wind. Having suffered what was now a routine engine failure, I elected to perform a straight in landing. This was probably an error in that it caused difficulties in attaining and holding the correct approach speed, such that the aircraft was approximately 5 knots fast over the round-down and floated over all the arrestor wires. I immediately applied full power to the operating engine and raised the

undercarriage but was unable to climb away. The aircraft settled towards the water but held altitude just above the surface in the ground effect. The altimeter was reading zero, and the needle on the Radar Altimeter, calibrated in 10 foot increments, was hovering just above zero – but not even half way to the 10 foot marker. As the aircraft passed down the port side of the Rescue Destroyer stationed on the Starboard Bow of the Carrier, the Port Running Light on the bridge was above the eye level of the crew in the Gannet. After what seemed an eternity, the Radar Altimeter began reading a healthy 50 feet above the water, and raising the flaps was commenced in stages. A very wide, climbing circuit was established, levelling at 1,000 feet down-wind. From there, a normal single-engine landing was completed, followed by several medicinal rums in the sick bay afterwards! This was the first and only successful night bolter and recovery ever in either the RAN or RN. I believe it remains so to this day. My crew comprised **Lieut. Evans** (Observer) and **Obs. 1 Hancox** (Tel).

Sting in the tail

Getting back to the Gannet peculiarities, the second sting in its tail – which caused many accidents and injuries, including death – was a little thing called the Flight Fine Pitch Stop. Essentially, this was a pin which prevented each propeller from moving into the fully fine position when the throttles were retarded as for landing, unless the landing gear was down and

locked. This stop was actuated (inserted) by the landing gear coming up, and removed by it on lowering for landing. When the propellers were allowed the full movement into the full fine position, they effectively presented two solid disks to the air-flow, causing enormous drag and potential for uncontrollable loss of altitude. Of course, this was of little concern when at altitude or when within inches of the ground in the normal landing with the gear down. However, in the single engine configuration, this drag was not at all desirable – so there were two Flight Fine Pitch Stop Override

(FFPSO) switches in the cockpit with which the withdrawal of these pins (one on each propeller) was prevented, either individually or together when the landing gear was lowered. Of course, when attempting a single engine landing, the lack of this drag in the final landing phase (assuming the pilot had remembered to make the FFPSO switches) could result in a float before touchdown. This was of no consequence when landing on a runway – but caused untold difficulties in the final phase of a deck landing! It was invariably this, in association with possible deck movement, which caused the aircraft to float over the wires and BOLTER!



Gannet XA330 was lost in February of 1961 when the pilot allegedly lowered the undercarriage during a single engine landing, without selecting the Flight Fine Pitch Stop on for the live engine.

The ability of the Gannet to fly around at low level on one engine with hook down, bomb-bay doors open and radome lowered made the aircraft a great crowd pleaser at flying displays. This act was sometimes varied by turning down wind at the end of the runway after the low fly-past, closing the bomb-bay doors, raising the hook and radome while in the turn, and then lowering the undercarriage to complete a single engine landing as a finale. This always impressed the crowd. However, had the pilot not taken the precaution of selecting the FFPSO ON for the live engine, the lowering landing gear withdrew the FFPS – with the resulting uncontrollable drag and inevitable catastrophic crash! This occurred at NAS Nowra on one occasion, and resulted in very serious injury to the Gannet pilot. This accident resulted in such demonstrations being banned in the RAN.

One-wing salute

The odd double vertical folding arrangement for the wings made for quite small ground coverage, but a need for lots of headroom. It did, however, lend itself to inventive initiative at times. Admiral's inspection at NAS Nowra was always a painful day – and one to be dreaded. Very rare was the day when the inspecting Admiral was not displeased about something. On one particular occasion a flight of Gannets provided a short air display for the Admiral's benefit. Upon landing, the four taxiing Gannets passed in front of all the Divisions drawn up on the Hard Stand with the Admiral waiting for them to march past in salute. An astute Air Engineering Officer of the Gannet

Squadron had disabled the folding mechanism of the port wing in all the four aircraft prior to take-off. As the flight passed the Admiral in line astern formation, the leader ordered the flight to 'fold wings'. Lo and behold, all starboard wings folded as one in salute to the Admiral, and then spread again after passing the dais! The Admiral was so pleased that he gave the Air Station full marks for their inspection (so the story goes).

Notwithstanding all that has been said, the Gannet was a delight to fly, very light on the controls, very manoeuvrable, with excellent visibility from the very roomy cockpit. Like the albatross and the pelican, which look most ungainly when on the ground, the Gannet was in its element once it shook itself free of the ground and soared into the air. As described by one pilot 'it was like the fat lady at the barn dance, who you find surprisingly light on her feet, that is how it flew.'

Note: Originally published in December 2011 edition of the Naval Historical Review (all rights reserved), available [here](#). You can read all about the RAN's Gannets, including a pictorial history, [here](#). ✈

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If you have not yet paid for 2019, or you
are not sure, go to the last page in this
newsletter to find out how to proceed.**



We are looking to find the names of the folk of the 1st Contingent seen above, boarding a QANTAS jet. In particular, we would like the names of people labelled 6,7,8, 14, 15, 16 and 18.

So far we believe the others to be: 1 Darcy Phillips (KIA), 2 Kev French, 3 Terry Brooks, 4 Jeff McIntyre, 5 John Dawe, 9 Ray Jones, 10 Gordon Edgecombe 11 Foxy Cronin 12 Ray Godfrey, 13 Bruce Crawford 17 Pat Vickers (KIA). You can see a larger copy of the photo [here](#), where the faces are a bit clearer. Send your thoughts to the webmaster [here](#). ✈

Sycamore in the Skies (continued from page 1)

between the front seats for the pilots to share. Swapping from one seat to the other required a degree of control dexterity, as the two rotor pitch controls (cyclic and collective) had to be used with different hands from the left hand seat.

The high attrition over the life in Service (61.5%) might be seen as a measure of how reliable this aircraft was. If so, it would be doing it an injustice - noting the harsh environment in which they operated, the tasks expected of them, and the standard of technology available in the 40s and 50s, it did well.

The NSW Floods in 1955 demonstrated just how capable the Sycamore was: with the first aircraft flying nearly 200 miles to in gale force winds and low visibility to reach the affected area. Conditions were so bad that an IFR approach was required at its initial destination. Over the next few days it and other Sycamores rescued over 100 people, transported food and clothing to inaccessible areas, ferried rescue workers and carried out reconnaissance work.

One aircraft was lost in a particularly difficult rescue, where two men were trapped on a signal box in raging flood waters.

The two men managed to grab the rescue strop but lost their grip and fell to their deaths. The helicopter followed them into the water but fortunately the two crew members survived, being rescued some 5 km downstream. The pilot, LCDR Gordon McPhee, was airborne the next day to continue rescuing people.

We have just produced a Heritage piece on the Sycamore, featuring the story of our aircraft, a detailed history of each airframe and a 'History in Pictures' section. There's also a couple of essays on flying the Sycamore. As always we are keen to hear more – so if you maintained or flew this aircraft please send us your memories, stories and photos. All you have to do is click [here](#) to set up an email to the editor. ✈

[Read the Sycamore Story](#)

[See the History in Photos](#)

HARS Naval Heritage Flight Update



832 being loaded on board a flat-bed trailer at Albatross on 06 Feb 19, bound for Albion Park. She was duly reset upon her Radius Arms and Wheels some four hours later. 832 is currently fitted with a nose cone from 813 as her own was damaged whilst in the care of another custodian. She is to be refurbished to 'static' display standard.

By **Michael Hough AM**

HARS Navy Heritage Flight Project Leader. Feb19

This week, ending 24 Feb 19, has continued to be very busy for the newly activated HARS Navy Heritage Flight, during which our HARS volunteers (and friends) continue to work on moving or updating the recently acquired 9 airframes and associated stores off the operational HMAS Albatross base or settling them into their new locations at either HARS Albion Park or at HARS Parkes or at Air Affairs (at Albatross Aviation Technology Park).

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 has received its regular weekly visit by HARS volunteers to maintain its engineering readiness status
- 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 continuing to do an

impressive job in cleaning it up and re- attaching components which were being stored separately. It is proving a very popular addition to our HARS airframes on display and is attracting much interest from our visitors

- This week we started work on removing the spares from the final container of Wessex spares recently trucked to HARS Albion Park, and our volunteers are beginning the task of sorting through what is actually in storage!

Sea Venom

- The completely dismantled Sea Venom has now been fully being transported to HARS Albion Park- either in containers or as loose spares (e.g. wing spars)- where a team of enthusiastic HARS volunteers are unpacking and cleaning components as they are removed from e.g. their containers, and HARS has allocated a dedicated space in Hangar 3 for the rebuilding of the aircraft. The final status of the Sea Venom restoration is still unclear.





Sea Fury

- Sea Fury WG 630 airframe is temporarily in secure storage at AA, and our HARS volunteers this week have concentrated on removing the massive engine and propeller, and have successfully transported them by road to HARS Albion Park – where a dedicated space in Hangar 1 has been allocated for the Sea Fury display. In the meantime, our Sea Fury project manager and his team are focusing on obtaining RMS approvals to move the Sea Fury airframe by road to HARS Albion Park where it will be on public display in Hangar 1 whilst being assessed by our HARS engineering staff for developing an approved schedule for repair and restoration – hopefully back to airworthy

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 this week
- Subject to appropriate approvals being obtained e.g. from Defence, CASA and Warbirds Australia, Air Affairs is prepared to sponsor both the operation and maintenance of the B Model 'Hueys'. The current plan is that after required HARS remote site approvals have been finalized with e.g. CASA, Air Affairs will take full responsibility for the maintenance and operation of 1 flyable Huey acting at all times under HARS licences and accreditations.

Once again we have had a solid 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.

As the NHF Project leader, I restate that HARS is, in principle, committed to the future return of operational airframes back to the long-term home of Naval aviation at Nowra Hill. CAN YOU HELP?

We now welcome selected new volunteers, as well as sponsors/ supporters- to assist in this massive project of **Restoring, Preserving and in some cases Operating, These 9 Historic ex-FAA Airframes.**

Here is a list of some of the many ways you could assist our Navy Heritage Flight project, ways of helping which include but are not limited to:

- Providing 'in kind' sponsorship-for example we are about to start repainting and then preserving the Wessex with special coating oil, and this will cost up to approx. \$1500 per airframe to PURCHASE these supplies. Can anyone assist by donating the required paints and oils (we are happy to tell you what specifications we need)
- Helping us financially by committing to a regular sponsorship payment e.g. if 50 persons commit to a regular monthly payment of \$A20 / month each, we will receive approx. \$5K a year to assist our constant expenses. Here is a partial list of the current activities which we need to fund this way:-
 - Bills for transporting airframes -for example moving the two Wessex to either PARKES or ALBION PARK incurred a contractor bill of a total of \$A6200.
 - We estimate the RMS and escort costs for moving the Sea Fury by road from Albatross Aviation Technology Park to HARS Albion Park will be up to approx. \$1500.
- Have you got any spares or manuals or related equipment(s) from any of our 9 airframes? Will you loan them so we can copy them, or would you donate them with suitable acknowledgements?
- Can you assist us with maintaining our inventories of spares? (a perhaps non- glamorous but essential task)- as we have many pallets and containers of spares in storage at present
- Can you assist with maintaining certain specific parts of our social media presence either through our website or Facebook or similar?

IF YOU THINK YOU CAN ASSIST PLEASE EMAIL Michael Hough [here](#), or contact him through the HARS NHF Facebook page. ✈

Wall of Service Update

Order No 42 is now open with **LCDR K.J. MacKenzie** GLEX(P) as the first applicant. We need a total of 12 applications before the Order can be sent to the Foundry for manufacture, so don't leave Kev on his own!

Order No 41 is still being manufactured at the Foundry and is expected back some time in March. You can see the final list of names in it by reading page 2 of the last 'FlyBy' magazine [here](#).

You can find information on the Wall [here](#), including pricing and how to apply ✈



DFWA Updates its Objectives for 2019/20

The Defence Force Welfare Association is affiliated to a number of Ex-Service Organisations, one of which is the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia. Together, we have greater reach and influence than we would individually.

DFWA's Objectives – what is working on to achieve this year – are therefore close to our heart. They are all of interest to Veterans, irrespective of what colour uniform you wore, and are designed to make our lives easier or perhaps even help with the cost of living.

The revised list of Policy Objectives leading up to the 2019 Federal election are as follows. They are in no particular order of priority:

Promote a Military/Veterans Covenant

The Government has agreed to legislate a Veterans Covenant in recognition of the 'Unique Nature of Military Service' – see here: Prime Minister's Media Release – Recognising and Respecting our Veterans dated 27th October 2018 "Our Government will develop an Australian Veterans' Covenant that will be enacted in legislation so the nation can recognise the unique nature of military service and support veterans and their families...". For its part, the Labor Opposition has committed to legislate a Veterans Military Covenant should it be elected to office.

Objective: To have Veterans and their families recognised for their vital role and service to Australia by way of a Military/Veterans Covenant, and to enshrine in legislation the unique nature of military service and the support their families give to veterans.

Fair Indexation for all Military Superannuation Payments

Issue: CPI is a measure of inflation, not purchasing power. Superannuation schemes indexed to CPI only lose their purchasing power over time.

Objective: To have all components of military superannuation payments under DFRB, DFRDB and MSBS, including preserved funds and the reversionary pensions for partners of deceased military superannuation pensioners, indexed as provided for under the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Fair Indexation Act. This is to ensure the purchasing power of superannuation is maintained, being the intent of the original enabling legislation.

MSBS Access to Employer Benefits

Issue: MSBS 'preserved benefits' (employer contributions) are indexed to CPI. They cannot be accessed until preservation age (55). CPI is already recognised as an unfair index in itself, plus its returns are low compared to other superannuation funds.

Objective: To have all MSBS members under preservation age and no longer serving but with 'preserved benefits' be given the same opportunity provided to all Australians – i.e., the ability to access employer superannuation payments and to be able to roll over their full benefit into a complying superannuation fund of their choice.

Fair Indexation for all DFRDB recipients

Objective: The provisions of the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Fair Indexation Act to be extended to include all DFRDB superannuants under 55, especially to those in receipt of DFRDB invalidity superannuation pensions. This will ensure the purchasing power of their superannuation is maintained, being the intent of the original enabling legislation.

DFRDB Commutation

Objective: The immediate application of up-to-date life tables for calculating commutation and fortnightly payments for current and new DFRDB superannuants; and rectification of the financial injustices caused by the application of out-dated life tables to superannuants.

DFRDB Reversionary Benefits

Objective: The immediate redress of the reduction of all benefits, i.e. retirement pay, invalidity pay and reversionary pensions for widows, widowers and dependent children, which has resulted from the manner in which those benefits were indexed before 1 July 2014, and continue to be indexed for those aged under 55.

Redress Inadequacies of Veterans' Disability Compensation Payments -TPI/SRDP

Issue: The disability compensation for Australia's most disabled Totally & Permanently Incapacitated (TPI/SRDP) veterans has declined significantly in relative terms to that of Average Weekly Earnings. The 'Economic Loss' component of that eroded payment rests at less than 65% of Australia's gross minimum wage.

This decline in compensation for Australia's most disabled TPI/SRDP Veterans is a poor indictment of the Commonwealth's obligation to the enduring care for its Veterans.

Objective: That providing an adequate standard of living to Australia's most disabled veterans and their families be recognised as paramount to a Government's obligations to them. Benchmark the Above General Rate component to the tax-adjusted minimum wage as a community standard.

Support retention of a Department of Veterans Affairs

Issue: The Productivity Commission's inquiry into the system of compensation and rehabilitation for veterans released a draft report on 14 December 2018. Among its many recommendations, one advocated eliminating the Department of Veterans Affairs and transferring veterans' support functions

to the Department of Defence.

Objective: To support the retention of a specific Veterans' Department that provides effective and efficient legislated veterans support programs. To support DVA's ongoing Veterans' Centric Transformation and transition initiatives that are being currently implemented. They address the recognised major deficiencies in past services delivery.

DFWA welcomes the opportunity to work with DVA and the Productivity Commission to jointly identify needs and problems, and to find solutions for them.

You can read more on the DFWA website [here](#). ✈

FLEET AIR ARM ASSOCIATION MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

The NSW Division of the FAAAA has the following items for sale for collection or by Mail Order:



POSTAGE: ADD \$5.00

Please contact Denis Mulvihill [here](#), or text to 0412 510 150 with your request and address details. He will then get back to you with price and payment details (either EFT or by cheque)

BOARDING!

HMAS Adelaide Boarding Party, Persian Gulf 2004

The following story about a boarding party from HMAS Adelaide in the Gulf in 2004 was first published in the June 2007 edition of the Naval Historical Review. At the time, very little news about the RANs day to day activities was reported in the Australian media, apart from the occasional 'good news' story in Navy News. The remote location of Coalition naval forces in the Persian Gulf was the most likely reason.

A brief outline of this incident originally appeared in Brisbane's Courier-Mail newspaper on 26 January 2006, announcing awards of the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) to both LCDR Johnston and PO Keitley, for coolly defusing a situation that could have ballooned into a major international incident.

The Courier-Mail article was subsequently republished in the February 2006 edition of TOUCHDOWN (the Australian Navy Aviation Safety and Information Magazine), acknowledged as the basis of this NHS article, with the kind permission of its editor, LCDR Shane Firkin RAN. Additional details were obtained by later discussions with LCDR Johnston, for publication in NHS Review

This unusual incident developed from a routine boarding operation carried out by the guided missile frigate HMAS Adelaide (**Commander Bruce Victor** RAN) on patrol at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab river at the extreme head of the Gulf on 6 December 2004. Acting on directions from the (USN) naval force commander, Adelaide was sent to investigate a large roll on/roll off (Ro-Ro) cargo ship which had run aground on a sandbank and remained stuck there for an extended period. The boarding party was dispatched several miles distant from the ship in two Rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIB) (standard 7m and 12m sea boats carried in most RAN vessels, configured specially for carrying out boarding operations) to check the status of the vessel. This had been checked on sev-

eral occasions previously. Overhead observation and top cover of the operation was conducted by the ship's embarked Seahawk helicopter Adelaide's Flight Commander, **LCDR Tony Johnston**, was airborne as TACCO and Mission Commander, along with Pilot **Lieutenant Sam Dale** and Sensor operator (SENSO) **POA Andrew Watson**. Once the boarding party of twelve personnel and two interpreters led by **POCD Keitley** had embarked without incident on the vessel and the boats had laid off, the helicopter departed to conduct a surface surveillance mission in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG).

Sometime after the helicopter had departed, the boarding party sighted a small boat in the distance coming towards them at speed. The unidentified boat was soon followed by several others. These were assessed as belonging to the Iranian Republican Guard Navy (IRGCN) – a maverick organisation known to have carried out the detention of a similar Royal Navy boarding party earlier in the year.

While the boarding party went about their business, Adelaide's boats came under threat from the newcomers, and with only the coxswains remaining onboard, withdrew from the scene to avoid any escalation. At the height of the confrontation with the Iranians, as many as six IRGCN armed boats circled the stranded vessel, with their crews brandishing AK-47 rifles, assorted small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and rocket launchers. The Australian boarding party, armed only with light side arms, 9mm pistols and two shotguns, prepared to fend off the threatening boarders.

LCDR Johnston in the helicopter had by now completed his surface patrol and was returning to Adelaide. Once onboard, Johnston was informed of the developing situation by the



Navy RHIB (Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat) and boarding party in the Arabian Gulf (Image: Defence PR Photographic Collection)

Command Team and began making immediate preparations to relaunch. Upon returning, the aircraft had been released for programmed maintenance, which was quickly stopped. The flight maintainers set to, to return the helicopter to full service-ability, which they achieved in less than half an hour, enabling a rapid response to the unfolding crisis.

Johnston and his crew, now supplemented by Lieutenant John Flynn in the rear cabin, took up a watching position two miles to the west of the incident ship at 1000 feet. From this vantage point the aircraft could easily surveil the entire area and its approaches, keep clear of weapon envelopes and maintain good communications with all parties.

The boarding party was advised to maintain a low profile and stay out of sight as much as possible. It was with some relief that they realised that the Iranian gunboats could not get close enough to the merchantman in the shallow water. An attempt was made by some of the gunmen to board the ship via a commandeered cargo dhow, but this proved unsuccessful when the boat grounded on a sandbar some 65 yards short.

It was decided that it might be too risky to send the RHIBs back alongside to re-embark the boarding party, as the boats might be attacked, captured or sunk in any escalation, so they were ordered to return to the Adelaide. Indeed, the entire boarding party would run the risk of capture during a boat transfer back to the ship. Johnston decided to return to his ship refuel and to brief his command on the tight situation facing the recovery of the boarding party. PO Keitley later commented that the Iranians appeared to be testing the Australians' resolve by being highly aggressive at times, then mellowing again afterwards.

Decision to Recover

Meanwhile the tense situation had been relayed to other Allied forces in the area, to summon strong support in the event of outbreak of hostilities, or to prevent the capture of Adelaide's boarding party by the Iranians. Ultimately the requested support was not forthcoming, and in the event, LCDR Johnston decided to recover the entire boarding party by winching them off the merchantman, without risking the boats. A dummy pass was made at low level to observe the reactions of the Iranian boats. This action tended to confuse them, although one in particular took up a close-in position, possibly to threaten the Seahawk in the hover. 3

Having relayed his intentions to PO Keitley, Johnston came in again and hovered low over the bridge. He winched off seven of the boarding party and promptly flew them safely back to Adelaide, less than 10 minutes away. He took off again immediately to attempt a similar operation for the remainder of the boarding party. This time the Iranian gunboats appeared more alert and tense, and Johnston was forced to carry out a series of approaches to mask his real intentions. Finally he came down low to winch the remaining members of the boarding party from the upper deck. Subsequently, while the evolution was precisely conducted in a remarkably short period, Johnston records it appeared to take '... an extraordinarily long five minutes...' in the hover, and he swept away when PO Keitley was finally winched onboard, blindsiding the most aggressive of the Iranian boats by departing in the opposite direction to his earlier approach. Breathing a collective sigh of

relief, the remaining boarding party members were returned safely to Adelaide.

Commenting on the situation much later, LCDR Johnston maintains that the ship's previous mission-capability training, including the winching drills for all boarding parties, paid dividends when the crunch came in this unexpected incident. It was a measure of the dedication and professionalism of the entire ship's team that a successful conclusion was achieved in the face of increasing threats and adversity, without having to rely on external armed support, which may well have led to a need to 'fight it out', perhaps with ensuing casualties, loss of prestige, adverse propaganda, or the indignity of capture in the circumstances.

The citation for the award to Lieutenant Commander Anthony Johnston of the Distinguished Service Medal reads:

'For distinguished command and leadership in action as Mission Commander of HMAS Adelaide's Seahawk helicopter during Operation Catalyst.

'During December 2004, facing overwhelmingly superior and hostile forces and without the support of coalition aircraft or firepower, LCDR Johnston showed exemplary leadership, courage, composure and determination as Mission Commander and Scene of Action Commander to facilitate the safe extraction of HMAS Adelaide's boarding party from perilous and harmful circumstances.'

Note: In another well-publicised incident, a group of fifteen sailors from HMS Cornwall, operating in circumstances not dissimilar to those described above, were taken prisoner by the Iranians and held for about two weeks. In light of the similarities between that incident and the one described above, I invited LCDR Johnston to clarify the means by which helicopters, and more particularly RHIBs, fixed their positions in such potentially contentious waters. His reply:

'Re navigation. The Seahawk nav system is an integrated package that combines inertial x 2, Doppler and GPS. The boats have their own GPS. The ship has an excellent nav package itself.

In the case of 6Dec04, the ship easily established the exact location of the target vessel within Iraqi waters. They were only eight miles away, unable to close due to the shoal waters that had claimed the merchantman, as well as other duties precluding same. This check had occurred well prior to any boardings taking place.

We had all been operating in the area for almost 4 months and knew the region intimately. Weather and visibility on the day were excellent, allowing us to visually cross check our position with some well known local and coastal features. I also have radar coverage from a very watchful air controller onboard Adelaide to keep me honest. The bottom line here is that all of this is SOP and we all know where we are.

Clearly, I cannot speak for our 'friends', but you have to think that they have some sort of electronic navigation assistance. The simplest indication of where you are is whether you are North East or South West of the SAA channel as this is the

inter-national boundary (as can be seen on any chart). The ship was obviously South of that line – placing it in Iraqi waters without doubt.'

Originally published in *Touchdown Magazine*, Feb 2006. Reproduced with additional notes by the Australian Naval Institute, Feb 2019. ✈

Book Review

BRAVO ZULU

Honours and Awards
to Australian Naval People

Volume 1
1900-1974

Ian
Pfennigwerth



“Bravo Zulu” Volumes 1 & 2 by Ian Pfennigwerth.

Between 1900 and 2014 over 4,000 Australian naval people received honours and awards for their efforts, courage, sacrifice and service to the nation. Whether a George Cross for defusing mines during the World War II UK ‘Blitz’, an American Silver Star for flying helicopters into intense enemy fire in Vietnam, a Distinguished Service Medal for the Iraq War or a Conspicuous Service Medal for quietly ‘just getting the job done’, *Bravo Zulu* recounts the stories of the men and women recognised for their Royal Australian Navy service. Some give insights into running of our Navy; others recall inspiring feats of courage under fire or bravery in risking their lives in saving others, on and off duty.

Through the recipients’ stories, Volume 1 traces the formation and development of the RAN, and its fortunes from World War I to Vietnam and everything in between. There are plenty of stories to engage an aviator, some well-known, others not. The exploits of RAN aviators flying in Europe (and not just V.A.T. Smith) during World War II are recorded, as are the backgrounds to the awards for the splendid Korean War service by *Sydney* and her Air Group. ‘Hairy’ helicopter rescues are recounted, as are examples of superb flying of aircraft in difficulties. Nor were the maintainers and deck crews forgotten when awards were made. All are recorded in *Bravo Zulu*.

In the separate chapter on Vietnam the circumstances behind all the honours and awards to RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam personnel which could to be validated before the book went to print are included, as well as those presented to RAN aviators

Taken from *Slipstream*, March 1958

Cars of Distinction



The vehicle whose mangled corpse appears above has been distinguished not by years or honours, but by downright ill luck. When Sub Lieutenant Chalmers bought this trim Standard Cadet brand new in 1955, he can have had no premonition that fate was hovering over it with its largest sledge hammer.

All went well for 12 months until Sub Lieutenant Chalmers happened to be cruising down Nowra Hill minding his own business. He applied the brakes at a corner in accordance with the drill book; nothing happened and the car wrapped itself quietly but determinedly round a post. Dents and things were straightened out at immense cost and the indomitable Chalmers set off again.

Six months later, the car was being driven along the Braidwood road at the usual 30 m.p.h. when it inexplicably performed a slow roll to starboard. The time was 2359, the weather was clear and there was not a wallaby in sight. Sub Lieutenant Chalmers is still at a loss to explain how it all happened.

Almost a year went by before Nemesis struck again. A Sea Fury driven by a pilot keeping his hand in (someone unkindly remarked that he had heard a buzz about an increase in flying pay) executed a sharp turn to port when passing the Control Tower. Without a moments hesitation, the Fury singled out the Standard in the A.T.C. park, collected it neatly between its oleos and reparked it firmly against the Emergency Generator building. Quick thinking on the part of the Fury, since the car acted as an excellent buffer between the aircraft and the building and after all what is a £900 Standard beside a £30,000 Sea Fury? Sub Lieutenant Chalmers, who witnessed the whole thing from the Control Tower, could not see it this way, but everyone else agreed that the Fury made a wise decision.

The car is badly wounded with a twisted chassis and an engine four inches farther back than in ought to be. Nevertheless it is expected that it will be mended and come back for more. The Insurance Company, who must reckon that this is the poorest risk they ever took on, appear to be resigned to the fact that once more they will have to pay up.

who served with 9 Squadron RAAF. The significant part played by FAA personnel from *Melbourne* and HS817 in the rescue of survivors from USS *Frank E. Evans* is described in the final chapter. Away from the flight deck, *Bravo Zulu* explains the background to awards to FAA people involved in the introduction of new aircraft types into the RAN, for service in the carriers *Sydney*, *Vengeance* and *Melbourne* and in detached helicopter flights. In short, the book makes a worthwhile contribution to recording the history of RAN aviation.

The second Volume, with 882 pages, describes the development and activities of the RAN from 1975, with separate chapters devoted to the Navy’s role in the 1991 Gulf War, in the 1999-2000 UN East Timor peacekeeping operation, enforcement of UN sanctions on Iraq, the 2003 Iraq War the continuing service of naval people in Iraq and Afghanistan, ashore and afloat and, of course, border security operations in Australia. There are 80 aviation-related stories in *Bravo Zulu Volume 2* alone.

If you are interested, you can find prices and purchase details on our website [here](#).

Last Mystery Photo (Number 50)



Mystery Photo No.50 showed a resplendent gentleman in top hat and tails going up in the world on Melbourne's lift.

We asked readers to tell us:

- **who the resplendent gentleman was;**
- **what the occasion was;**
- **the date and place the image was taken** and, for bonus points
- **who the other two senior officers were.**

HMAS Melbourne had been in extended refit during 1959, but in September of that year she finally slipped moorings from Garden Island and, in company with VOYAGER and WARRAMUNGA, made her way south to work up with aircraft from Nowra. After a brief return to Sydney the ship headed south again for Port Melbourne and thence to New Zealand, making landfall off Milford Sound (where she proceeded seven miles into the Sound) (see photo left).

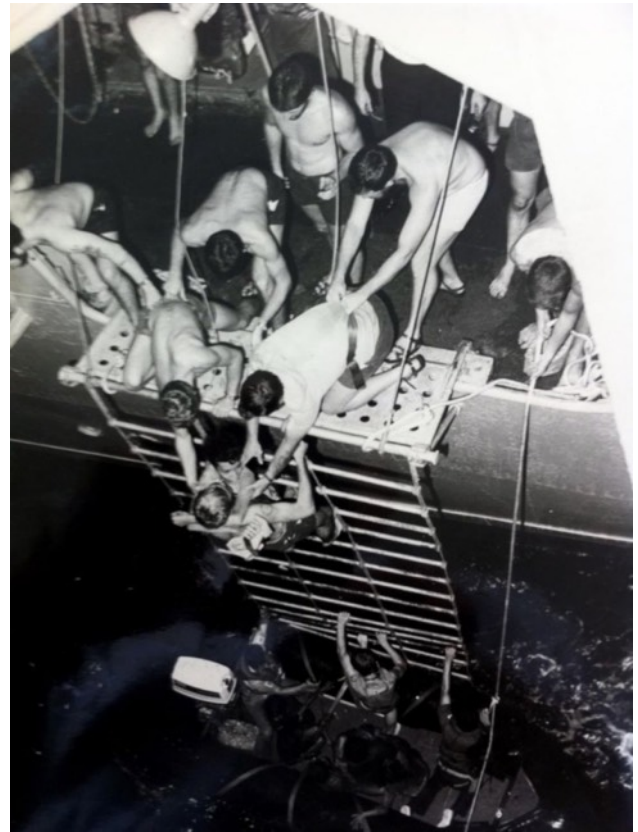


After a brief visit to Christchurch Melbourne made for Wellington, where the mystery photograph was taken on 19 November 1959.

The usual round of visits occurred including this one by the Governor General of New Zealand, His Excellency Viscount **Charles Lyttelton COBHAM** CGMG, who is shown in the top hat (see photo left).

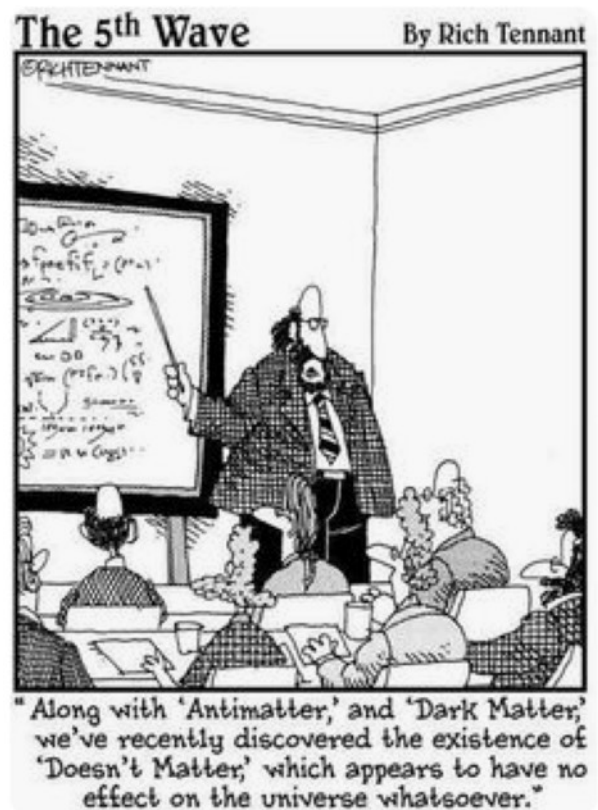
He was accompanied by **RADM G.G.O Gatacre**, Flag Officer Australian Fleet. The four-striper is **Captain T.K. Morrison**, the Commanding Officer of HMAS Melbourne. ✈

New Mystery Photo (Number 51)



Mystery Photo No.51 captured a dramatic moment aboard an RAN ship. We would like to know when the photograph was taken and where, and what was happening.

You can see a larger copy of the image [here](#), together with a link to let you easily submit your answer. ✈



Captain John Phillip Stevenson AM RAN Ret'd

24 August 1921 – 29 January 2019



John Stevenson entered the RAN as 13 year old Midshipman at the RAN College at Cerberus. During the second world war he served with the Royal Navy, including in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean sea. After being wounded in an air attack he served on *HMAS Shropshire* in the Pacific Theatre and was present for the Japanese surrender in September of 1945.

At the end of the war he was assigned to POW recovery duties around Nagasaki, where he saw first hand the devastating effects of the atomic bomb dropped on that city.

After the war Lieutenant Stevenson undertook specialist navigation and air direction courses, and served in RN ships in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean, including active service in the Malayan Emergency. He returned to Australia on *HMAS Sydney* in 1950 as a brand new Lieutenant Commander.

Promoted to A/Captain in July 1959, he sat on the Board of Inquiry for the Melbourne/ Voyager collision – an unfortunate irony considering the tragedy that was to befall him five years later.

Captain Stevenson assumed command of Melbourne in October 1968. On 3 June 1969 disaster struck when his ship collided with the *USS Frank E. Evans* in the early hours of the morning, with the loss of 74 lives.

A joint USN/RAN Board of Inquiry into the tragedy held Captain Stevenson partly responsible stating that, as Commanding Officer of Melbourne, he could have done more to prevent the collision from occurring; however, a subsequent RAN court-martial cleared him of any responsibility. The integrity of the initial Board of Inquiry has since been questioned, particularly as it was presided over by Rear Admiral Jerome King, USN, the officer in overall tactical command of *Evans* at the time of the collision. Stevenson's defence council, Gordon Samuels, QC, later Governor of New South Wales, said that he had "never seen a prosecution case so bereft of any possible proof of guilt."

Captain Stevenson subsequently resigned from the RAN, ending what had been 35-years of distinguished service. He went on to enjoy a successful career working for the Australian Gas Light (AGL) company while the story of his experience of the Melbourne/*Evans* tragedy was told by his wife, Joanne, in the books 'In the Wake' and 'No Case to Answer'.

He retired from private enterprise in 1987 and resided in the Southern Highlands of NSW until Joanne's death in 2012. In December of that year, Stevenson received an official apology from the Minister for Defence, the Hon Stephen Smith, MP, in which he states that Stevenson was not treated fairly by the government of the day and the Australian Navy following the events of 1969, and describes Stevenson as 'a distinguished naval officer who served his country with honour in peace and war'. Stevenson was appointed as a member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2018 Australia Day Honour's List. He passed away in Sydney on 29 January 2019 at the age of 98. ✪

NOTICE

A large proportion of our Members still have not paid their 2019 membership subscription, particularly in NSW Division.

If you have not yet paid please can you make this a priority? We desperately need every person to stick with us to keep the Association viable, and make newsletters such as this one an ongoing service to ex FAA members.

You can find payment details on the back page.

Around the Traps

817 SQUADRON ANZAC DAY REUNION

A reunion is being organised for all past and present members of 817 Squadron. It will be in the Canberra area over the period 25 (ANZAC Day) to 27 April 2019.

Details are as below. Please contact the organisers ASAP to express your interest in attending one or more of the featured events.

25th April - Anzac Day

Dawn Service (Personal Choice) Bungendore 0530 for 0600, or Australian War Memorial Canberra 0530 for 0600

Anzac Day Service - Bungendore War Memorial, Bungendore 0900 for 1045 March off

BBQ lunch and reunion begins at the Bungendore Bowling Club 1300.

Memorabilia, photos, Uckers, 2-up planned.

26th April

1900 for 1930 Formal Dinner Bungendore War Memorial Hall

Uniform or Jacket (medals - miniature)

Cost \$70.00 pp includes 2 course meal and drinks (partners most welcome)

27th April

Australian War Memorial visit / and or cricket match with BBQ at Bungendore

For booking details check 817 squadron FB site/events or

Email: shane.holness@madlinprojects.com.au or phone 0409 364 757.

Ex RN Sea King for Norwegians

A Sea King helicopter that has flown thousands of hours has been unveiled at its final resting spot.



Richard Wood, the British Ambassador for Norway, presents the Sea King to Bardufoss Air Force base.

The retired green Mk4 was officially presented to the Norwegians at a ceremony held at Bardufoss air base in mid February 2019.

The helicopter made its journey from HMS Sultan in Gosport to Norway via sea and road and will now act as a 'gate guardian' – a giant statue to welcome visitors to the base.

The Sea King operated in Norway for years as part of Exercise Clockwork, an annual exercise that is this year marking 50 years.

Over the decades, generations of naval aviators and engineers have learned how to maintain and operate helicopters so they can support Royal Marines on the ground.

To celebrate the significant milestone, Commando Helicopter Force donated the retired warbird and it was formally handed over in front of military and civilian dignitaries in a ceremony.

Attending the event, Richard Wood, the British ambassador for Norway, said: "Fifty years after Exercise Clockwork began, Norway remains the best place to conduct severe winter training.

"The reason we carry out this training is because we are committed to our Norway ally and the protection of NATO's Northern Flank.

"The Sea King being here is a reminder of the relationship between Norway and the UK. It will stand guard over the entrance of this air station. It represents our thanks for Norway's hospitality, comradeship and close relationship."

During the ceremony, wreaths were laid at a memorial opposite the Sea King at Bardufoss in a sign of remembrance. There was a parade and the Last Post was played. Then, those gathered moved to the Sea King for the formal handing over and speeches.

This Mk4 was delivered from Westland in 1985 and saw action in both Gulf War and the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s – it was hit by nine machine-gun rounds while heading for Sarajevo in September 1994, damaging the fuel tanks, tail and main rotor blade.

It remained part of the CHF fleet until 2016 when the Mk4s were retired in favour of the faster, more powerful and more advanced Merlins. (RN website article). ✈



Voyager Commemoration in Kings Park, Perth. At back L-R: Command Warrant Officer Jack Parnell, HMAS Arunta; Mrs Duggan (partially obscured); Commander Troy Duggan CO HMAS Arunta; AB (MUSN) Josh Abbott RANR; Mrs Abbott. Centre L-R: CHAP John Marshall RANR, Mrs Marshall; Retired PO (Communications Yoman) Front L-R (seated): Mrs Dot Casas, ex-CPO Kim Casas HMAS Voyager.

Where's the ASM(CT) for the Bursa Gang?



A couple of years ago we reported that efforts were underway to get appropriate recognition for aircrew of 723, 816 and 817 Squadrons who were directly involved in Operation Bursa. Essentially, the proposal was to ensure that qualifying Navy aircrew received the same entitlement as Army aviators who took over the role from 1989 – that is, entitlement to the Australian Service Medal (ASM (CT/SR))

The proposal was put together by **CDRE Brett Dowsing** and **CMDR Ted Wynberg**, who unfortunately passed away not long afterwards. Brett has been monitoring it ever since, and giving a hefty push to the wheel whenever it stalled.

There was early and widespread agreement to the proposal in principle, but the question of who exactly would qualify (and who would vet that) was an early sticking point. The eligibility

of Army personnel was relatively easy to determine, as they are/were force assigned to the relevant Operation (Bursa, Estes etc.) Navy, on the other hand, never formally force assigned anyone – if you were on the Squadron and required for the task, you did it!

We believe the ASM(CT) proposal is still somewhere between the legal areas of Honours and Awards and Prime Minister & Cabinet. To address the question of who would be eligible, it is proposed (but not yet accepted) that Navy would determine who was 'assigned' to Bursa, perhaps using DCOMFAA as the Delegate.

As part of the staffing process, a number of examples of 'Qualifying Aviators' were raised, using flying log book and other material to demonstrate eligibility. This would also establish the nature of evidence required for anyone else involved. We hear that H&A has agreed that this material meets the intent.

Assuming the qualifying criteria/process is fully endorsed, we will then need CDF's support (who agreed when he was Chief of Army), and then the Governor General to publish it in the Gazette.

The \$64K question is, of course, how long this will take. Regrettably we can't answer that question. These matters ALWAYS seem to take an inordinate amount of time and this

one is no exception. We will continue to nudge it and will, of course report on progress - and the outcome when we finally get to hear it. ✈

New Vietnam Book Needs Your Help



The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia is calling for help in compiling personal stories for a new publication in the making.

The Association would love to hear your stories, yarns, reflections, anecdotes and more to make it be the book they are aiming for. It will tell the history of the war under the working title of "Our Vietnam, Heroes, The People, The Stories & the facts"

Any stories funny or wry, sad or sombre, offering insights, untold tales and thoughts that reflect what the 50,000 Aussies who went to Vietnam went through.

Many histories are told through the memories of top brass but they are after a dinkum account that the spirit of Vietnam through those who served and fought there.

Send your stories to the Editor [here](#). Aim for up to 1000 words (about two A4 sides), and they will be forwarded to the publisher. Absolute cut off is the end of March 2019. ✈

Voyager Commemoration

Fifty people gathered at the Voyager Chair in Kings Park to mark the 55th anniversary of the collision off Jervis Bay which saw the loss of the Daring Class Destroyer, at the cost of 82 lives, following a collision with the aircraft carrier HMAS Melbourne during night flying exercises.

The group consisted of Voyager survivors, rescuers, relatives of those lost, former members of the ship's company, ESO members and members of the greater naval family.

The Fleet Air Arm contingent was led by the WA secretary, Keith Taylor, there was a strong presence of serving RAN members.

The very moving service was led by Chaplain John Marshall RANR, a very well received occasional address delivered by Commander Troy Duggan RAN, CO, HMAS Arunta.

The "Alert" "Last Post" and "Rouse" sounded by AB (MUSN) Josh Abbott RANR. The Naval Ode was recited by retired CPO Kim Casas, a Voyager survivor.

Wreaths were laid by the Hon **Captain Peter Tinley** AM MLA,

WA Minister for Veterans' Interests, **Commander Duggan** and **WO Parnell** RAN, **Mrs Kerry Forster**, representing DVA and relatives of those lost, including **Mrs Ethel Leipold** and **Mrs Barbra Head**, sisters of **LS Jack Sparrowhawk**, who was lost that night. The sisters have been the mainstay of the memorial service for many years.

Following the service, many remained behind to share fellowship and take a picnic lunch beneath the trees.

All tales told (some taller than the trees) were verified by the Chaplain. The wreaths and floral tributes were later collected and distributed to hospitals and aged care facilities.

David MacLean. Voyager Memorial Committee ✈

Letters To The Editor

Misguided Credit

I note that I have been credited with the answer to the Sycamores in Tasmania on p10 of February 'FlyBy'. The credit should have gone to my brother Graeme who provided the information. He is more of an aviation person than I, however I have provided more contributions to mystery photo answers etc. so no doubt that is where the confusion arose.

Neither of us served in the Navy but we retain an interest in FAA history as a result of our late father's service. If our contributions help to keep alive his memory with those who served with him (he retired in January 1978) then that is worthwhile.

Regards, **Dr. Richard Kenderdine**

Thanks Richard – point taken. Perhaps you can pass on our thanks to your brother for the Sycamore information. I see that he is not on our mailing list, but can easily be added if he (or you) simply sends his name, address and email to the Editor [here](#). ✈

The Tale of One Venom

In regard to your article "The Tale of Two Venoms" in last month's 'FlyBy', I have met Rich (Grinnell) and John (Hammons) in Brigham City Utah. They are rebuilding WZ944 to flying standard. We pass through there about four times a year when on our road trips. I was quizzed on what I know about the Venom. The last time I worked on one was about '64.

I was able to give them some info on the starter safety disk. In my opinion they have a hell of a task before them to get it flying. The airframe appears OK, but close inspection of the hydraulic and fuel hoses makes me wonder about the project. Different airworthy standards between the RAN FAA and US Experimental category don't make things easier.

I know that she will fly again and I hope to see her wheels up. When? Lord knows. I do believe she is in good hands at Ultimate Aviation. Not sure where it got its crappy paint job, though.

John (Mitch) Miller. NAMA 1962 on 724, out the gate '83. ✈

A Hot Start for 812

It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words but that may not be true in regard to the photograph of firemen dealing with a fire in Gannet 812 (XG796) [on our website Gannet 'Heritage' pages]. All the viewer can ascertain is that **LEUT John McAlister**, the Air Engineer Officer, is watching firemen extinguish a blaze in Gannet 812. What happened to Gannet 812? Why was it on fire?

It was Thursday 22nd August 1963 when MELBOURNE embarked three Gannets from 816 Squadron for a family day off Jervis Bay. The three pilots were **LCDR Arthur Payne**, Squadron CO, **LCDR Toz Dadswell**, Squadron Senior Pilot and **LEUT Jerry O'Day**. After completing the flying display the ship disembarked the Nowra families and proceeded to Sydney. The three aircraft remained onboard for the Sydney family day on Friday 23rd.

After embarking the families the ship sailed and once well clear of the Heads commenced the flying display. It was planned to fly three sorties of two aircraft. The aircraft carried four rockets which were fired when abeam of the ship and then each carried out a touch and go before landing on. The first sortie was flown by Payne and O'Day. The display worked well and the onlookers seemed suitably impressed.

Dadswell and O'Day were scheduled to carry out the second sortie. Aircraft were manned and the order given to start engines. Dadswell, who was in 812, attempted to start the port engine but suffered what he assumed was a cartridge misfire. Misfires were not unusual. Dadswell then turned his attention to starting the starboard engine.

Satisfied that the starboard engine was running correctly he raised his eyes from the instrument panel and saw **LEUT Gordon Turner**, his Observer, standing on the deck waving his arms wildly. This came as somewhat of a surprise to Dadswell as only moments earlier he had seen Turner strapping himself into the observer's cockpit behind him. A further surprise came as he saw of a large group of fire-suited men approaching the aircraft. They were indicating that he should shut down the engine.

Dadswell slammed shut the starboard HP Cock and to his horror a wall of flame surged over the cockpit. Now there is no sense in sitting in an aircraft that is on fire, especially when it has just been refueled, so Dadswell made a quick and dignified exit from the cockpit. The flight deck crew quickly had the



extinguished.

What was the cause of the fire which did considerable damage to the aircraft? The problem can be traced back to one small action. The Naval Airman who replaced the port cartridges after the first sortie did not properly secure the cap on top of the cartridge chamber so that when the cartridge fired it blew the heavy cap into the oil tank on top of the engine. The six gallons of oil which poured out of the tank was ignited when the starboard cartridge fired. While the starboard engine was running the flames were pushed under the aircraft and then curled up over the trailing edge of the mainplane. This caught the attention of LEUT Turner who made a hasty exit. When the starboard engine was shut down the flames blew back over the cockpit. It all happened very quickly and was quite exciting.

The damage to XG 796 was very extensive and when MELBOURNE returned to Sydney the aircraft was ferried to Bankstown and the aircraft re-built. On 10th January 1964 LEUT Peter Adams collected XG 796. However, on arrival at ALBATROSS he was unable to lower the undercarriage and had to do a wheels-up landing which meant the aircraft was out of action for a while longer. XG 796 again made the headlines when on 24th February 1966 it nose-dived over the side of the ship and came to a halt dangling on an arrester wire. Eventually it was cut free and plunged into a watery grave. The pilot on this occasion was LEUT Albie Fyfe and you can see images of it on our website page [here](#).

Cheers, **Toz Dadswell**.

By Ed. Thanks indeed to Toz for putting the record straight on this incident – we had thought it was simply a cartridge fire. The relevant caption (in the Gannet History in Pictures section of our website) has been amended.

Input such as this is vital to get our history right, so if you have any stories please don't waste any time sending them in. ✈

And a Final Word...



Don't forget there's an amazing Art Exhibition opening in Melbourne at the end of the month. It's by renowned artist John Downton, who has given so much of his time and talent to support the Fleet Air Arm Association. Details are:

Date: 1400 Saturday 23 to 1700 Sunday 31 March

Place: Malvern Artists Society Galleries, 1297 High Street, Malvern VIC.

Title: 'Spirit of Place – Searching For The Story'

Contact: Tony or John Lack 0419 237 424 or email [here](#). ✈

Subscription payment details for members:

NSW:

Renewal \$35.00 pa. (Note the bank account is different to last year. It is now with Greater Bank)

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 637 000

Account: 7168 19 388

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA NSW Division, PO Box 28, NOWRA 2541.

ACT:

New Subscription Rates: \$30.00 for those who have hardcopy Slipstream. \$20.00 for softcopy recipients.

(Joining fee for eligible new members has been reduced from \$15.00 to \$10.00)

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 032 719

Account: 374 093.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The President FAAAA Act Division, 41 Noarlunga Crescent, BONYTHON 2905.

VIC:

Renewal \$45.00 pa.

Account Name: Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia Inc

BSB: 083 961

Account: 3108 23774.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA VIC Division, PO Box 2179 RMH Post Office, PARKVILLE 3050.

TAS:

Renewal \$30.00 pa.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 037 013

Account: 13 3119.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA TAS Division, 7 Danbury Drive, LEGANA 7277.

SA:

Renewal \$45.00 pa.

Banking Details: **BSB:** 065 118 **Account:** 009 05 668. **Refer-**

ence: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA SA Division, 460/1075 Grand Junction, HOPE VALLEY 5090.

QLD:

Renewal \$30.00 pa.

Account Name: FAA QLD Div.

BSB: 034 611

Account: 171 277.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAA QLD Divn, 37 Miles Street, CABOOLTURE 4510. Ensure you put your name on the back!

WA:

WA Division has declined to publish its payment details. If you have any queries please contact the Secretary (see box to the right).

Contact Your Secretary

You can make a payment as per the instructions on the left, but if you need to contact your Secretary you can do so using the links below.

[NSW – Terry Hetherington](#)

[ACT – George Sydney](#)

[VIC – Mal Smith](#)

[SA – Jan Akeroyd](#)

[TAS – Graham Nicholas](#)

[WA – Keith Taylor](#)

[QLD – John Stewart](#)