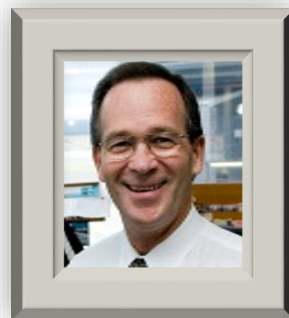


FLEET AIR ARM MUSEUM SLIPSTREAM REPORT September 2013



FUNCTIONS & EVENTS

The commissioning of 808 Squadron occurred on 11 July with the CO, Commander Charlie Stephenson and his staff hosting over 300 dignitaries and guests at their new facility on a site very close to where G Hangar (the Igloo) once stood. Many former Sea Fury and Sea Venom era personnel were in attendance to witness the pomp and ceremony of the occasion and an exhibition of Museum artefacts and a Sea Fury aircraft helped to rekindle memories.

Many guests for the 808 Commissioning took the opportunity to visit the Museum and I was amazed to greet one South Australian couple who were inspired to emigrate from the UK after the husband, an airframe mechanic on loan to 808 Squadron, paid-off from the Royal Navy.

Mr Keith Payne VC, OAM made his third visit to Nowra on 20 July to attend the Shoalhaven Rugby Club's 'Digger Day' football match organised by Nowra-Greenwell Point RSL. Keith was flown in by 723 Squadron's Bell 429 helicopter to deliver the match ball and to later witness the auction of game jumpers where over \$10,000 was raised for Keith's chosen charity 'Soldier On'.

Later in the month of July a naming ceremony was held to dedicate the 'Windy Geale Archive and Library'. Mrs Kit Geale and members of her family were our special guests, and the Commander Fleet Air Arm, Commodore Vince Di Pietro CSC, RAN spoke about Windy's passionate involvement with the Museum over many decades.

On Saturday 31st August the 65th Anniversary of HMAS *Albatross* was celebrated with a Freedom of Entry Parade through the streets of Nowra in the morning and the Anniversary Ball at the FAA Museum that evening. The ball committee, comprising members of all ranks of the ship's company, did a magnificent job of converting the Museum into a wonderful social venue and the Navy Band provided the music and entertainment. Great appreciation was expressed to Mr John Downton, an Associate Member of the NSW Division, for his generous donation of original artworks as lucky door prizes.

VISITORS AND DONATIONS

Without doubt the most significant, and yet bewildering donation, came into the Museum's possession on 31st July. Through a colleague who is president of the Society of WW1 Aero Historians, I was introduced to a gentleman from Queensland who had in his possession artefacts belonging to the highest-scoring Australian born fighter ace of any conflict.

Flight-Commander Robert Alexander Little DSO*, DSC**, Croix de Guerre RNAS sailed from his home town of Melbourne in June 1915 and underwent private flying training in London before being accepted into the RNAS on 14 January 1916. In a flying career spanning less than two and a half years, Little flew mainly on the Western Front in France and Belgium and amassed 47 confirmed aerial victories before being fatally shot down during a night sortie in May 1918.

A leather Gladstone bag was found on a rural garbage tip at Texas, Qld about 18 months ago and it was not until July this year that the Stanthorpe resident who had found the bag investigated its contents. He made the incredible discovery of Little's flying helmet, goggles, items of personal clothing, mementos and keepsakes. The helmet and clothing items were marked in Little's hand with his name and home address in Melbourne.

To add even further to the finder's amazement, he detected a solid object stitched into the peak of the leather helmet. Careful removal disclosed a British gold sovereign coin dated 1884 which had been encased in a folded photograph of his infant son Alec. Little had married Vera Flood in Dover in early 1917 and they made a pact that if he were not to return from battle, she and their child would migrate to Australia to live with Little's family in Melbourne.

The finder generously agreed to donate the entire collection to the FAA Museum and he, and many others have undertaken extensive research since to try to unravel the puzzle of how Little's possessions found their way from a remote aerodrome in northern France to a garbage tip in south-east Queensland. Many theories abound and if any reader can assist in our search it would be greatly appreciated.

R.A.N. HISTORIC FLIGHT PROGRESS

No Project Board meetings have been held since my last report so the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between HARS and the RAN remains unresolved.

HISTORY OF ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY GLIDING ASSOCIATION (RANGA)

There is very little in the official FAA or Navy records about RANGA. This is a deficiency that we are trying to put right. RANGA was established very soon after HMAS Albatross was commissioned as NAS and was one of the earliest flying organisations within the RANFAA. RANGA was special because it depended upon volunteers who had an enthusiasm for pure flying-the purest (so they say). The aim of the membership of RANGA, which was to fly, was sometimes a little different from the activity that took place on the other side of the airfield where different priorities and considerations occasionally prevailed.

Service people and civilians contributed to RANGA and the association was highly regarded in the wider fraternity of Australian gliding-and still is. Many people of all sorts were involved and an important achievement of the association was the provision of air acquaints to the cadet midshipmen of HMAS Creswell. How many were introduced by RANGA to an awareness of either or both military and civilian aviation that would otherwise have been beyond their reach? How many were given a 'taste' of flying and then having had their interest kindled went on to a life's work within aviation? The story seems to be important and something we ought to research and record.

The Oral History section of the Sea Power Centre has indicated (initial) interest in assisting with establishing the record of RANGA. All material provided will help the unit ask appropriate questions of the right people and will assist with establishing a proper record. If you know of a member of RANGA who might be able to contribute perhaps you could pass this request on to him or her for help with this project.

COMING EVENTS

By the time this issue of 'Slipstream' is published the Navy 'Iroquois' helicopter will have been remounted on its pole outside the Nowra Tourist Information Centre. Many organisations and individuals have generously contributed to its restoration including the NSW Division of the FAAA, BAE Systems Nowra site team, Greg Morris and colleagues from the RAN Historic Flight and Mr Garry King of Premier Motor Service Nowra.

To coincide with the Jervis Bay visit by forty foreign and RAN warships in preparation for the International Fleet Review and Navy's centenary celebrations, the Lady Denman Maritime Heritage Complex at Huskisson will launch a major exhibition in September to commemorate the event. As well as artefacts loaned from the FAA Museum, including the recently acquired Wardroom table from HMAS *Sydney I*, the display will include the Lady Denman's own collection of numerous *Sydney I* items.

Together with the Museum curators and other staff members I look forward to welcoming the Association delegates and members for the October Federal Council and Reunion.

I would also like to invite Association members who are attending the National Reunion in October to share their memorabilia with us. If you have photographs or any significant documents that we can scan and digitise while you are visiting Nowra, we will return them to you together with a disc copy before your departure.

Terry Hetherington

Manager

Fleet Air Arm Museum



Captain R. Little's gladstone bag with helmet, goggles, coin and photograph plus other items of clothing



Fleet Air Arm Museum Director Terry Hetherington displays the latest addition to the museums collection, a flying helmet, coin and photograph that belonged to the late Captain Robert A. Little DSO, DSC, RAAF

Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia

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