



The Kaman Super Seasprite promised a medium helicopter that would operate off both the RAN's new Anzac class frigates and the proposed Offshore Patrol Combatant. It would boast state of the art avionics, sensors and weapon systems integrated by a cutting edge Tactical Avionics technology, and an all new AFCS. Crewed by just two crew people, the Seasprite would be able to detect, classify and attack multiple targets and would boast one of the most potent anti-ship missile systems on the market.

But eleven years and a billion dollars later, the contact was cancelled with little to show for it but a plethora of reports and a few photographs in the Fleet Air Arm Museum.

Although the Seasprite never flew operationally it was, nevertheless, part of our history and the story of what went right and what went wrong is worth telling. You can read about it [here](#). ✈

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History-Making New Squadron Commissioned

A week or so ago we received an email from **CDRE Chris Smallhorn**, the Commander Fleet Air Arm, suggesting we might like to share a message he had recently sent to the FAA Force. Needless to say, we're delighted to do so!

Aside from the great news of eleven operational Ships' Flights – we think the first time the FAA has ever achieved that number – it included an announcement that the RAN has just commissioned a brand new Squadron. **822X Squadron** is the first in RAN History to be equipped solely with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), following successful trials on this type of aircraft. Our congratulations to COMFAA and to the Commanding Officer (Desig) of 822X, **Commander Mick Rainey**.

The Squadron will be equipped with the fixed-wing ScanEagle and rotary wing Schiebel S100. Both types are being flown for Operational Evaluation purposes so the RAN can develop its Concept of Operations (already in draft). The CONOPS will include Manned-Unmanned Teaming doctrine and will inform Project Sea 129 that will purchase Navy's future Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems (MTUAS) due to deliver in the 2022/23 timeframe.

The ScanEagle completed a nine-month deployment on HMAS Newcastle to the Middle East last year, and the S100 has recently completed a Ship UAS Operating Limit verification and validation trial aboard ADV Sycamore.

The body of COMFAA's message follows:

"Last Thursday the 8th MH60R Seahawk Flight joined HMAS Adelaide. This represents the delivery of our promise to government that we would achieve 11 Flights ready for embarkation by Jan 2019. You have now achieved this with all three

MRH90 Flights and all eight MH60R Flights now available for embarkation. These Flights are fully crewed; to the best of our knowledge we have as many personnel assigned to sea duty as a Force than at any time in our recorded history.

While you have achieved all this, next week we will commission 822X Squadron, the first UAS commissioned Squadron in Australia and one of only a few in the world. We will deploy a tailored Air Group aboard HMAS Adelaide for APEC Assist with both MRH90 (two of) and MH60R (one of) alongside Army Aviation, and earlier this year we excelled in arguably the most complex ASW exercise in the western world, Joint Warrior, with our NATO friends and allies. We transitioned 723 Sqn to the EC135 based training system and have graduated the first HATS course of our next generation Navy and Army aviators. The grass does not grow long beneath our feet, we drive on and we will continue to do so.

I wish to offer my congratulations to each and every one of you. None of these things happen without all elements that make Naval Aviation happen. Our project and sustainment experts, our HR and Training teams, financial support, Fleet support, industry, the 'Tross team, and of course the FAA to name just the major players – there are many more – have together achieved this outcome. You have collectively overcome some truly significant challenges, as is always the case, to make this happen.

Less than three years ago we were not going to achieve this milestone. The projection was that we may never establish MH60R Seahawk Flights 7 & 8 due to aircrew training throughput shortfalls that were trending to unrecoverable, HATS had some significant pressures. We have seen one of the highest separation rates of our aircrewman driven by strong employment opportunities in the civil EMS industry in 16/17; and while I would have preferred those aircrew remained with Navy I would not wish anyone else to be rescuing Australians than those men and women, they are of the best. We must continue to strive to retain every member of our team as our Navy fills its numbers by making our place the best place to work and where the best continue to prosper. There were many other barriers and we still have many, but as is so very much the spirit and culture of the FAA and our wider support agencies, you grouped together and found the best, and at times truly innovative ways, to solve each challenge as it arose.

Please accept my thanks for your hard graft day-to-day, your intellectual and values-based approach to solving problems as they arise, and your deep and clear dedication to our integrated warfare outcomes, always safely. Take a moment to reflect on the enormity of this effort – the FAA is re-capitalised and we are offering a sustained lethal capability to our Fleet Commander and our Government – that's our job and we do it well.

BZ – COMFAA Sends."



Far Left. The Boeing ScanEagle, designed for long endurance surveillance operations at sea. Left: the shorter range Schiebel S100 has a higher payload and VTOL capability off any small deck.

822X SQUADRON COMMISSIONINGS AT ALBATROSS



In a spectacular ceremony 822X Squadron was commissioned on 25 October 2018 by the Chief of Navy, and orders were read to CO 822X (**CMDR Mick Rainey**) by the Fleet Commander. These are of course rare and special events, and 822X is the Nation's first commissioned UAV Squadron. This Squadron represents Navy's commitment to future technology and the developing nature of maritime aviation warfare, it is a recognition of our deepening expertise and world leading experience in Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems, it sends the strongest of messages that the combination of crewed and non-crewed air vehicles is the FAA's future, and most importantly it further builds the future lethal warfighting capabilities of our Navy.

Only two weeks ago we realised our 11 embarked Flights and today we add a Squadron to the Command. It is, by any measure, a magnificent show of professionalism and dedication that you have all achieved these extraordinary milestones in our history.

The Navy has been using remotely piloted vehicles almost since the FAA's formation in 1948; they are not new to us, but what we are doing with these aircraft is new. The joint integration and teaming with

other aircraft, ships, and land elements will continue with pace, and the payloads and technology that underpin these systems is moving fast. The X indicates the experimental and developmental nature of the Squadron's near term future. Working closely with the test and evaluation expertise of AMAFTU, supported by the dedicated team in CASG (NASPO and NAAS), 822X will be at the forefront of new technology. Agility, technical acumen, and innovative thinking will be cornerstones for 822X – the officers and sailors who have been serving in NUASU prior to its commissioning have already set this culture.

The Fleet Air Arm has not had five Squadrons since the days of the aircraft carrier, HMAS *Melbourne* - in 1984 the FAA were operating five Squadrons (723, 724, 816, 817, 851) however by the end of 1984 we had three following the decommissioning of 724 and 851 Squadrons; 805 Squadron had been retired in 1982. The FAA has taken enormous strides in these recent years. Each and every one of you I hope feels very proud for the part you have played – Navy is a team game and we are playing well.

To the Commissioning Commanding Officer and Crew of the Navy's 822X Squadron – congratulations and well done. COMFAA ✈

HMAS SYDNEY IN KOREA

THE FIREFLY OBSERVER

A.H. Gordon

Looking at my log book I find that the first sortie into North Korea was undertaken on 5 October 1951 and the final one was undertaken on 24 January 1952. A total of some 60 sorties adding up to 120 hours flying. As I recall, we were briefed and ready to go on a last sortie the day after, on 25 January, but representations were made to the chaplain, Father G.S. Lake. He had a direct line to the man who controls the weather and enormous snow storms suddenly precluded flying. We therefore departed for more congenial waters as fast as a light fleet carrier has been known to travel. There was an enormous amount of superstition amongst air crew in those days about the survival rate on the first and last sorties of a tour of operations and to have the last programmed sortie cancelled was a relief, to say the least.

There are several interesting facts about the use of carriers in interdiction and close air support, particularly in relation to the use of carriers around a peninsula. Before mentioning these, however, some points should be emphasised about the practical aspects of flying from the Sydney and the progress of operations.

The first thing which should be emphasised was the experience of the Sydney Carrier Air Group. From an old photograph I notice that 75% of the air crew had flown in World War Two and included three members who technically qualified for the title "ace", while most had completed at least one tour of combat operations. The remainder had undertaken their flying courses post-war. The Air Group, consisting of two squadrons from the 21st CAG (808 and 817) and one (805) from the 20th, had undergone intensive training in the UK and, from April to September 1951, specific training for its role in Korea. For the Firefly crews this meant an extension of their normal role from anti-submarine operations to bombardment spotting, dive bombing and close air support. The training we received from our indefatigable Carrier Borne Ground Liaison Officers (CBGLOs) was superb. Due to their efforts, the rapport which was achieved with the Australian Army and the skills in close air support on which the army relied so much were a part of Army/Navy relations for many years thereafter.

Earlier experiences with Rocket Assisted Take Off Gear (RATOG)

RATOG in the Air Group had not been such as to inspire the



A Fairey Firefly in Korea. The aircraft were on loan from the RN, hence the marking – but the "K" designated HMAS Sydney.

greatest confidence in it as a means of propelling one into the air. It was with a fair sense of relief that the catapult became the norm. I do not know how many readers have seen rocket assisted take-off, let alone sat in the aircraft as it took off in a shower of smoke and sparks, but it is not something to be repeated by the faint hearted.

Arriving in Yokosuka, we were privileged to receive a visit from an American general and an aviator who had been shot down over Korea several times, if memory serves me correctly. Their task was apparently to give us the "good oil" on what to expect. The feats of derring-do which were described, due no doubt to the difference in cultures, reduced the Air Group to tears – of laughter – at which the furious general burst out with the fact that it wasn't funny and "some of you guys ain't gonna be sittin' there next week", which so broke up the audience that the general had to leave.

The average Firefly sortie consisted of bombing a particular target, mostly rail bridges with 7-ton spans and then undertaking armed reconnaissance along the roads or railway between two points. There are two things that stick in my mind on the first trip – a young sub-lieutenant who had the misfortune to have one of his bombs hang up and the absolute refusal of the carrier to let him come back on board with it. Nobody wanted to know him and he eventually landed in Korea to get rid of it.

It soon became apparent that dive bombing in a Firefly was not a particularly accurate method of weapon delivery and the squadron reverted to the type of bombing it had spent a year perfecting, that is, operating at 50 feet in a similar method to dropping depth charges. From this developed the use of 37-second delay bombs and a dirty dart-in before they could get ready for you (hopefully) and away out of it. Having stirred them up, I can still hear the thick Scottish brogue of 25 Flight leader saying, "Och 25-3, will you go down and take a photograph?" Needless to say, we were 25-3 and had the pleasure of going down again into the ants' nest.

Some Machiavellian ploys can be worked with delay bombs. After we destroyed bridges during the day, the opposition were

dragooned to repair or jury rig them at night. Sprinkling the odd 12- or 24-hour delay in amongst the bombs gave him pause for thought in his repair program.

The trains operated at night and hid by day in the tunnels and I don't think that there is anything more satisfying than catching a train in a tunnel. The use of aircraft, each carrying two 1,000-pound bombs, and the excitement of flying up the railway cutting is rewarded when you see a continuous stream coming from inside the tunnel after the attack.

Operating against an enemy who did not have air superiority and where there was a distinct front line was at first an eerie experience. The total lack of movement by day in his area, as opposed to the almost criminal lack of precautions against air attack in our area, was most noticeable. This was vastly different in my case from experiences in Burma in the Second World War where a more fluid situation prevailed. Whole divisions used to move down from the Chinese border and not be detected and it was only with experience that one could detect and flush troops or find vehicles camouflaged in odd fields.

I have lunch with some old wartime comrades and you can see people depart in droves when the conversation gets around to "warries". I have therefore restricted my comments to small items of day-to-day activities, but what did it all mean?

First, it was a pleasure to operate in a professional permanent force, highly experienced and trained to the minute. After some of the bumbling that went on in World War II it was a relief to know exactly what you were doing. There is a lesson in this for governments in the nurturing of their professional forces and the reserves comprised of ex-regulars. The British Army found it necessary to bolster its troops with Class 2 reservists, that is those who had seen action in the Second World War. Our relieving carrier on station was manned by United States Marine Corps squadrons who were ex-Second World War reservists called up with no notice whatsoever.

I make the point therefore that time spent on training pays enormous dividends. The contrast between a professional fully trained unit and some of the Second World War units resulted in a greater return in operational efficiency and far fewer casualties.

I might make a point here for future historians. The official history of the Korean War makes mention of the doubts that existed in some quarters as to our efficiency because we made no extravagant claims on targets. As pointed out previously, some 75% of us had flown in the Second World War, where early in the piece "drawing a long bow" resulted in so much ridicule when it was proved that such claims were false that a very healthy scepticism prevailed later in the war. Consequently, claims were only made on what you saw. The "body-count" mentality did not prevail in the Air Group. These doubts as to our efficiency were apparently overcome by our Allies attributing some enormous number of enemy slain to us after one operation. The use of the body count as a yardstick of success in Asia is dangerous. I prefer the notation I found in my log that at one time all bridges in our area were out. No vehicular traffic could move and the enemy was confined to moving supplies by hand at night; a subject for a paper on its own in respect to Asia.

With other units of the fleet we were sent for a period in November 1951 to the east coast to act as a diversion and draw troops away from the front line. In this I believe we were entirely successful as large numbers of troops were moved in. My memories of the operation were enlivened by winning a bottle of champagne from the CBGLO for knocking off a gun position and fortifications on the end of the breakwater in the enclosed harbour at Hamnung. I was bombardment spotting for HMS Belfast and what neither Belfast nor the CBGLO realised was that inside the main harbour was a boat harbour exactly 400 yards along the gun target line. I therefore had a built-in device for amending the fall of shot. Incidentally, for collectors of trivia, the time of flight of the shells from the battleship New Jersey on one occasion when she was engaged in bombardment in the area was 87 seconds. The formula for the safety height was four by time squared. Taking 90 seconds as near enough to 87, some mental gymnastics worked out 32,000 feet as the safety height for the aircraft. Try that in a Firefly!

What lessons other than intensive training and the provision of modern equipment can we learn from our participation in the Korean War?

First, air superiority – in this case provided by our allies. Second, interdiction, carried out effectively and cheaply by carrier forces at far less cost in manpower and material than land based aircraft. Nothing I have seen has convinced me that there is any better use for airpower in land warfare than interdiction and close air support. The strategic bombing campaign in Europe was incredibly uneconomic and, in effect, unsuccessful. The interdiction before and after D-Day at Normandy and whilst the Allied armies moved across Europe contributed in no small measure to the success of that campaign. Without dwelling on another controversy, I am sure that political restraints imposed on the interdiction campaign in Vietnam contributed to the ability of the North Vietnamese to sustain their war effort.

To those who say that the air war in Vietnam could have been carried out by land-based aircraft alone, the answer is "yes", 99% of the time it could, at a much increased cost. Could Australia guarantee that in any future situation it could base its aircraft in friendly countries or use two divisions of troops to ensure the safety of an airfield, as in Vietnam?

I am not here to argue the strategic basis, but the lessons learnt from the use of the carrier in Korea in close air support of the army and interdiction are as valid today as they were 40 or 20 years ago and the tasks cannot be undertaken by land based aircraft in an island or peninsular campaign except at enormous cost.

This Essay was the text of a presentation given by A.H. Gordon to the inaugural Naval History Seminar at the Australian War Memorial in 1989. It is reproduced with the kind permission of the Authors of "Reflections on The Royal Australian Navy" by T.R. Frame, J.V.P. Goldrick and P.D. Jones. Kangaroo Press pp 291-295. ★

LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY PHOTO (Number 46)



Mystery Photo No.46 was actually two Mystery Photos, kindly sent to us by **Ian Gibson**. We wanted to know what the two images had in common and the approximate date they were taken.

Unsurprisingly, everyone who responded to the question said it was a pair of Trackers over Darwin, noting also that cyclone damage could be seen in the left-hand photo so it was taken in early '74. They surmised the second image was taken about '78.

A couple of people got the key connection, though – that the two aircraft in each picture are the same airframes, although they bear different side numbers.

The first image was indeed taken shortly after Cyclone Tracy. The S2Es were engaged in Operation Seawatch, which was surveillance of illegal fishing/immigration. By the beginning of December 1976 all but one of the RAN's entire Tracker fleet was back at Albatross, however, and on the night of 4th December were put to the torch by a disgruntled sailor. Of the 12 aircraft in the hangar only two were ever returned to flying status. These were re-badged from 849 to 840 and from 843 to 841.

A couple of years later LCDR Gibson was the OIC VS816 Detachment and having seen the first photo and realising the only two S2Es to survive the fire were the same aircraft, organised another formation practice to capture the second image. It was taken in 1979. You can see the full story [here](#). ✈

New Mystery Photo (No.47)

Mystery Photo No. 47 was kindly provided by Ron Marsh. It shows HMAS *Melbourne* in close formation with another vessel.

Can you tell us:

- What is the name of the ship in company?
- What is the event?
- What is the device circled in yellow on *Melbourne*, and what was it specifically used for?

You can see a larger photo [here](#), which also provides a means to send in your answer. ✈



Wall of Service Update

Order No. 40 is at the Foundry for manufacture. Order No. 41 is open for applications for plaques. We need a minimum of ten names before an Order can be raised with the Foundry. The current four applicants are:

LCDR Al Byrne	LCDR Anton Beauchamp
LSATW Robert H.G Ralph	LSATWL Robert W.G Ralph

More info on the Wall [here](#). ✈

† REST IN PEACE †

Since the last edition of 'FlyBy' we have become aware of the loss of **Robert Glendinning, James Ferguson and Ian McInnes**. You can read a little more of these sad events on our Obituary pages [here](#). ✈

Remember, if you are a FAAA member you can leave comments on any obituary to commemorate a mate, or add information or perhaps an anecdote by which they might be remembered. Use the link above.



Arm as a nucleus to start their fleet air arm up. So I volunteered, did a medical and went down to join HMS Glory, which was the depot ship at the time. It was an English carrier that was more or less in mothballs or dry dock and it was in dry dock, as a matter of fact and lived on there for about a week or so until the Sydney was ready to come out. That was in Plymouth. I went home on a weeks leave and shook hands with the missus and said, "I'll see you out there."

And she was quite happy to wait for you and she wanted a new life out in Australia too?

George Meacham recently died at his home in Nowra, at the age of 94.

He was born in the UK in 1923, the son of a railway worker. On leaving school at age 14 he worked as a storeman in a RAAF maintenance depot before volunteering to join the Navy just after the outbreak of war. He was enlisted into the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm, learning to be an engine mechanic. His first posting was to 816 Squadron on *HMS Dasher*, but just before joining the ship blew up in the Clyde from an internal explosion with heavy loss of life.

He served on Atlantic convoys aboard *HMS Tracker*, then a Russian convoy aboard *HMS Jason* before the ship ran aground in Scapa Flow. Following VE day George was sent to 822 Squadron which was working up for the Pacific War, but Japan surrendered before he saw action in that theatre.

On leaving the RN he worked in a maintenance unit, but the working conditions and life in the UK were difficult after the war and he and his young wife looked for an alternative. In 1947 he volunteered for the fledgling RAN Fleet Air Arm.

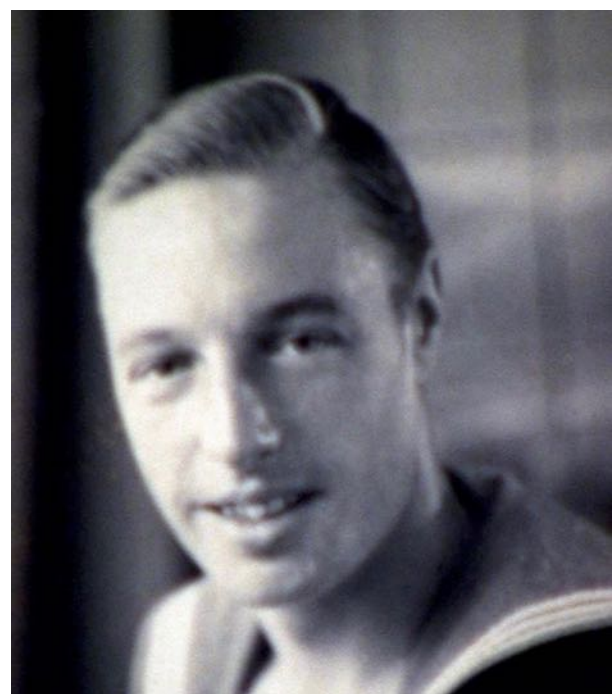
In the abridged transcript below, extracted from a 2003 interview for *The Australians At War Archive*, we pick up from the time he joined the RAN. His remarkable recall and frank manner provide a fascinating insight into the training of the day, the engines and aircraft that were his bread and butter, the ships he served on and the early days of living at HMAS Albatross.

"I'd say the work in England was shocking. It was staggered hours, everything was still rationed and it wasn't very pleasant at all. And they put an advert in the papers for ex-RAN Fleet Air Arm people to join the fleet arm, the Australian Fleet Air

She wanted a new life. She was only twenty-one and she was living with my folks, in-laws and then she went and lived with her own Mum and Dad in the end and as I say eventually she got a passage on HMS Cheshire, not HMS Cheshire, SS Cheshire, and she came out here. She got here, I got out here on the Sydney, arrived her in Sydney in '49, May '49, and she came out in the New Years Eve '49.

All right, I'll just ask you a couple of things before we move to Australia. You mentioned that it was really tough in England after the war, but when you were talking about actually living in England during the war you said that you didn't notice it that much, so are you saying that it was actually, life seemed harder after the war and tougher than during the war?

Absolutely. So many facilities had been wiped out. As I say half the generating systems were on half power and you



couldn't get any work. Well nearly all factories and things that relied on electrical power and stuff just couldn't work full time. They had to share it sort of thing. The power would go to this factory that day or that business that day and until they got things back on the ground and there was still petrol rationing and still food rationing, still clothes. I mean you couldn't go and buy any clothes then. You still had to have clothing coupons. It was hard but Pearl and I were young and let's face it, this was, I met Ken's brother, Pearl's brother Ken, he'd been out here with the Australian fleet, with the American fleet. He was with the *Victorious* out here with the Avengers and he reckoned Australia was a beautiful country.

What did he tell you about it?

Oh, he was, I think he had taken the Sydney Harbour Master's daughter out. He never got his leading rate. He was still a sailor all the time but he got around and met people and I think she came from Burwood, this girl and he reckoned it was a terrific country. He said, "if you go out there George, I'll think you'll enjoy yourself," sort of thing, so that was it, the deciding factor. I joined the Navy.



Above. Laden with new Sea Furys and Fireflies, HMAS Sydney departed from Devonport on 14Apr49 and turned south for her journey home. George Meacham would probably not have enjoyed the cramped conditions with 1600 souls on board, but would have appreciated the runs ashore in Aden, Fremantle and Melbourne.

So you went straight from Britain to Australia, was it the HMAS Sydney that you came [in]?

I came out on the Sydney. It was the maiden voyage of the Sydney.

It was the maiden voyage?

On the Sydney was the 20th Carrier Air Group and who finished up in Korea 'cause this was '49. I got into Albatross in May '49, which is down here. Went to work in the MT section at the time, just to fill in and eventually I started working on the aircraft, the Sea Furys and the Fireflies. They were all wrapped up in mothballs. They came out on the Sydney in a sort of silvery skin for protection.

Okay. We'll talk about the aircraft that you worked with in Sydney in more detail but did you go to Perth first?

Oh yeah. Sorry, we went to Fremantle first. We did the tour. Fremantle first and then round to Adelaide, Melbourne and

Sydney. I forgot that, yes, that was the actual dates I can't remember. I could if I looked the reference up.

But you just stopped there briefly?

Yeah, we stopped there. I thought Perth was absolutely fabulous. It was warm. I mean leaving England in March it was still snowing occasionally, and to get down there it was absolutely beautiful.

What was the city of Perth like in 1949? If you could call it a city?

Well I didn't see much of the city. I mean we spent most our time in Fremantle. We were only there for about a week so the Western Australian blokes could get off and go on leave. No, I didn't really see much of Perth but it looked, I mean it was a clean, nice, it was a beautiful city. There's no doubt about that but the Swan River was definitely an asset for the whole of the city. It's different now. I've been back since and there's skyscrapers and buildings here and building there. It's very hard to recall actually what Perth was like but like every city today it's not the same as it was like fifty years ago.

So you ended up landing in Sydney? That's where you disembarked?

Oh disembarked in Sydney, yeah. We called into Melbourne and let the Victorians off and Adelaide, the South Australians. They all went on leave and we were a scattered crew on the ship by the time we got to Sydney. And of course I left Sydney and went down to Albatross.

So what were your impressions of Sydney when you arrived?

I admit the Harbour Bridge was definitely a classic, no doubt about that, and of course no Opera House and hardly any skyscrapers. I mean Pitt Street and George Street were pretty low level round here. The Victoria Building was still there, been there a long time. I don't think the railway station has altered very much. Not from the outside. No, it – oh – of course there were trams running. That was a thing that amazed me. Those trams were really people movers, weren't they? Oh what do

they call [them]? The toast rack ones and the paper boys used to swing along the outside selling the papers. You wouldn't remember those days, would you? It was, yeah, it was an interesting city. I wouldn't say that it was clean but it was busy and noisy, no doubt about that, and yes, Sydney was okay. And of course leave there to go to a place like this, Albatross, well.

I was going to say how did that feel, after coming from Britain and having a lot of people around and it would have been really quiet around here?

It was a bit of a step back in time I think. It was all country down here. I mean Albatross itself consisted of, in my opinion, a mass of tin sheds. Because that's all they were - just long dormitories of tin sheds.

So this is what the Naval Base was in 1949?

This is what the Naval Base was. About the only tin sheds that are left now I think is the gymnasium. It's still standing but they were called the wind tunnels and we'd have about twenty blokes either side in the beds. You'd have your bed space, all the beds were stacked either side with an alleyway down the middle and a toilet at both ends. If you opened the doors and the wind blew a westerly, it would blow straight through. Yeah, the wind tunnels. And of course when I left the [Royal] Navy I'd been rated up to a Petty Officer status, an acting PO when I left the Navy, but when I joined the RAN I joined back as an OD, as an air mechanic first class.

In August I got rated up to Leading Hand on one day and to a Petty Officer confirmed the next one. So I changed my rig to a peak cap and brass buttons and etcetera; so I was quite dressed up when I met Pearl at the Woolloomooloo when she came in on the ship.

You'd already been here for nine months?

Yes.

So how did you cope for the nine months when you were out in [Nowra], it would have been fairly isolated country town?

Well it was an isolated country town and they didn't accept the Navy very much in those days, country people. They were a bit narrow minded, but eventually they did. We weren't allowed ashore. We were only allowed ashore occasionally to ten o'clock at night.

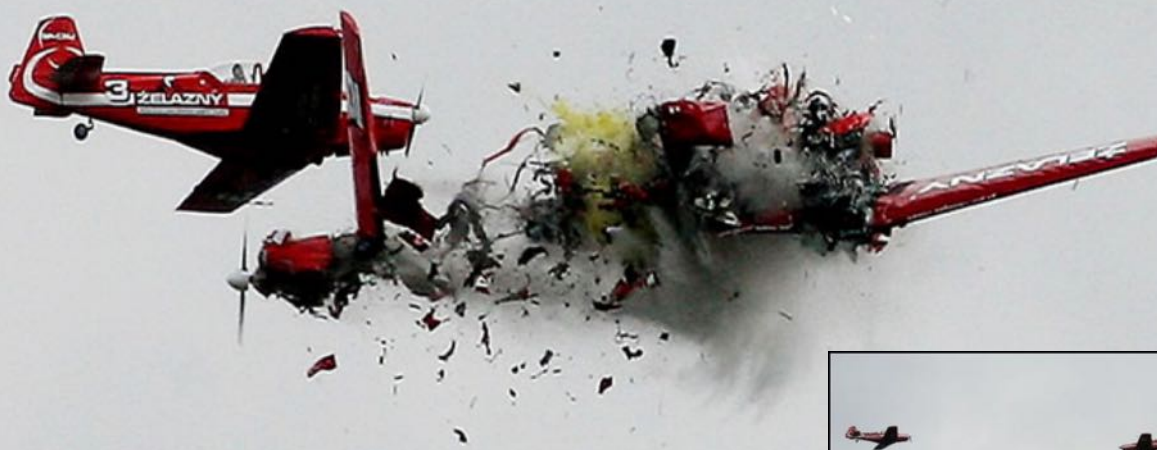
Where would you go?

It was a bit of a hole but we coped. We used to go hitch hiking round the place, down to Batemans Bay and Ulladulla and round there and hitch hike for a weekend and come back. That was when I got POs. I was allowed ashore then see all night if I wanted to.

Yeah the time passed and there was always plenty to do on board anyhow, and plenty of entertainment at the old cinema. [We] had occasional dances but yeah, there wasn't a hell of a lot to do. I eventually got a little flat down at Palmer's Beach at the... doesn't matter. It was a little holiday place down there and I had to pay rent on it to hold this flat over the holiday period till Pearl came out and I used to pay rent on it. It was only a one bedroom flat and I had to share the kitchen. I don't think even then Pearl could boil water. She wasn't much of a cook but I'm getting ahead of time. I paid rent on this flat to hold it, but never lived in it. I was still living on board and of course it was there when Pearl came out.

Photos of Yesteryear

Captured at the moment of impact, this image shows the total devastation of a high speed mid-air collision. The aircraft belonged to the Zelazny Aerobatics Team and the accident occurred on 02 September 2007, in Poland. The two pilots lost their lives in the horrific event.





Above. HMAS Albatross in 1950. Although the photograph makes it look spic and span, it was rough around the edges. The main runway (03/21) was not completed until after the CAG's arrival and even then was only just long enough to operate the Sea Furies. Accommodation was at a premium and most personnel were obliged to live in the caravan park that can be seen just to the north of the airfield. To those who had joined the RAN from the UK it must have seemed like another planet.

So you were all dressed up when you went to pick [her up]?

Yeah, when Pearl came. She'd seen me in my sailor's rig naturally, before I left, but she'd never seen me in a PO's rig. And a mate of mine, Les Cooper, he was a PO too, his wife came out on the same ship. So Pearl came out with somebody she knew in the end. When we came in on the Sydney the first time, people in Sydney asked for sailors to go and visit with them, stop with them and I picked a place in Rockdale to go to and they made me welcome and took me out and showed me around the place. And I said my wife was coming out and they said, "When's she coming out?" And I said, "This Christmas."

They said, "Well we're going away after Christmas. Your wife and I can stop here with us, in the house while we're away for the two weeks. While we're away she can stop at the house." Which was absolutely marvellous and that was at Rockdale and when Pearl came out we had somewhere to go before we came down to Albatross, down to here. And they were very kind, the sort of people they were in Sydney. They welcomed all the sailors – "Come to our place and we'll look after you while you're on holidays or on leave."

Would this sort of thing happen to people in Britain?

Would they, were the British do a similar sort of thing for the Australians?

I don't think so, no. They socialise, but among their own friends. They'd never welcome a stranger into the house, strange to say. But it's this lady said they were going away to Jervis Bay for their holidays for two weeks over Christmas, and the house is yours. And when we got there the fridge was stocked up and there were a couple of cans of beer and all that sort of thing - and it was just mind blowing really to think that people would do that, for complete strangers.

I mean they'd only met me once and they met the wife before they went on holidays and of course they came back and we were still there and we thanked them very much and Pearl had done all the washing and that. And she said, "Oh you needn't have done that,"

Pearl came down to the flat at JB [Jervis Bay], and after living in a modern house with flush toilets and bathrooms upstairs and same as what I'd been used to and she came down to a one bedroom flat with a dunny outside. Oh, it shook her.

The only pleasure she got I think was the fact that she could go down to Hyams Beach and sunbathe and swim all day because she had nothing to do while I was at Albatross, 'till I

came home at night and she'd the kitchen with Mary Cooper, as I say, the girl she came out with. And eventually it got a bit too much for Pearl. I mean some of the holiday makers would come down and they'd take her out and they'd go places but it, she was sort of closed in.

A bit of a lonely life?

Yeah. So we moved down to St Georges Basin, to Jervis Bay and shared a house with a PO electrician and his wife. They came from Yorkshire and had a couple of kids but it was a fairly big house but we still had the hole in the backyard with two planks on it and a shed round it. It was a bit smelly but we got used to it, and she taught Pearl to cook. By now she was a pretty good one. She was always cooking with a cigarette in her mouth but we all smoked in those days. We got on very well with Jack and his wife.

Then married quarters came up at Albatross and I put in for one. We moved into married quarters on the 13th, at the beginning of January in fifty-one. It was Flat 13 and Steve was born on February the 13th and they were a real palace, the married quarters. There were five ex-PTU huts. They bought in three flats, so there were fifteen families. There were three families to each hut, and we were on the end hut with a proper little kitchen and a little lounge with a fire in it, two bedrooms and a bathroom and a toilet, and it was a palace.

What was your work like at that, what were you doing at the Albatross at that time?

Back then I was a PO. I was working on getting the aircraft ready for the 20th CAG and 21st CAG to go to Korea.

Okay, let's talk about that in some detail. What kind of aircraft were you getting ready?

Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft. One had an eighteen cylinder Centaurus radial engine of which I spoke earlier on.

That was which?

The Sea Fury. It was the fastest single engine aircraft in the world at the time.

Was it?

It was nigh on the speed of sound and it was a terrific aircraft. It was just a fighter.

And you were fixing, looking after the engines?

No, we were taking the protective cover off them and cleaning them down and getting the engines up to scratch before flying them, getting them into working order because they'd been sort of stationary for quite a few months. And ran the engines and tested all the systems out and then handed them over, the actual aircraft to the squadron itself. That's how I was employed. That was after a couple of months in the MT section before I went to work on the aircraft.

The motor transport section. What would you do for them?

Oh, maintenance on the vehicles, got my driving license, Australian one and Navy one. Yeah, it was quite good. It was an interesting job but it was mechanics, so it entertained me but I wanted to get back on the aircraft and eventually I did.



Above: *The HMAS Albatross Commissioning Officers 1948*

Australia's first Royal Australian Naval Air Station was commissioned on August 31, 1948.

In April 1948, the name of the new station was approved by King George VI. The following month on May 8, 1948 a party of cars and trucks departed HMAS Penguin heading south to the deserted airfield.

The airfield had been vacant for the past two years and had suffered widespread vandalism, with doors torn off hinges, windows broken, fittings stripped and wash basins and toilet bowls broken.

Extensive refurbishment was required to make the station habitable and ready for the first aircraft to arrive the following year.

However, it wasn't until October 1949 that the 'patch' was established. The runways also needed much work. Although described as having a 'tarmac' surface, they were little more than compacted gravel and had a habit of breaking up, which had caused much consternation during WWII.

One of the major issues was a lack of electricity. Additionally, communication with the outside world was difficult, with only a single phone shared by all the staff.

Albatross became the Fleet Air Arm's main training establishment, thus a number of schools were set up. One of those was the Aircraft Handling School. As part of the school, a dummy deck was painted on concrete to replicate a flight deck.

All this and only seven months to prepare for the arrival of the 20th Carrier Air Group (CAG) in May 1949, which brought an extra 1000 people to the area, an increase in the local population of more than 10 per cent.

The provision of married quarters and accommodation generally posed a problem. Personnel found accommodation where they could at Huskisson, Shoalhaven Heads, Nowra and beyond. (*South Coast Register*)

Were you able to transfer your knowledge of aircraft engine to car engines that quickly?

Oh, car engines were simple weren't they in relation to an aircraft engine. No problem there at all. Anyhow as I say we went

to married quarters and then I got recommended for a mechanics course back in Arbroath, up in Scotland. Stephen was what, eight months old and we took passage on P&O Stratheden. Quite a few families were recommended for this course. Would be what, about half a dozen of us, complete with families, on this ship, back to England again. And of course, going back there with an eight-month old son was their heyday.

We got into London, Tilbury Docks, Boxing Day because we celebrated Christmas Day on board the ship and that's right, we got stopped in a gale in the Bay of Biscay with the ship and I thought that was going to roll over because she really, was in a foreign sea that was giving the motion of lifting the stern and twisting it over and twisting it back the other way. And I can remember Stephen in his cot in the cabin and we had an outside cabin with a porthole which was closed pretty quick and watching the dressing gown, which was hanging on the door, swinging like this across the doorway with the roll of the ship and my son was fascinated with this. I wasn't very happy. Anyway we survived that one.

You saw your parents when you got [there]?

Yeah, we back into Tilbury Docks and Pearl's Dad and my Dad met us and we went out to a place called Hounslow for the night, to stop the night before we caught the train back up to Kidderminster. And of course, went back home and Pearl stopped with my parents for about a week while I carried on up to Arbroath in Scotland and got accommodation for her up there and started the mechs course, and Stephen and Pearl came up by train a couple of weeks later.

We lived in an old fisherman's cottage. The walls were about two foot thick, made out of stone, a real old place it was - double story but we only had the bottom story, bottom half. It was a, yeah it was a bit damp inside and coal was still on ration even then because they were all coal fires and I don't know what Pearl did but she managed to get two hundredweight of coal every week off this coalman. I didn't see any black fingermarks on her so it must have been a bit of charm somewhere, but I think he charged a little bit extra for the coal.

And what did you study at the course?

Engines again, we did the air frames. We did brakes, wheels, tyres, pneumatics, hydraulics, electrics, the whole system of both trades of the aircraft. Also I learnt algebra, trigonometry. I was twenty-six then. As I say, when I left school, I left long division. I got my education in the Navy as I said before. I learnt all the higher education things that you need to become a mechanic. And English, and as I say the electronics, algebra, trigonometry, geometry and a complete secondary education I got at that age. It was a bit of a struggle but I made it.

Okay George, if you could just tell us a little bit about how you felt working on Sea Fury engines compared to Fire Fly engines, which were more difficult to deal with and for what sort of reasons?

Well the radial engine in the Centaurs was a bugger of an engine to work on, because you've got cylinders all the way around. So you're upside down, on the side or on the top. The plugs were very hard to get out. They were sunk in what they called the junk head, which is the cylinder head of the engine

itself and you had to pull out baffles, rubber covers, to check the air because it was an air cooled engine.

And all the cylinders themselves were actually ribbed, like your lawn mower engine, got sort of a water area of veins for the air to pass through to cool the engine down. The plugs were about the worst thing to get out. They were sunk down and wired up and you needed a great big spanner to get in to get them out. That was all right on the top ones but when it come underneath you were working upside down.

As I say, it was not a very good engine to work on at all. You used to lose a lot of oil from the sump down below. As soon as you dropped the bottom cover you'd have to duck out of the way because of the oil that used to run out of it. Most radial engines were pretty messy like that but the Centaur's was quite bad for oil loss and they used to use a lot of oil because of the lubrication of the sleeves and pistons more or less had twice the rubbing area then, wearing area. While the Griffin was a nice, clean, straight rowed engine with a row of cylinders that side and a row of cylinders that side. You could get into the plugs quite easy. There was hardly any mess underneath. They were pretty clean underneath.

That's the engine that's in the Fire Fly?

That's the engine that's in the Fire Fly, sorry, yeah, that's the Griffin 3 I think that was. We started off with Griffin 1's in the 822 Squadron in the RN [Royal Navy] and they were an improved version of the Fire Flies that we had in the Australian Navy. Yeah they were very good engines to work on 'cause they were cooled by radiators. Had radiators in the wings for the inter-cooler. Had radiators in the other wing to cool the engine down because it was sent forced air cooled by the air flow across the veins on the cylinders while the Griffin was shaped like a car engine, more or less. Had wet sleeves, sort a liquid air round all the cylinders that kept them cool.

The Fire Fly was quite a good aircraft to work on. Air frame wise, with regards to hydraulics and pneumatics they were similar, very similar 'cause they were both British aircraft so, British made aircraft so they used to follow quite a pattern of the same design for continuity with the spare parts. They were made by different firms. I think the Fire Fly was made by Faireys. Rolls Royce made the engines of the Fire Fly and I think the fuselage was made by Blackburn. I wouldn't swear to that because, the Fury, but they were all metal aircraft, they're good. And of course they were fitted with deck hooks for deck landing and they were pretty good at coming in to land.

Okay, so just continue the story, how did you find the course? You said it was quite challenging because of your lack of education?

It was quite challenging for me but I passed, put it that way. I didn't get any big marks. I think I averaged about sixty percent, but it was enough to pass. But as I say you don't need maths or mechanics or electrics or algebra or trigonometry to work on an aircraft. You needed to have a bit of common sense and know the system you're working on, put it that way. And we learnt all about hydraulics and brake coolers and tyres and pneumatic systems. We covered all the systems they use in an aircraft and that was your basic knowledge. You took the individual aircraft itself and the individual system and you

learnt all about that.

So there was obviously no equivalent course available in Australia at that time?

Oh no, no, no.

So all the Australian guys went out to do that course as well did they?

Yeah, nearly all the people who joined the Fleet Air Arm, both Australian and people like myself, if any instruction was to be done, it was done by UK. Eventually they did get their own instructors out here and Nirimba I think was quite a big place at Bankstown. HMAS Nirimba was the training school then a bit later on for apprentices, in all fields, electrics, electronics, radio, the whole works - but until then it was nearly all done by courses in the UK.

So you completed your course?

Yeah, completed the course, joined HMAS Melbourne. Now that was the latest ship. I went back to England and did a course, sorry, sorry, take that all back. I came back, I finished the course and I came back to Australia on the *Oriana* with the wife and a three-year old son then. Pearl was pregnant with my daughter and we came back and stopped with some friends in Botany for about a week or so. Got a week's leave and came down to Nowra and purchased our first house.

It was a little weatherboard cottage on what was then the

Princes Highway. It is now Kinghorn Street and it was on top of a hill and it overlooked Nowra. I think I opened an account with the Commonwealth Bank while I was on the Sydney and put payments into it. We were lucky while we were over in England, I forgot this, our pay was still in pounds in Australia at the time, and we got paid pound for pound in Sterling, which means every pound Australian we gained five shillings advantage, which was good. And then when I sent it back to the bank here, the Commonwealth Bank, my pound was worth twenty five shillings Australian, so I made a profit both ways.

Eventually we'd got ourselves a thousand pounds in the bank, the Commonwealth Bank, and saw this place up the highway. Went for a loan to pay for it and the Commonwealth Bank wouldn't give us a loan. So I took the money out of the Commonwealth Bank and went to the Bank of New South Wales, that's Westpac now, and the fellow that built the house, he said, "I'll go guarantor for this young lad," and that was it. We put the deposit on the house and that's where we settled and we were there for sixteen years.

We moved in in the January and Jennifer was born in the June '54, and as I say I used to go from the house on the highway up to Albatross either on a bike or get a lift in. Usually used to ride a bike out there until I got the car. We bought ourselves a 1934 Austin 10 which had no shock absorbers. They were just a couple of rubber pads rubbing together on a wishbone joint, spoke wheels. It was a real reliable little bomb. She took us



Flight Sub Lieutenant Reginald Warneford was the first naval aviator to be awarded the Victoria Cross

Flight Sub Lieutenant Reginald Warneford was the first naval aviator to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

On 7 June 1915 he carried out a daring mile-high, moonlit duel with a German airship over Ghent, Belgium, dodging the Zeppelin LZ37's machine-gun fire and climbing to 11,000 feet by pushing his aircraft to its limit. Diving steeply towards the airship he dropped four 20lb bombs directly on target, setting the airship on fire from end to end.

The terrific explosion that followed flipped Warneford's Morane-Saulnier type L monoplane upside down and tossed it out of control. Recovering while in a precipitous dive, Warneford landed behind enemy lines and hastily conducted running repairs, fixing a fuel leak with his cigarette holder. After considerable difficulty in starting his engine single-handed, he took off again before he could be captured. Despite having to find his way back in thick fog he returned unhurt to his base the following morning after an extraordinarily courageous and resourceful attack.

Almost immediately King George V awarded Warneford the Victoria Cross. The threat to London from the German airships was a cause of grave concern and Warneford was acclaimed as a national hero.



The RAN Sea Venoms arrived at Nowra on 7 May 1956. By then George Meacham had completed his 12 month course on type in the UK and was probably in this photograph, although no caption exists to give names. (Jeff Chartier collection).

everywhere and I used to drive that to Albatross and back.
Just having had that return home, how did it feel being back in England? Did you get a sense of the fact that you'd made the right decision?

Absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

Coming to Australia, that was confirmed for you?

Every time we went back [to England] we'd turn around and say, "No way would I live here anymore." Yes, we were quite happy to come back and look forward to it, actually. The weather, the climate is different. Back in England you do get distinctive four seasons. You get Spring, Autumn, Summer and Winter. Out here it's not quite so vivid, it sort of blends in. You drift into the different seasons. You really don't notice so much as you would in England. But the little house up the highway it was good. Admittedly we still had a dunny up the back in a shed and there was no water. There was tank water but eventually the water came on and eventually the sewerage came on and we settled quite well up there.

From there I went to sea with 817 Squadron, the Fire Fly Squadron, on the Sydney. Went to sea, did the couple of runs there and came back and got recommended for a course back in England for twelve months on Sea Venoms. My daughter was about six months [old] when I went on the course and I was away there for twelve months, over Christmas. Came back, my daughter didn't know me. She was eighteen months and she didn't know who the stranger was in the house was. Of course she soon latched on that Stephen knew me, her brother, and of course I won her round in the end but it was a bit of a struggle.

Can you just tell us a little bit about the Sea Venoms?

Yeah. The Sea Venom had a wooden airframe, a plywood airframe. It had twin booms out the back with a tail plane across

the middle and it had a Ghost jet engine in it. The front half had a radar scanner, a radar scanner in the front. It had a fibreglass nose, had a dome over that. It was a twin cockpit. It had ejection seats. It had four forty millimetre cannons on the underside of the body. That was the armament it had. It was a fighter.

As I say twin towers on twin booms, pressurised cockpit. The jet engine was a real reliable one. The only thing about those days was they didn't issue us with the proper protective ear muffs. Our protection we had was a rubber plug pushed in the ear and when the engine was around ten thousand five hundred revs it was you could feel the vibrations in the air. It was sort of electrifying - but it was a terrific aircraft.

And you said it had a Ghost jet engine?

Ghost jet engine.

What did that mean? What Ghost?

That was the make of the engine. There were several, the name of it. It was called a Ghost engine. It was a cylindrical affair with burners in it.

The air came in through the intakes. It was ignited by an electrical spark and it turned out like a blow lamp in the end. If you can imagine a blow lamp with kerosene when it was pumped up and it defused heat. Well that heat was, the air was compressed by a compressor. It went into a burning chamber, down the tubes, directed onto a turbine and the turbine was connected to the fan in the front and the faster the turbine went the faster the fan went and of course, if you let it get away it would just implode. So the only way they could govern the speed limit was by governing the amount of fuel they put into it. The more fuel, the hotter it went, the faster it went and basically that was the principle of a jet engine. The jet stream coming out of the tail pipe would be above the speed of sound,

but the temperature was that high, it never reached the speed of sound, if you get what I mean. The velocity was absolutely coming out of the tail end from the burners and the turbine.

So you came back from doing that course and you're daughter finally took a shine to you?

Oh yes, she came around in the end.

And of course then I went to sea on the Melbourne with the Venoms and did more SEATO runs. As I say, this South East Asian Treaty Organisation was an organisation with the countries in that area and Australia and I think Singapore was in it.

I don't quite know the actual setup but apparently we were out there, as I say, just more or less showing the flag around the area, around

Singapore and Hong Kong. Never got to Japan and then the next thing I came back and got recommended to do the Wessex course. So in sixty two I flew over, flew back to England for a six month course down at the factory down at Yeovil and did a maker's course on the

Wessex engine, the Gazelle engine at Bristol, the Scout aircraft and the Nimbus engine. So I did, learning maker's manufacturing of those two aircraft, the Wessex and the Scout.

Came back, let's see. '62, six months, around Christmas when I came back on the course. We flew back. I flew over on a 707 and came back on a Comet, which was the De Havilland Comet, it was a terrific aircraft that, a jet aircraft. And came back, came back home. I went to work on the Wessex and eventually took charge of ten Wessex on the Melbourne. I was the chief in charge of the maintenance.

What was your official title on the Melbourne before you made that transition?

Oh you were either the Chief Air Mech or a Chief AA. I was a Chief Air Mech and put in charge of the Squadron and that was it. All the things that you learnt when you were an ordinary sailor helped you to do the job when it came to the job. Which was a top job, you were in charge of the maintenance. You told everybody what to do, when to do it and how to do it sometimes. Yeah, I enjoyed that position.

Anyhow I was drafted back to 725 and they came in one day and they said they wanted four Wessex put on the Sydney to go to Vietnam. It's got to be self-contained. You've got to be

able to fly the aircraft on and fly them off because there will be no communication between you and Albatross. So I had to work out what machinery I wanted, like hydraulic test rigs and electrical rigs, and what spares I'd need - seals, nuts and bolts and I finished up with a great box full of stuff. I used quite a bit of it too, and I managed to get the aircraft up to Vietnam and back to Vung Tau.

Now they were doing the same things as what we were trained to do. Going ahead of the ship with the old sonar buoy down listening for submarines, because I mean it was a war time exercise in the Navy at that time, although it wasn't like being at war really, but it was a war time exercise and we went. The first trip I did was from Sydney and I think it was the Sydney



HMAS Sydney made a total of 24 voyages to Vietnam, transporting troops, stores and vehicles. She was equipped with Wessex Mk 1 helicopters for anti-submarine duties. (Mike Breakspear)

regiment, all Nashos [National Service soldiers] and more or less a straight trip to Vietnam. Took about ten days and we used to give them a 'crossing the line' ceremony, give them the treatment and entertain them on the way up there.

The next trip we picked up

a crowd from Perth. I was away over Christmas on that one. We picked them up about Christmas Day. We celebrated off Christmas Island so that would be about three or four days trip before we got there. Up to Vietnam again, unloaded the ship with their own cranes, well with the aid of a Chinook sky crane, the same things [now] used for fire-fighting here. Remember they hired those big aircraft, Yank aircraft for fire-fighting out here? Just like that. Only they had a crane on board and would latch onto a lorry or a van and pick it up and take it ashore to save putting them onto barges alongside and loading them off their own cranes and loading them onto barges alongside to take them ashore.

The troops used to come on board a Chinook. The returning soldiers would come out to the rear of the aircraft, down to the flight deck and the people that were going to replace them, the new recruits would follow in, straight in the aircraft and the aircraft would go, just like that. It was quite a unique operation. We'd only be up there about twenty-four hours and we'd be on our way back.

Same thing again with the Wessex in front checking the sonar buoys and that was it. I think the next trip was from Sydney again with a load of lorries on board and all the flight deck was covered with vehicles all lashed down. We had a little space

at the foredeck for landing the Wessex on. And the last trip was we went round to Perth, round to Brisbane and picked the Nashos up from Brisbane.

This was the middle of 1957 then. We started in, sorry, 67, 67, get it right - and they came back and the Vietnam guys said they never had a ticker tape reception, but they did in Brisbane because they had to march down the street with a band and there was a ticker tape reception for them. And those soldiers we took up there we landed them ourselves and in our own landing barges.

The Sydney got fitted with four landing barges in Hong Kong and they took them ashore just like the invasion days in the old landing barge and I've got all that on film. Yeah, it was quite a good run, an interesting run.

'cause you arrived in Australia at a pioneering time for that sort of work, didn't you really? It was all to be established and set up as far as that air fleet side of things, it was all new for Australia?

Oh, absolutely yeah. The Fleet Air Arm, they had an air base here before but the RN had it during the war I think as some base. Basically I was at the start of the Fleet Air Arm and as I say I didn't go to Korea because I was on the mechs course during the Korean business up in Arbroath - and yeah, it was a good life. I paid off and finished in the Australian Navy in 1969. I paid off.

I did quite a few jobs, like establish the flexible service system on the aircraft on a pegboard sort of a ranking where the aircraft either had an hourly-based service or a calendar-based service and I made all the servicing records up for that and set that up. The department they called the Royal Australian Naval Air Fleet Development Unit and I was the Chief in charge of that when I left the Squadrons.

I went to work as the Chief Instructor for the school they had out there. They started a school at Albatross and also they started a mechanics course there and that eventually got transferred to Nirimba. That was a six-month course in relation to the two year course I did. We called it minimax. It was a very abbreviated bloody training but it was good. Of course they had airframe and engine mechanics and ordinance mechanics and they trained them all at Nirimba.

And eventually my son joined the Navy when he was fifteen

and a half and he served with me on the Sydney. Just before we started our first trip to Vietnam he came aboard in Sydney, and then we went down to Jervis Bay to finish our refit off. The dock yard people had packed up working on it and so they got the apprentices on board to finish all the fiddly little jobs off like painting and messing about.

In your opinion what was the finest aircraft that you've worked on?

Finest? I'd say the Sea Venom. It was a neat, clean little aircraft. Well it was little I suppose in comparison, and it flew well. It had pressurised cockpits. It had an altimeter rating of about thirty thousand feet. In fact the last trip I did, I went up with CO of the squadron and we were over Batemans Bay and he switched the engine off - well dropped it right back, and we glided into Albatross and the angle of glide was about seven degrees so if your engine failed you didn't go down like a lead brick, you did have plenty of time to control it. It was a beautiful and all the controls, the ailerons, the elevators, were all done by hydraulics. There were no cables, or wires or anything like that; it was all done by hydraulics. The wings were rather natty. They folded up nicely. Yeah, it was a very compact aircraft.

You've worked for both the Australian navy and the British navy?

Yeah.

Can you tell us how they differ?

Well for a start once again one was wartime, one was in peacetime. In the wartime the officers and the men used to sort of mingle and get on quite well. Peacetime navy, officers were officers and men were men, the lower deck. They didn't really like to mix. They were friendly provided you were respectful to them. If you turned around and were a bit cheeky, well you got lumbered. During the war you could have a laugh and a joke with the officers and of course they're all about your age anyway. Of course when I joined the RAN I was getting on really in relation to the age of some of people.

A lot of my friends that did the mechs course, they went for a commission and they became two and a half engineers when they left the Navy. I hesitated about doing it. The wife said, "No, when your time's up we're getting out of it. I've had enough of this." Most of the time I was away from home, three or four months at a time and she was looking after the kids and she'd had enough of us being in the Navy for a while. She said, "Let's settle down and get a job in civvy street." Which I did in the end as I told you.

I left the Navy. I became an undertaker for the local funeral director and then eventually sat the exam for SAMR, the Ship and Aircraft Maintenance Repair, and was told to move up to Sydney where the offices were in Kent Street. And so I sold my little house after sixteen years up in the hill in Nowra and moved a caravan up to Rockdale Caravan Park, and I used to catch a train in from Rockdale to the offices every morning.

That went on for about twelve months and they wanted me to move the family up to Sydney and I didn't really want to if I could help it but I still didn't want to lose my job. Then they asked me to go down to the range at Creswell and set up a library down there and also be the engine mechanic - well air

George Meacham 16 Mar 23 – 26 Jan 18.



frame and engine mechanic- on the Jindivik aircraft. So I jumped at that because I could more or less live down here. I finished up buying a house on the headland at Gerroa, Blackhead, on the headland, and I used to travel down to the range everyday and back."

With thanks to UNSW Canberra, who generously allowed us to use this material. You can see the transcript/video [here](#). ✈

FLEET AIR ARM HISTORY IN PHOTOS

If you don't feel like reading too much, you can see our "History in Photos" pages. Click on the images to check some of them out.



Update on Historic Flight

In our last issue we reported that the defunct RAN Historic Flight had been put up for sale by Tender, and there had been three contenders for the RFT. We had expressed concern that the collection might not be kept together if one of the smaller organisations won the Tender. You can see that article on our website [here](#).

At the time of its demise the Historic Flight comprised 2xTrackers, 2xUH1B, 2xWessex, 1xDakota, remnants of a Venom and Sea Fury, and a large quantity of miscellaneous spares.

We hear that the Tender Evaluation process has now been completed but, at the time of 'FlyBy' going to press, the result had not been released. We will send out a special email when we do hear of the outcome. ✈

Video/Podcast of HMAS Sydney in Korea Just Released



The Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society has just released its latest video/podcast on HMAS Sydney in the Korean War.

It features, amongst others, CDRE Norman Lee, Dr. Fred Lane and CDRE Jack McCaffrie who recount the story of those tumultuous few months when our brand new Fleet Air Arm went to war in that far-flung conflict.

You can see the video (or listen to the audio Podcast) [here](#), together with a wide selection of other subjects on the RAN, such as its code-breaking activities in WW2, the Naval War Against Japan in Northern Australia, the RAN and Mine Warfare in WW2, the story of the Navy in Cockatoo Island and the loss and finding of HMAS AE1.

Get Old Disgracefully

Me: Okay, so to complete the order I'll need your credit card number.

Member: You'll have to call me back, I have to go upstairs to get my purse.

Me: I can hold.

Member: I won't be able to go up for, probably twenty minutes, I have to finish this dungeon and beat Razor Finn.

Me: What?!?

Member: Actually, give me thirty minutes, just in case!!!

Me: Okay...will do.

wrote notes in the account about calling member back after she beats a boss in World of Warcraft

thirty minutes later

Me: So, I'm dying to know.

Member: What?

Me: Did you beat Razor Finn, is Azeroth safe?

Member: Yeah, he ain't nothing, just part of the grind. I bet you were surprised when I told you I was playing World of Warcraft, huh?

Me: Whaaaaat!!! No not at all...yes, I was actually surprised, if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

Member: I'm 73! And I play games every day, ten to twelve hours. I'd rather play game and slay monsters than knit like some old lady.

Me: I want to be you when I grow up.

Member: Age is just a number, honey. I didn't even start playing games until 8 years ago, my grandson got stationed overseas in Afghanistan and I wanted to be able to talk to him, so me and my sister started playing with him. We'd go on raids and talk about our day, I'm actually better than he is at the game now, he HATES IT!!!

Me: You're pretty much my hero now.

Member: I didn't know what leveling up meant or anything, I freaked out when I found my first weapon, God, I was such a noob. If you play let me know, unless you're Alliance, I HATE Alliance, I'm Horde until the day I die.

Me: I'm speechless, which is weird for me.

Member: I can't wait until the Dark Moon Festival!!!

Me: I have no idea what that means, but we either...

Member: I'd love to talk more, but I gotta keep grinding out my new character!

Me: I respect that, being awesome is a twenty-four hour a day job... ✈



We are trying to identify the date of the photograph above, and some (all) of the aircrew in it. The left most of two officers in the centre is **RADM J.A.S. Eccles**, who was Flag Officer Commanding Australian Fleet from 05 October 1949 and whose flag was flying on HMAS Sydney from then until 21 April 1950, when he hoisted it in HMAS Australia. To the right of him is **CAPT Roy Dowling**, the CO of HMAS Sydney, who left that command on the same day (21 April 1950) for HMAS Cerberus on promotion. It is likely, then, that the deck is that of HMAS Sydney and the photograph was taken between those two dates. The aircraft is, of course, a Firefly and with the side number 2*4 (centre number is obscured by one of the prop blades). Can anybody provide more information? Contact the webmaster [here](#).

Exciting New Items

in the Navy Wings Flight Store

[SHOP NOW](#)



Are you interested in FAA merchandise, books, clothing or memorabilia? If so **NAVY WINGS** might have just the thing for you, for yourself or as a Christmas Present from a loved one.

Navy Wings is a UK charity dedicated to keeping heritage Naval Aircraft flying. They have a wide range of material, much of which is applicable to us, and it can easily be sent to Australia.

Better still, they have offered the Australian FAAAA a 15% Christmas discount for our 'FlyBy' readers, applicable right across their range of goodies. All you need to do is input the code **NWFAACHRISTMAS15** when you place your order, and the discount will be applied to the final price. You can find their website [here](#).

Farewell the Venerable Sea King – Aussies attend Downunder Dinner



The 'Downunder Dinner', to commemorate the paying off of the last RN Sea King was held at Victoria Barracks Sydney on the evening of 04 October. Arranged by CMDR Paul Hannigan it attracted 35 ex-Seaking veterans, who gathered to remember the old bird and exchange warries. A list of those attending can be found below. The Royal Navy had a similar dinner in the same night held in the gunroom of RNC Dartmouth but our time difference gained a ten-hour advantage. (Photo: Paul Hannigan) ✈

Paul	Hannigan
Chris	Money
Michael	Wagstaff
Mike	Hogan
Roger	Eaton
Steve	Hancock
Richard	Carter
Katie	Frazer
Rob	Fisher
Nigel	Eves
Jeffery	Choat
David	Oddy
Peter	Stretton
David	Simpson
Jamie	Kirby
Phil	Crick
Paul	Morrison
Nige	Carter
Patrick	O'Callaghan
Jarrold	Nieuwendaal
Matt	Jose
Andrew	Dudgeon
Colin	Mcleod
Anthony	Mason
Anthony	Mason
Philip	Payne
Peter 'Bong'	Nelson
Peter	Ashworth
Richard	Booth
Tanzi	Lea
Ian	Chapman
Howard	McCallum
Philip	Woodward
Stuart	Baily
Cdr David	Salisbury



The above napkin ring is in the collection of the late Duncan Menzies, who was a test pilot of some renown. It has "HMAS Sydney 98" engraved on the outside and the Fairey Aviation emblem inside. We are looking for any information on the significance of this, and in particular the number '98', as it doesn't easily correlate to any date or number of any significance to HMAS Sydney. Or maybe you just have a memory of them? Any thoughts welcome...send to the Editor [here](#). ✈

Update on Federal Council Meeting



The Federal Council meeting was held on Saturday 27 October 2018, when representatives from all Divisions get together to talk about the Association, set fees, propose new policy etc.

Our guest speaker was COMFAA, CDRE **Chris Smallhorn**, who gave an extremely entertaining and informative update on the state of the Fleet Air Arm and its likely future direction.

Reports were presented by the Deputy President (**Phil Carey**) (the National President was overseas), the Secretary (**Dick Martin**), the Treasurer (**Denis Mulvihill**), the Slipstream Editor (**Ron Batchelor**) and the Database Manager/Webmaster (**Marcus Peake**). **John Balazic**, our Wall of Service administrator, and **Terry Hetherington** the Manager of the FAA Museum also presented their respective updates.

Other items covered were:

Nomination of a Life Time award for **John Gregory Kelson**. This was approved unanimously by the National Executive. Our congratulations go to Greg.

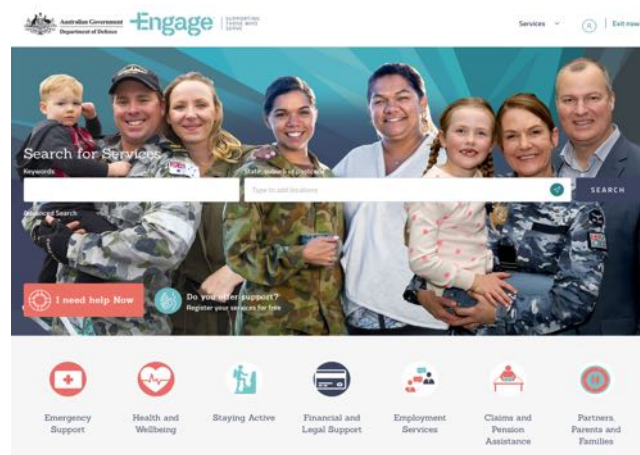
Fees and Levies. Each year the Federal Council Meeting considers two fees: the Slipstream Levy, which Divisions pay to the National Executive for each hardcopy (\$5.00) and softcopy (\$2.50); a "Registration Fee" (\$10.00 for eligible new members) and a "Capitation Fee" (\$10.00) paid to the National Body on an annual head count of their members. The FCM decided to keep the fees at their existing levels for another year.

Three Notices of Motion were considered as follows:

- To approve one of two nominees for the position of National Database Manager (either Mr. Paul Norris or Mr Jeff Powis). The FCM chose Mr. Norris, who will assume the duties as soon as a handover with the outgoing Manager, Mr Marcus Peake, can be arranged.
- To approve a Governance Framework setting out the policy and process by which changes to our Roll of Honour may be considered. The Motion was agreed, with the new Framework to be enshrined as an Annex to our National Constitution in due course, and
- To approve a WA Division Motion to have a State Division President Position established on the National Executive. The Motion failed to find a seconder and was therefore set aside.

A Notice of Grievance by WA Division concerning an unsuccessful claim for expenses was tabled. The document was noted, and the WA President addressed the meeting on this and other matters. ✈

New Defence Website Support for Ex-ADF Members and Families



Did you know there's a website called "Engage" that provides a portal for ex-ADF members and their families to a range of support services? These services include Emergency Support, Veteran Community Support, Staying Active programs, Claims and Pension Assistance and Financial and Legal Support.

The website is populated by a range of providers and offers not only a comprehensive understanding of what's available, but also links to access it.

'Engage' is easy to use and saves trolling through countless pages to find what you're looking for. You can find it [here](#).

We will put a permanent link on the front page of our own website. ✈

Letters To The Editor

Not A Beer Can Regatta – Rather a RAAF Display!

I recently read your latest missive and noticed a smallish error which you may wish to correct.

In the "Story Of The Remarkable Grumman Tracker", a photograph was incorrectly captioned - "A VS816 Squadron Tracker conducts a flypast during the 1980 Casuarina Beach Beer Can Regatta."

That flypast was in fact conducted over RAAF Base Darwin during an airshow to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Airbase. I was flying 842 at the time, and the story of what occurred and why it was emblazoned with a FLY NAVY banner is appended below.

In May 1980, I was serving as Senior Pilot of the VS 816 DETDAR deployment searching for refugee boats/illegal fishing activities out of RAAF Base Darwin.

As the detachment commander - **Ian Gibson** - was on annual leave, I was summoned to appear before the RAAF Group Captain in command of the airbase.

Fully expecting to be bollocked for some indiscretion of my own (or of one of the other detachment personnel) I was pleasantly surprised to be invited to join in the celebrations marking

the 40th anniversary of the commissioning of RAAF Base Darwin. The highlight of day was to be an airshow on June 1st and we were being invited to take part.

Whilst frantically trying to hide my relief and surprise I thanked the Group Captain saying that I would seek the requisite Naval Command approval which I was sure would be quickly forthcoming. Whilst walking back to the squadron office I was trying to decide whether this was an elaborate gotcha - it didn't appear to be - and I also pondered the vanishingly small likelihood of the Fleet Air Arm ever inviting the Crabs to take part in one of our shows!

Command approval to take part in the airshow quickly followed so I and a few others set about devising an appropriate display. Emphasising the unique differences inherent in Naval Aviation was strongly in my mind, so a simulated carrier landing seemed to be a good idea, along with the usual configuration changes that were part of the Tracker operation. A time slot of 6 minutes was thought to be adequate to strut our stuff.

The main runway was to be used as the display orientation and luckily there was a dirt road that ran alongside it on the side where the crowd was to be sited. We decided to have a navy 40 seater bus drive along this road at 25kph to simulate HMAS Melbourne. I was to "land" on the top of this bus as it passed in front of the large VIP tent to be erected for the occasion.

It would be a hook down, touch-and-go landing, followed by a full stop landing and wing-fold in front of the crowd as we taxied to dispersal. One of our squadron officers was to handle the public announcements during the display.

To further stir the pot, we thought that in case the public didn't notice the light-blue colour of a Naval bus, it should be adorned with a large NAVY banner. In addition, it occurred to us that as the starboard torpedo bay door of the Tracker projected vertically downward when in the open position, would make a wonderful signboard to project another message to the (hopefully) spellbound crowd. It was considered that a "FLY NAVY" message would be most appropriate, and after test flight high speed dives to ensure that such an addition to the aircraft would remain intact the ground crew affixed such a message.

Inter-service rivalry was alive and well in Darwin. VS 816 personnel were not backward in reminding their RAAF colleagues that we had three aircraft permanently stationed there, whilst the Crabs had a single DC-3 to show for their efforts. Such pot-stirring might well rebound against us, so all were sworn to secrecy.

A day before the airshow was to occur I was once again summoned by the Groupie. I figured that the word had got out and that we were to be dis-invited to take our part in the show. I was astonished again to hear that as a consequence of the inability of the RAAF P-3 Orion to be able to appear, could we please also blow up the submarine that had been constructed opposite the crowd? Another three minutes in front of the crowd! I agreed that it would be no problem and wandered back to the office wondering whether I could remove my under-pants without having to use a tyre-lever!

Nat Gould Footage

In our last issue we told the story of Nat Gould. You can see his video about deck landing operations [here](#), in the days when Flight Decks were not angled.

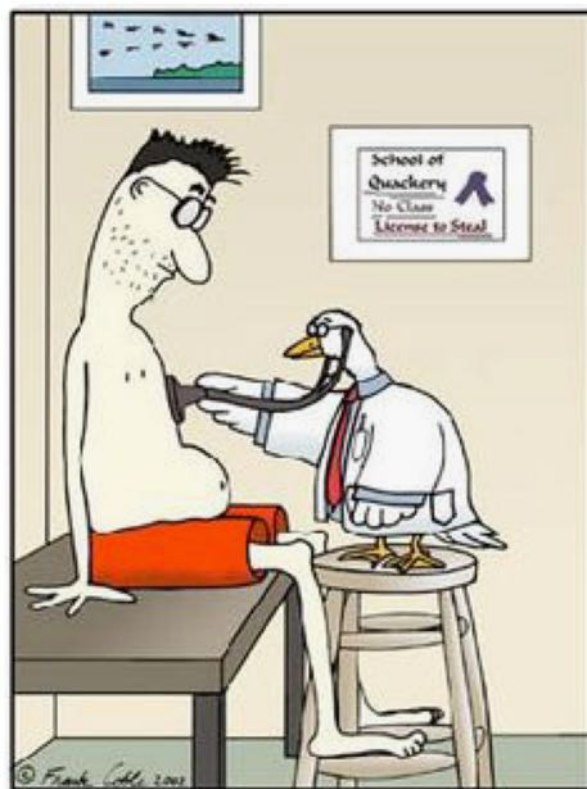
The big day arrived. The show went off without a hitch as far as we were concerned. As soon as the aircraft got back on the line the offending speed-tape was removed and I repaired to the Officers Mess for a well earned frothy fully expecting to be upbraided by the RAAF brass for such effrontery. Not a sausage. No-one said anything. It was killing me, so I finally asked the C.O. of HMAS Coonawarra what he thought of the display.

"Didn't see a thing Old Boy. Just as you were making your initial run-in, a Chinook helicopter prepositioned near the VIP tent and its downwash collapsed the entire assembly. We spent the next ten minutes trying to extricate all and sundry from a tsunami of tarpaulin!"

To add insult to injury, the barman told me that he thought the highlight of our demonstration was the wing-fold on the runway!

Oh well, you can't win them all! Lyall O'Donoghue.

Thanks Lyall. Caption on the offending photograph has been amended! Ed. ✪



Frank started to get a funny feeling that his doctor was a quack.

Kamikaze Kopiers!

We used to say that the Japanese never invented - only copied and improved. Now I have discovered that Australia developed the Kamikaze concept. Rather tongue-in-cheek I know, but interesting.



The attached newspaper clip from the Melbourne Age dated 26 August 1937 explains.

Regards, Ron Marsh

A4 Photographs wanted.

The Skyhawk Heritage article on our website is the first we ever did, and it is now not up to the standard of later work. We intend to radically reconstruct it with a new layout, new images and a new story.

The A4 Skyhawk was one of the great success stories of the Fleet Air Arm. It brought new capability and, although it was never used in anger, provided a powerful deterrent. Sadly, it was the last great fixed wing aircraft of our time.

The Skyhawk deserves a truly remarkable 'Heritage' piece on our website, but to do so we need YOUR help. So empty out those old albums, shoe boxes or logbooks and share your images with the webmaster. Once you are gone, they will be too – so let's work together now to ensure a lasting legacy for those precious pictures you took. Contact the webmaster [here](#) to ask what he needs. ✈

