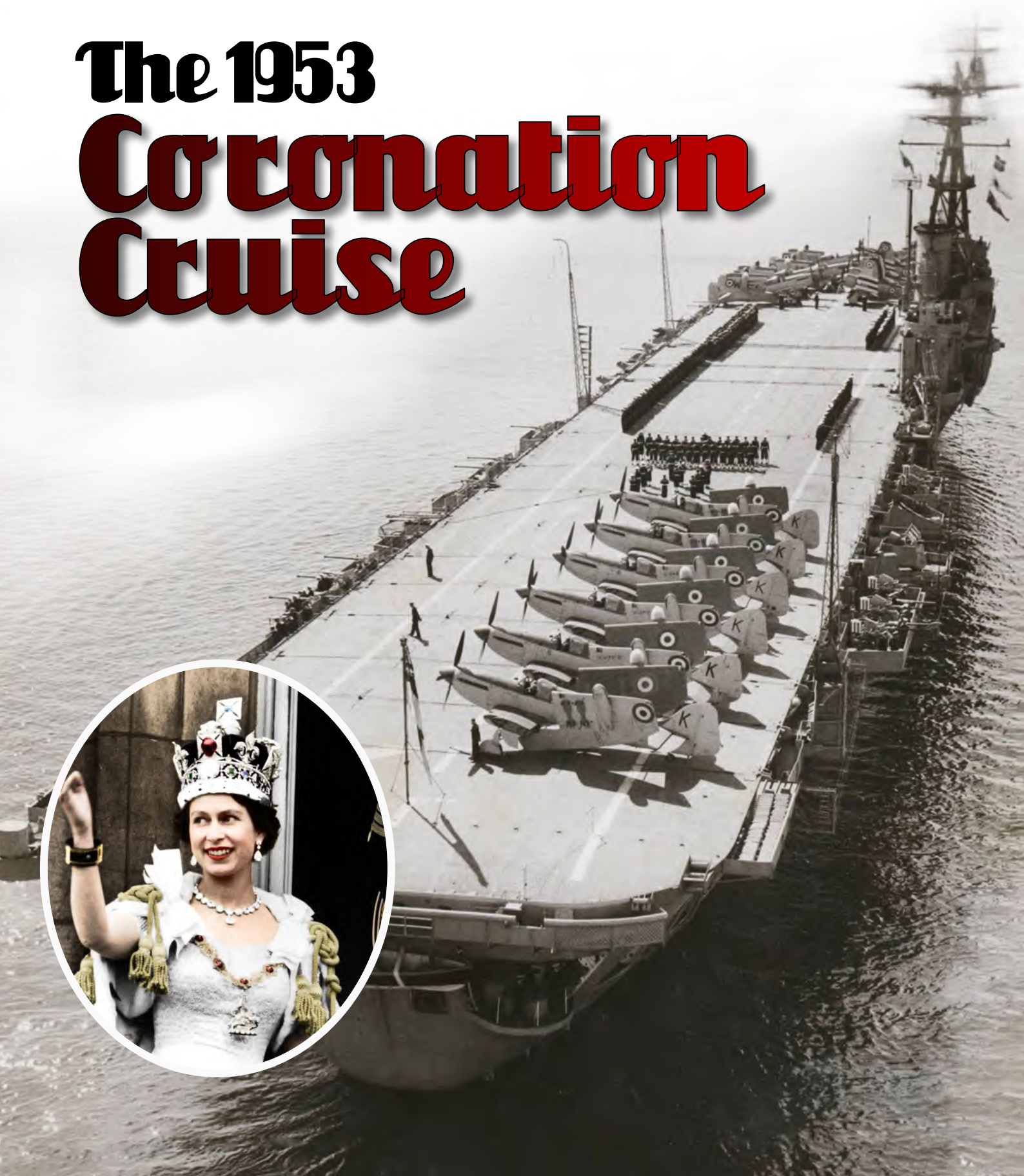




Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia
Edition 69 - May 2023

Fly By

The 1953 Coronation Cruise



FOREWORD

By Captain H. Buchanan - HMAS Sydney - 1953



Captain H. J. Buchanan,
G.B.E., D.S.O., A.D.G.



We have completed a cruise which is unique in the history of the Royal Australian Navy. 30,000 miles in five months with three of these at sea is an unusual experience, and we have followed the track of many famous navigators.

With Arab dhow-masters whose names are unknown to history we have traversed the Arabian Sea to make a landfall off that curious rocky near near Cape Guardafui known to the Romans as Raz Elephants.

We have passed through the Pillars of Hercules to enter the stormy waters of the Atlantic.

With Christopher Columbus we have sighted the Bahamas off the coast of Florida, and have passed through the Crooked Island Passage to Jamaica.

At Port Royal we have entered the lair of the pirate Henry Morgan, who in his later years became Governor of the colony and presented the church with silver plate.

We have crossed the Isthmus of Darien, not as Drake did on land to sack the town of Balboa, but afloat, towed by ten electric locomotives through the locks.

We have visited the islands of "O'why'hee", discovered by Captain Cook, and passed through the Trade Wind belt where the Polynesian navigators directed their great outrigger canoes with a calabash instead of a sextant.

We have crossed three great Oceans to be present at the Coronation of our Beloved Queen, Elizabeth II, an event which shall be foremost in our memories as long as we shall live.

We have made friends in many countries, not only for ourselves but for the countries we represent.

I wish to congratulate you upon your excellent behaviour at all times, and to wish you success and happiness in all your future affairs.

H.J. Buchanan. →
Captain, HMAS Sydney.

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FLYBY is a periodical of the Fleet Air Arm Association. The views expressed within it are not necessarily endorsed by the Association or any of its agents.

Editorial

By M.C. Peake - Editor, 'FlyBy' Magazine



the-world cruise that every member of her ship's company would remember for the rest of their lives. With her went an abbreviated Air Group - just a few Fireflies from 817 Squadron, which were to take part in the massed flypast for the Queen, the like of which has never been seen since.

Our article is not exhaustive - rather, it seeks to capture a few images of the time that tell the mood of that epic journey, and an observation or two from the young men who experienced it. I hope you enjoy it!

We also bring you a new perspective on Flying the Sea Venom, written by Clive Blennerhassett. His timing was perfect as we'd also just finished updating the 'Heritage' piece on that aircraft. You'll also find links to that later in this edition. ➔

The Coronation of King Charles III will take place on Saturday 6th May, in Westminster Abbey.

Even the most ardent anti-Royalists would concede that the event is historical. It will be filled with pageantry and pomp befitting a ceremony over 1000 years old, and will be done with panache and splendour as only the Brits can.

It will also be considerably smaller than the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, which was the last such occasion. The guests for that event numbered over 8000, whereas King Charles's will only be about one quarter of that number. This recognises the circumstances of modern-day Britain, and the new King's wish that it be seen as value for money.

It is not my intention to publish too much material about the King's Coronation - there will be ample coverage in just about every media channel in the world, and it doesn't have a Naval Aviation flavour. But it goes give an opportunity to remember 1952 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and, in particular, the role that the RAN and the Fleet Air Arm played in that extraordinary occasion.

That happened 70 years ago, when HMAS Sydney, not long out of cutting her teeth in the Korean conflict, shaped course for Portsmouth on a round-



REST IN PEACE

Since the last edition of FlyBy we have been advised that the following people have Crossed the Bar:

Ronald McKenzie, Everett Jenkins, Bevin Hardy, Don Gunn.

You can find further details by clicking on the image of the candle. ➔



Opinion

The last week of April saw the release of the **Defence Strategic Review 2023**. Readers may remember this was commissioned by the Albanese Government early in its tenure. You can read the public report [here](#).

Seldom if ever has a Defence Review been undertaken in such trying geo-strategic circumstances. The emergence of Russia as a rogue state, sabre-rattling from China, accelerating and dramatic climate change and social and economic global uncertainty have all provided a backdrop which emphasizes not only how quickly new strategic threats can emerge, but how warfare itself is changing.

The principal recommendations of the report are logical and include a move from a 'Balanced Force' concept to 'Focused Force'; the acquisition of nuclear submarines; developing the ability to strike precision targets at longer range, and greater focus on operating from our northern bases.

But it was the paragraph on Acquisition that most caught my eye. It reads:

"...Defence's current approach to capability acquisition is not fit for purpose. Defence must move away from processes based around project management risk rather than strategic risk management. It must be based on minimum viable capability in the shortest possible time."

Anybody who knows anything about the way Defence does its procurement couldn't argue with this observation. To be fair, Defence's Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group (CASG) has hundreds of projects on its books, some of which are the most complex and expensive in Australia's history. It has also operated in a model where levels of preparedness are based on a ten-year notice for major conflict.

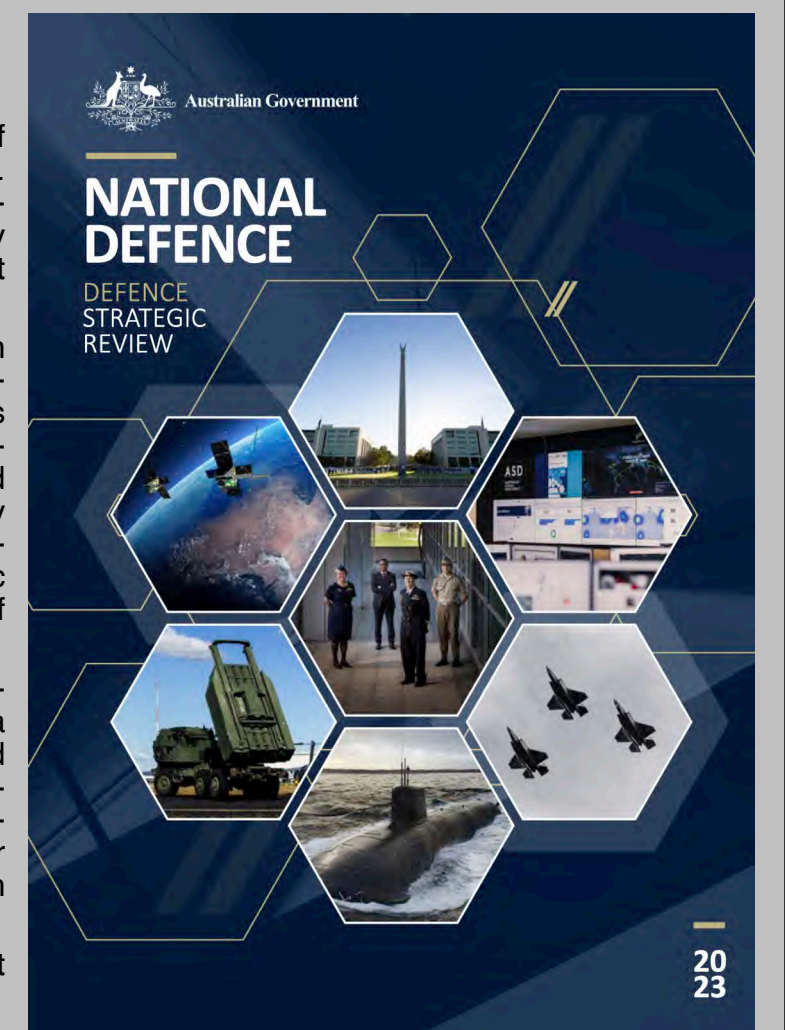
It has resulted in a procurement system that is ponderous, layered in organizational complexity and, in keeping with wider Defence, seeped in a culture of risk adversity. What we actually need is the antithesis of this - an agile process that quickly establishes our capability needs and acquires them in months, rather than years.

Saying it and doing it are two different things, however. Changing the culture of an entity is the hardest change of all - especially if you try to do it with the same leadership cohort. Typically, it takes a generation to do so, which is time we don't have.

So it will be interesting to see how Defence approaches this major challenge, which is so central to many of the other recommendations in the Review. And will it be a transparent process, or buried in bureaucratic obscurification?

One thing is for certain, however - they need to do it soon, and do it right.

Note. The views expressed in this piece are those of the author and are not necessary shared by the Fleet Air Arm Association or any of its members, officials or agents. ➔



Dear Editor,

On 29 March 2023 the Prime Minister and Minister for Veterans' Affairs launched a commemorative medallion to honour those who served in the Vietnam War.



The medallion is a small but meaningful way to honour the service of Vietnam veterans and to recognise the sacrifice of those who never returned home and that of their families.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Some 60,000 Australians served in the Vietnam War, more than 3,000 were wounded and 523 tragically lost their lives. We must honour those who served and the families that support them.

The medallions are available for every veteran, and can be applied for by Vietnam War veterans, widows of veterans and other family members of veterans.

The launch of the medallions continues the Australian Government's recognition of this significant anniversary throughout 2023, culminating in a national commemorative service on Vietnam Veterans' Day, 18 August 2023.

For more details on the commemorative medallion, including how to apply, or for more information about the other commemorative events planned, visit the DVA website [here](#).

Prime Minister Anthony said: "This year, as we mark 50 years since the role of Australian troops in the hostilities in Vietnam came to a close, let us acknowledge your service and sacrifice."

"Your experiences during and after the war are a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by those who have served our country and the debt of gratitude we owe each and every one of you."

"These medallions are a small but meaningful way to honour your service - to recognise the sacrifice of those who never returned home, and of those who did, and endure the scars of service."

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Matt Keogh added:

"This was a war that was at times contentious at home, and for some veterans their service not recognised as it should have been

"To each and every one of our Vietnam veterans: We honour you. We thank you

Yours sincerely, **The DVA Media Team.** ➔



By Editor,

No sooner had the Commemorative Medallions been released than some eagle-eyed observer spotted the island on the Carrier's silhouette was depicted on the port side, rather than the starboard.

There's a bit of finger-pointing going on from some individuals to inform DVA that they got it wrong, and the medallions should be recalled.

DVA have basically responded to the effect that the medallion was minted that way for artistic reasons. I guess they don't understand that a 'thank you' token really must be graphically and historically correct in every detail if it is to be taken seriously.

In a light hearted moment or two I searched for images of HMAS Sydney, to see if, in her early days, she had her island on the 'wrong' side. It seems she did (and, for the record, the photos have NOT been reversed). Clearly the shipyards fixed her up so you'd think DVA could do the same.

Do you have strong feelings on the issue? If so, email the Editor [here](#). ➔



HMAS Sydney, June 1951



Above. Three shots of HMAS Sydney in her early days, before the island was correctly located to starboard. This was part of an early trial to determine if a port-mounted island improved ship handling characteristics. It did not. ➔



Courtesy of West Australian Newspapers

Dear Editor,

Some time ago we looked at the identity of the Firefly that crashed in 1950, taking the life of **Lt Keith Wilson, RAN**. We concluded that the entry in my father's logbook (VT395) was correct and that other published sources were wrong. Late last year my brother, Graeme, came across a reference in the National Archives to the accident report. He paid the not inconsiderable fee for access to the report and this was finally obtained last Thursday. We now have confirmation that VT395 was the correct serial number.

I have read through the report, most of it is duplicated one or two times. I have edited out the duplicated pages, hoping to email a copy to you but the file is 54Mb.

If you want to edit the report to put on the website I suggest keep pages 1 – 9 and 86 – 142.

Presumably this report has some historical importance, given the previously published incorrect information. Perhaps the museum might be interested too?

Regards, **Dr Richard Kenderdine**.

By Editor,

Thank you, Richard. We're always interested in any additional information about those who gave their lives for Naval Aviation and I will examine the file and try and extract relevant pages.

For those not familiar with this accident, on 10 July 1950, **Lieutenant Keith Wilson (P)** and **Petty Officer Leonard Kenderdine (O)** were briefed to conduct exercises at the Treligga range flying Fairey Firefly AS5 VT395.

During the flight Lieutenant Wilson encountered engine trouble and decided to make an emergency

landing at the nearest open space, which was Treburrick Farm near St Merryn. After making a wheels-up touch-down the Firefly hit a thick hedgerow, causing the aircraft to break up and catch fire. Those who know the West Country of the UK will remember that hedgerows often hid granite centres!

Although badly injured Petty Officer Kenderdine managed to escape, but Lieutenant Keith Frederick Wilson (P) RAN was engulfed in flames and died at the scene.

You can see a photo of the tragic outcome below and read Lt. Wilson's story [here](#). ➔

Dear Editor,

I have a little bit of info in relation to the T28 Trojan which may be of enough interest to publish in FlyBy. I have attached two photos with this email with another two in a separate email.

The T28 in question now lives in the Ashburton (NZ) Aviation Museum and is owned by **Brian Hall** of Christchurch. The info board indicates it was part of the US Navy for about 28 yrs and was at Pensacola Florida and Texas (no location indicated). This time period coincides with the period when a cohort of young Australian aviators went through the US Navy Flight Training program. Ref the book 'Wings of Gold' written by **Jack McCaffrie, Trevor Rieck and Jed Hart**.

The T28 has had its R1820 changed out and an

R2000 fitted and a modified Grumman Tracker propeller fitted.

I queried whether the aircraft log book was available for perusal however the volunteer at the museum believed the owner of the T28 has them and they are not at the museum.

Hope this is of some interest.

Regards, **Peter McLaren**. ➔

NORTH AMERICAN T-28B TROJAN 283 ZK TGN

The North American Aviation T-28 Trojan is a radial-engine military aircraft used by the United States Air Force and United States Navy beginning in the 1950's. Besides its use as a trainer, the T-28 was successfully employed as a counter-insurgency aircraft, primarily during the Vietnam War. It has continued in civilian use as an aerobatics and Warbird performer. On 24th September 1949, the XT-28 (company designation NA-159) was flown for the first time, designed to replace the T-6 Texan. The T-28A arrived at the Air Proving Ground, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, in mid-June 1950, for suitability tests as an advanced trainer by the 3200th Fighter Test Squadron, with consideration given to its transition, instrument, and gunnery capabilities. Found satisfactory, a contract was issued and between 1950 and 1957, a total of 1948, were built.

This aircraft BN (Build Number) 138218 was constructed by North American Aviation in 1953 and entered service with the US Navy in 1954, where it served continuously for 29 years based at Pensacola Florida and Texas, training US Navy Pilots. On completion of its service, it was sent to the boneyard at Davis Monthan air base at Tucson, Arizona with a total of 15200 Hours of flight time accumulated. After two years in storage, it was sold to a private (EX naval aviator) owner and underwent a 16000hr restoration to "better than new". This Trojan is, likely the only one in the world converted to a Pratt & Whitney 2000 engine producing 1450 hp driving a modified Grumman Tracker propeller which results in around a 20 Knot increase in cruise speed at 200 less RPM. In 2015 Brian Hall and a few of his aviation friends travelled to the states to among other things, attend Oshkosh. While he was enjoying the air show, his engineer, Kevin Langford and Pioneer Aero Ltd owner Paul McSweeney, took a trip down to Rockford, Illinois to visit Pride Aviation to inspect a plane for a client back in New Zealand. Noticing a T-28 sitting in the corner of the huge hangar full of L-39s, their curiosity prevailed, so they asked John Morgan, the owner of Pride Aviation, about it and he replied "its for sale, do you know anyone interested in buying it?" Little did he know that Brian and Kevin been looking for another T-28 for NZ for around two years! The next day Brian and Kevin returned and the deal was done. This aircraft owned by our member Brian Hall is now displayed in our museum and is maintained in airworthy condition being flown regularly from Ashburton.

KEY FACTS
Crew: two Length: 33 ft (10.06 m) Wingspan: 40 ft 1 in (12.22 m)
Height: 12 ft 8 in (3.86 m) Wing Area: 246 sq ft (22.90 m²) Aspect Ratio: 6.0:1 Empty Weight: 6424 lb (2914 kg) (equipped) Maximum Takeoff Weight: 8500 lb (3856 kg) Powerplant: 1 x Wright R-1820-86 Cyclone 9-cylinder air-cooled radial engine 1425 hp (1063 kW) Maximum Speed: 243 mph (552 km/h) 258 knots at 10000 ft (3000 m) Ferry Range: 1080 mi (1710 km) 920 nmi Service ceiling: 35500 ft (10800 m) Rate of Climb: 3540 ft/min (18.0 m/s)
Armament:
Hardpoints: 6 with a capacity of 1200 lb (540 kg) total



Dear Editor,

The Letters to the Editor on 723 Squadron spraying of Albatross airfield made me search in the now tattered and foggy brain backed up by the similarly worn but more accurate log book.

- 25 January 1973 N9-3103 Iroquois UH-1B
Self MIDN Jackson (Neil) :10 Spraying run
- 26 January 1973 N9-3103 Iroquois UH-1B
Self SBLT Llewellyn (Jim) 2:15 Spraying airfield

I thought we were spraying for mosquitos but the pig farm would have generated many a fly.

Certainly no protective gear worn by the crews.

As for what the spray was.....DDT was what my frail mind has thrown up but that, surely could not be....DDT is now banned and has been for some considerable time although Professor Google says it was not banned in Australia until 1987...so it could have been ?????

Note that I flew N9-3103 but our callsign was always 895 or 893 or 897.....do you perhaps have a conversion of the N9 callsigns to the 3 letter call-

sign. When we left the Nowra area we became "Navy 893"....: The squadron strength in my time was 3 aircraft then it went up to 4 with a hybrid.

The TAHS continues to keep me occupied. My "hobby" for 50 years was flying helicopters then suddenly...retirement! Five years of sitting scratching my bum wondering what to do then the TAHS came along and I am now once again fully engaged with all things that fly or flew, albeit in the context of Tasmanian aviation history. We have just taken delivery of a 1946 Auster. The second aircraft in our collection so far. Eventually we want to set up a museum but methinks it is a way off yet. It will be the first in Tassie and will be very modest compared to the 28 aviation museum's on the mainland. Mind you, Tassie has some notable historical persons....the founder of Qantas, the inventor of the black box, Wiley Post's navigator /first around the world trip...and so it goes on

Regards., **Peter Manktelow**.

By Ed. Thanks Peter. I seem to remember readings somewhere that the mixture being sprayed was part DDT and part AVTUR, although why that might be, who knows. Perhaps one of our readers can throw more light on the subject? ➔



Were You Involved in the British Nuclear Tests?

Dear Editor,

Please see below the information I undertook to find out about from Navy Honours and Awards (CAPT Paul Fothergill, OAM, RAN) at the recent FAAAA meeting.



The Brits have approved the award of a new medal to veterans who were involved in the nuclear tests of the 1950s, including to servicemen and women of other countries who participated. The official announcement is [here](#) and you can read the eligibility criteria [here](#) which also tells you how to apply.

The British Prime Minister said:

"I am incredibly proud that we are able to mark the service and dedication of our nuclear test veterans with this new medal. Their commitment and service has preserved peace for the past 70 years, and it is only right their contribution to our safety, freedom and way of life is appropriately recognised with this honour."

This medal is an enduring symbol of our country's gratitude to each and every person who played a part in this effort and their loved ones who supported them."

The eligibility criteria advised that applications received from Foreign Nationals (e.g. Australians) will be passed to another UK Government department who will assess eligibility in conjunction with officials from our High Commission.

I have been told that Individuals will need to apply via the above UK website as we do not have a definitive list of personnel.

The medal can also be claimed posthumously by NOK or dependents of veterans who were involved in the Tests.

Cheers, **Brett Dowsing.** ➔

DVA Effort May Result in More Errors

Dear Editor,

Ian Thompson attended a meeting with DVA representatives last week who provided some important information which needs to be distributed to all Region 2 Regional Mentors, Coordinators, and to Advocates through the Coordinators.

"You may have noticed some very questionable (poor) Decisions/Determinations being issued by DVA Delegates recently, and the only way we are able to remedy the client situation is through the Appeal process." More work for Advocates!!

Subsequently, Ian attended another meeting with a senior DVA representative who advised that the long-term claims backlog is being addressed because of the large increase in Delegates, recently employed. "Be aware that there has been an 89% (per cent) increase in DVA Delegates since June 2022, thus significantly reducing the overall experience of the Delegate cohort and the effectiveness of claims decision making.

Accordingly, it behoves all Advocates to examine all Decisions/Determinations very diligently to ensure a fair outcome for our worthy clients".

Please disseminate to your Communities of Practice, Advocates and ESOs.

Geoff Harrison
CoP Coordinator

By Editor,

*The above letter was received by our National Welfare Officer, **John Macartney** who passed it on to me.*

The moral of the story is twofold: if you have a claim pending, or are thinking of making one, then be informed what your rights are so you can see any errors in the process.

John is available to offer advice and assistance to FAAAA members. Contact him [here](#). ➔



Order No. 52 is now open for applications, with the following applications currently in the queue:

M. Cowley 0112461 LEUT Jul72 - Oct93.

J. O'Regan R107494 POATWL Apr70 - Apr82

A.R. Milsom O120392 CMDR GLEX (AvWI) Jul76-Oct14

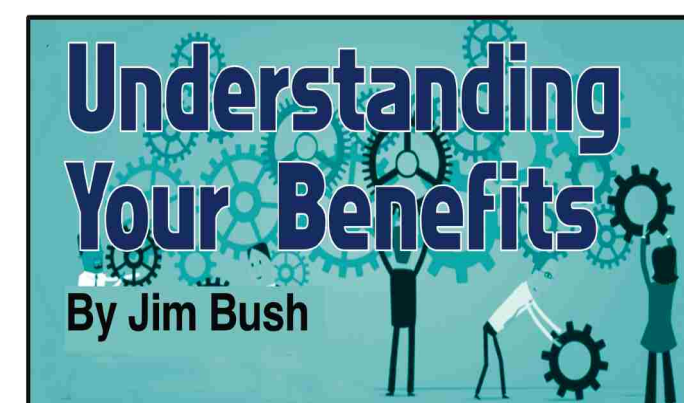
B.J. White R94352 CPO ATWO Jan64 - Jan91

Now is the time for you to order a plaque for yourself if you have not already.

For those who don't know, the Wall of Service is a way to preserve your name and details of your Fleet Air Arm Service in perpetuity, by means of a bronze plaque mounted on a custom-built wall just outside the FAA museum. The plaque has your name and brief details on it (see background to photo above).

There are over 1000 names on the Wall to date and, as far as we know, it is a unique facility unmatched anywhere else in the world. It is a really great way to have your service to Australia recorded.

It is easy to apply for a plaque and the cost is reasonable. Simply click [here](#) for all details, and for the application form. ➔



Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemorative Medallion and Certificate

The Department of Veterans Affairs will produce a Commemorative Medallion and Certificate of Commemoration to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

The medallion and certificate will be made available to every living veteran, widows of veterans and other family members of veterans of the Vietnam war.

It should be noted that the logo image of the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney shows the ship's island superstructure on the Port side and not on the correct Starboard side of the ship. Applicants may like to take this into account when applying for the Commemorative Medallion. The error has been raised to the highest levels of DVA and we await their advice.

The medallion will be presented in a display case and will include a card that explains the design and contains a brief expression of thanks. The design of the commemorative certificate will complement the medallion, and will be contained in its own folder that will allow for independent display, framing and mounting.

The full design's features, eligibility and applications for the commemorative medallion and certificate are described in the DVA Web Page Information Sheet, which can be found [here](#).

You can also see pictures of the medallion and the associated certificate and presentation box on page 6 of this edition of *FlyBy*, together with some comment on the design error. ➔

Reunions



PHOT BRANCH REUNION

There will be a grand gathering of the PHOT/IMAGERY Specialist Branch in October of this year, as follows:

Friday 27th October. 1430-1700 "Meet & Greet" at the FAA Museum, Nowra, followed by dinner at the "Postman's Tavern", Nowra @ 1800.

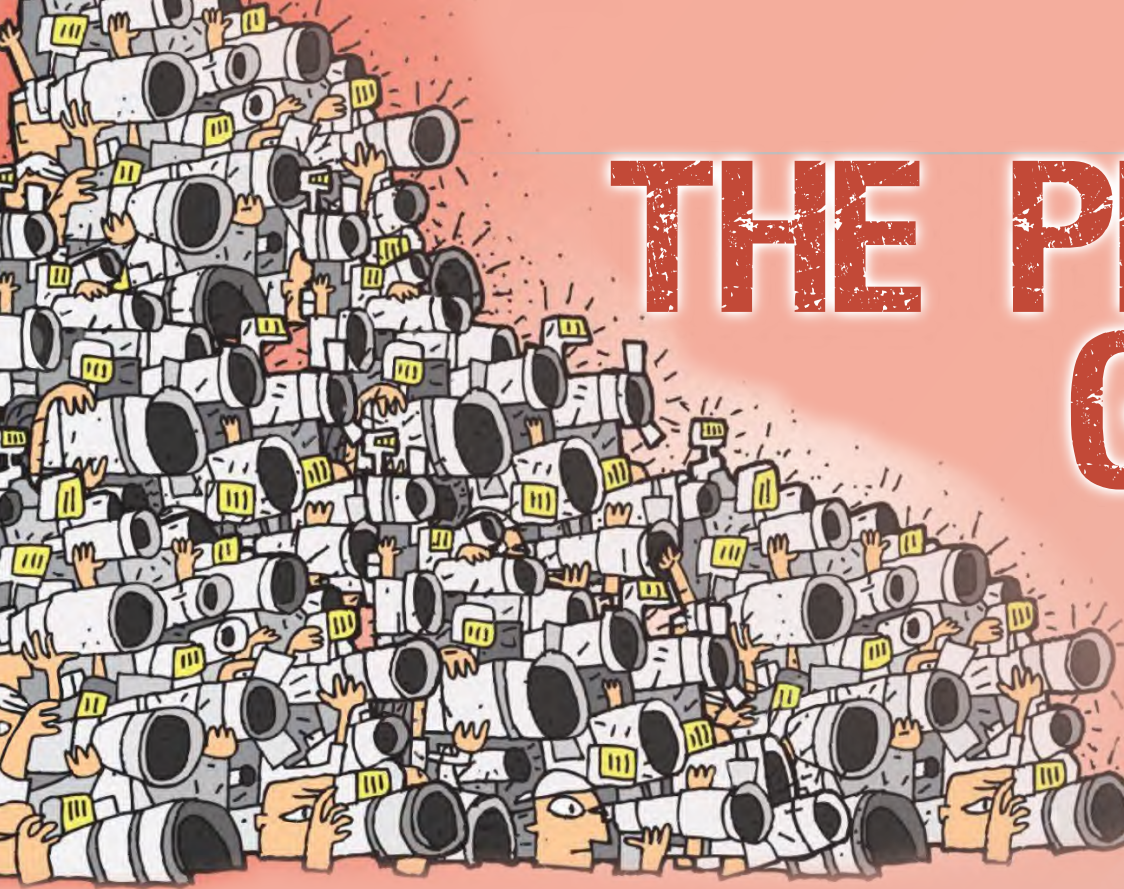
Saturday 28th October. Trip to view HARS aircraft. Lunch at Shell Cove. Dinner Worrigee Sports Club.

Sunday 29th October. Recovery lunch at home of Brian Warnest, in Berry.

You are requested to Register your interest if you think you would like to attend. Click [here](#). ➔

Have you paid your Membership Subscription?

See last page of this edition for details.



THE PRESS GANG

by Marcus Peake

another batch. This went on until the enormous queue was extinguished.

After the monotony of endless ab-initio training it was a welcome change, and we quickly got into a routine. The ground party organised the

queue into groups of three, more or less ready to climb into the aircraft as soon as we landed. The doors had been removed to improve visibility, with one passenger accommodated in the left hand seat and the other two in the back, each one outboard of an aircrewman.

We found it interesting watching them as they did their fifteen minute stint in the air. Their faces varied, of course, but you could tell in an instant they were all of the same tribe: the shabby clothing that didn't quite fit, the weary expressions borne of too many disappointments, and the dour countenances of those who have seen it all and enjoyed nothing. It gave them away, as did the tools of their trade - enormous cameras battered by years of careless use, and telephoto lenses the size of small drainpipes.

Occasionally we'd get a brief smile and a wave as they climbed out, but for the most part they skittered away, keen to make their newspapers' deadlines, and we'd load another cohort and do it all again.

But hey, the weather was reasonable and the Gazelle was always fun to fly, so who were we to complain? At the end of each day we'd land back at Lee-on-Solent in gathering darkness for a quick shower and a beer or three in the Mess. It was a good time to swap yarns.

"I had an odd one today." Sandy said.

"Really?"

"Yep." He took a swig of his beer and regarded the frothy head contentedly for a moment.

Attention!

At the time of this magazine going to Press there were over 120 members who have yet to renew their 2023 subscriptions. We value your support and certainly can't afford to lose a single one of you, but regrettably this will be the last *FlyBy* (and *Slipstream*) sent to non-financial people, as we can't absorb the extra cost. Please see the [back page](#) of this edition to find out how you can quickly and easily renew, or join up. ➔

"It was a hour or so into the sortie and we were half way around the circuit when Phil, my crewman, reports that something a bit weird was going on, so I asked him what."

"It's this couple in the back, Sir' he says, 'look at their cameras.' So I peered over my shoulder at the one I could see and bugger me, he was right. There was this little fat guy grinning in the back, and instead of the usual mammoth Nikon he had this tiny little instant camera, like the ones you buy in Boots. And not only that - he looked excited, you know. Not like the others."

We nodded in understanding. After a day flying dozens of paparazzi around the greatest fleet gathering in recent times you'd still have been hard pressed to distil an ounce of enthusiasm out of the lot of them.

"So I asked Phil to ask them which paper they were from, and after a minute or two he comes back and tells me they haven't

got a clue what he's talking about."

"Well, find out where they live!" I asked him".

"There was a bit more of an exchange in the back - difficult as the bloke wasn't on intercom - and then Phil starts laughing. I couldn't shut him up.

'Apparently he and his wife are from Bolton, Sir,' he says at last, 'they're on holiday down here and saw the queue and thought they'd like a ride. He wants to know how much we're going to charge.'"

We were delighted by the story - it wasn't often that you could pull the wool over Pusser's eyes and this nondescript middle aged couple had somehow done it without even trying.

"So what did you do with them?" I asked Sandy.

"I gave them an extra circuit around the Fleet," he replied. "Initiative should always be rewarded, don't you think?" ➔

Researching the history of the Fleet Review (later in this edition) reminded me of a little story from back in 1978, when I was serving with 705 Squadron in the UK. It happened to my good friend **Sandy Mathieson**, and I thought I'd share it with you.

The occasion was at the Queen's Silver Jubilee Review which was, of course, to celebrate the 25th year of her reign.

It was a lavish affair, as aside from a great gathering of ships to titillate Her Majesty's senses, there was to be a massive flypast of the aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm as a dramatic crescendo to the Review. (The latter actually turned into an epic disaster but that's a story for another day).

The event attracted media from all over the world and in a rare display of generosity the Navy offered free rides in its Gazelle helicopters to any gazetted photographer wishing to get airborne shots of the fleet. It was a tough gig to get on though - you had to be employed by a reputable publisher and show appropriate ID and credentials. I think there was a limit of only one from each newspaper too, to try and keep the numbers down.

And so, for a day or two before the actual Review, 705 Squadron found itself working as a taxi service for the multitude of approved media who had taken up the offer.

Our task was very simple. About six Gazelles would run a shuttle service from a hardstanding in Portsmouth dockyard, not too far from the Spit. We would land at the pad, load three paparazzi, fly them once around the Fleet in a clockwise direction and then drop them off before collecting



LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY PHOTO



Last Month's Mystery Photo was of a brutish looking aircraft, of the kind of engineering reminiscent of the cold-war Soviet Bloc. We asked what it was.

To answer the question it's best we go back a bit to the 1960s, when the Brits were looking for a replacement for their ageing Shackleton Maritime Patrol aircraft. They settled on the Hawker Siddeley NIMROD (pictured right), which then served for some thirty years.

The Nimrod MRA4, the subject of our Mystery Photo, was intended to replace the original Nimrod. Extensively re-engineered with new wings, adapted fuselage and Rolls Royce BR710 engines to replace the very thirsty Speys, the new aircraft promised much.

Unfortunately, its 2003 introduction date passed without a blink and for the next seven years the project lumbered along, gathering costs but delivering nothing. It was cancelled in 2010 by which time it was nearly £800m over budget.

It was another nail in the coffin of the British Aerospace industry as the replacement, eventually, was the Boeing P-8A Poseidon, thus taking another platform offshore.➔



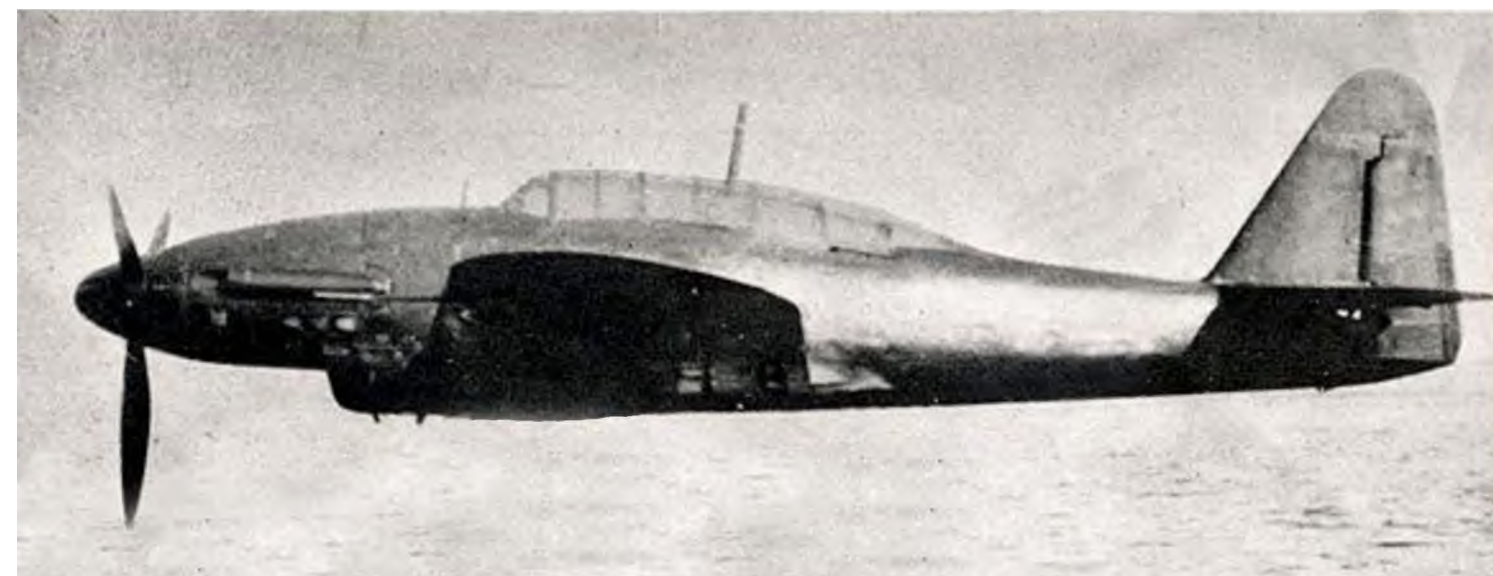
Why so Difficult?

You would think that taking an existing, well understood airframe like a Nimrod's and converting it wouldn't be that difficult.

Well, for a start, BAE (previously Hawker Siddeley) discovered that the original Nimrod airframes were not built to a common standard, which considerably complicated the transition. The new wing was then found to be flawed, so the project was put on hold whilst a new one was designed.

Although deemed a 'rebuild' the MRA4 was essentially a new aircraft, with an extensively modified fuselage, larger wings and completely new systems throughout. Meanwhile, the British Government was steadily reducing the projected number of airframes from 21 to 16, and then 9, thus increasing the amortised costs per unit. Something was bound to break. ➔

THIS MONTH'S MYSTERY PHOTO



Judging by the number of correct responses we received, last month's Mystery Photo was a tad too easy, so the Editor found one a little more obscure. It has a truly fascinating story behind it.

A give-away feature on the airframe in this picture has been edited out to make it slightly trickier, and all markings have also been removed from the image. Clue: its a maritime aircraft!

Can you tell us what it was? Click [here](#) to submit your answer. ➔

Left Middle. The original Nimrod, which served the UK faithfully for some 30 years as a Maritime Patrol and long range SAR platform.

Left Lower. Nimrod airframes being broken up in a highly controversial move as the airframes were all nearing completion. The Government ordered they be dismantled behind closed doors, but the BBC flew a helicopter over the compound to photograph the carcasses.

Below. One of the three MRA4s that reached flying status. When the project was cancelled, it left a huge capability gap in Britain's surveillance capability. On one occasion, foreign Maritime Patrol aircraft from France, Canada and the US had to be hurriedly positioned in the UK to try and locate a Russian submarine which had been spotted in UK territorial waters. ➔





Melbourne's "Beast" Crane Restored by the Hastings Deering Team.



Known for its supply of Caterpillar heavy equipment and construction machinery, the Hastings Deering team have been involved in the manufacture of some incredible machinery throughout the business' history. Last year, the Hastings Deering team embarked on the restoration of a Beast Crane that was manufactured and used on HMAS Melbourne. The restoration project focused on repairing the crane to its former glory, and it has been a complex and extensive undertaking that required a high level of technical expertise and attention to detail.



The Beast crane used on Melbourne has a fascinating history, with a unique story surrounding the tractor that powered it. The tractor, which came from A.T. Osborne Ltd/County Tractor Spares Ltd in Hampshire, is a County FC654 – a forward controlled, four-wheel drive conversion of the Ford 5000 tractor. What makes the tractor used in The Beast a rare find is the Ford Select-O-Matic powershift transmission fitted to it.

The tractor is one of only three known FC654 tractors with this gearbox, making it a unique and valuable example. The Ford Select-O-Matic powershift transmission was an advanced gearbox for its time, offering ten forward speeds and two reverse speeds. Its quick and smooth gear changes made it a significant advantage when powering heavy equipment like the Beast crane. Its durability also made it ideal for use in tough and demanding conditions.

This particular tractor was built in mid-1967 by County Commercial Cars Ltd, the company that specialised in producing four-wheel drive conversions of Ford tractors, including the 654 and FC654 models. A crane attachment was then designed and fabricated by the Hastings Deering Group of Companies in Sydney in late 1967 for Melbourne.



The restoration project was conducted in stages, with the initial focus being on repairing the cab, structure, and frame of the crane. The team replaced the old and rusted-out panels and skin on the cab with new ones to give it a fresh and updated look.

One of the most significant challenges of the restoration project was dealing with the air system and brakes fitted for the crane attachment. The team rebuilt and re-plumbed the entire air system due to corrosion and certification requirements, and they fabricated new brake and air tubes to replace the corroded ones.

The team paid attention to the machine's electrical system, replacing any damaged or faulty components. The dash and cab interior were also restored, with repairs and replacements conducted where necessary to improve functionality and aesthetics.

The restoration project has been a remarkable achievement for Hastings Deering. The team's attention to detail and technical expertise has been critical in restoring the machine to its original state.

The restored Beast Crane serves as a testament to the expertise and dedication of the team at Hastings Deering.

ings Deering. The project has been a testament to the company's commitment to excellence and quality, and it will undoubtedly stand as a remarkable achievement in the company's history - no body rebuilds machinery like this better. See website [here](#).

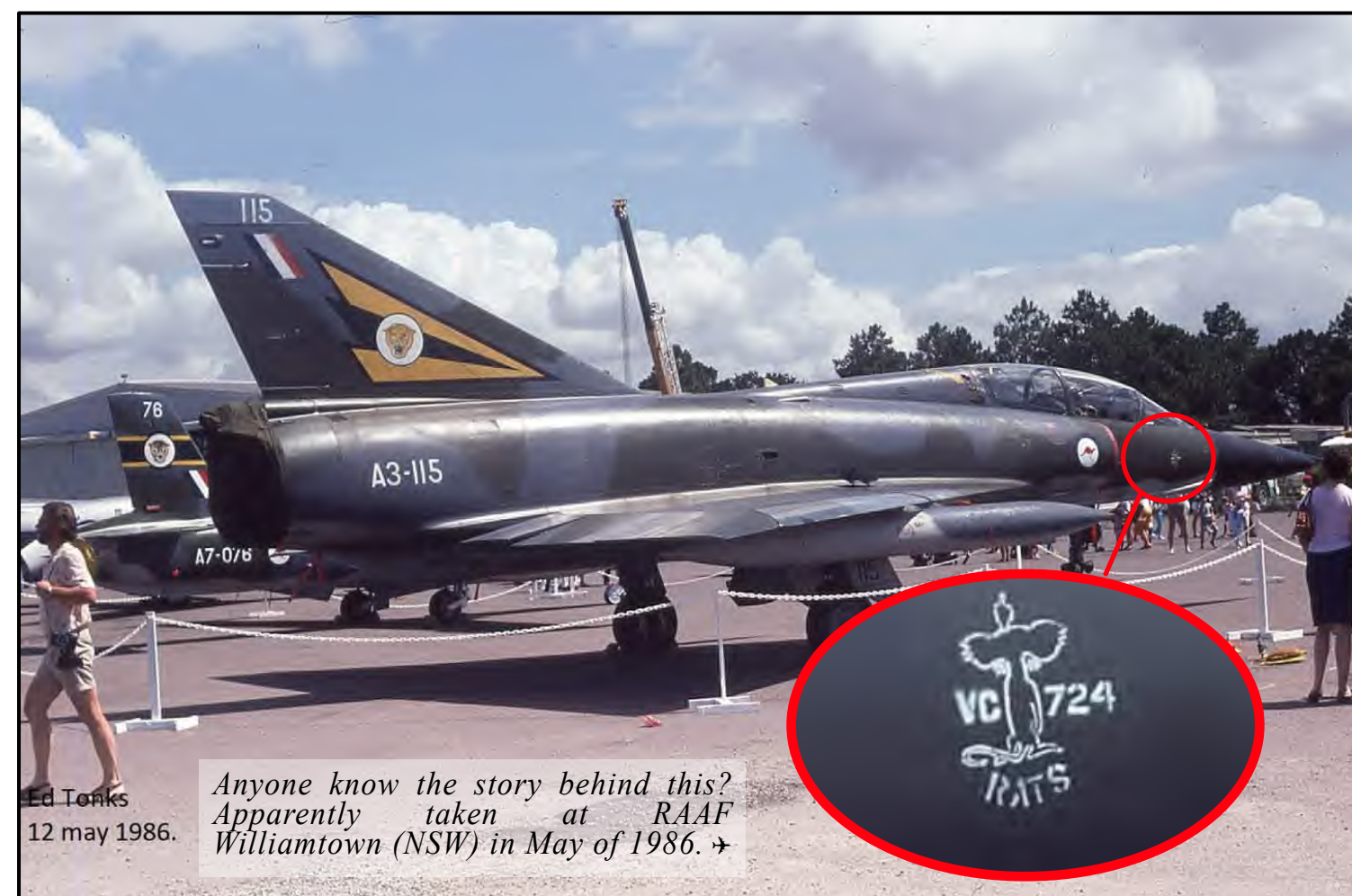
FlyBy asked Hastings-Deering what they intended to do with the crane and it seems they have yet to decide. It's looking as good as new, so perhaps it will go back to work somewhere.

The Beast is currently stored in Hastings Deering's heritage listed WW2 hangars at Archerfield.

With thanks to Ashley, from Hastings Deering. ➔

Changes in the Museum

We hear through the grapevine that "The Navy's Anchorage" (formerly the Canteen Fund) is relinquishing its interest in the Museum, which means the front shop will need a new agency to manage it. We also hear that the FAAM Manager, Stu Harwood, is retiring in August, so it looks like some changes are in the pipeline. We'll keep you informed. ➔



Anyone know the story behind this? Apparently taken at RAAF Williamtown (NSW) in May of 1986. ➔



Nothing to do with aviation, but this little snippet of history might be of general interest to our readers.

The Roman Emperor Caligula went down in history as a debauched megalomaniac who was said to engage in sadism, incest and excess. Some historians suggest this reputation might have been inflated somewhat, to justify his assassination only four years into the job. Whatever the truth, he was certainly a party animal.

For example, he launched extravagant pleasure barges on Lake Nemi, a body of water now in the metropolitan city of Rome.

In 1929, Mussolini, the dictator, obsessed with the legacy of ancient Rome, ordered the whole of Lake Nemi to be drained. Two vast shipwrecks were recovered in the basin, the largest of which was 240 feet long and steered by oars 36 feet long. Caligula's name is inscribed on lead remains on the ships.

Suetonius recalled the luxuries that ornamented the pleasure vessel: "Ten banks of oars... the poops of which blazed with jewels... filled with ample baths, galleries and saloons, and supplied with a great variety of vines and fruit trees." One can only imagine the hanky-panky that occurred aboard.

Who said that going to sea in the old days was rough? →

MISSING AFTER ACTION

Over the years we've whittled down the number of RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam (RANHfV) Vets whose whereabouts is not known, but five names remain on the list.

We're keen to find out where they are, or, if they are no longer with us, confirmation of their passing.

Can you help? Drop the Editor a quick email [here](#).

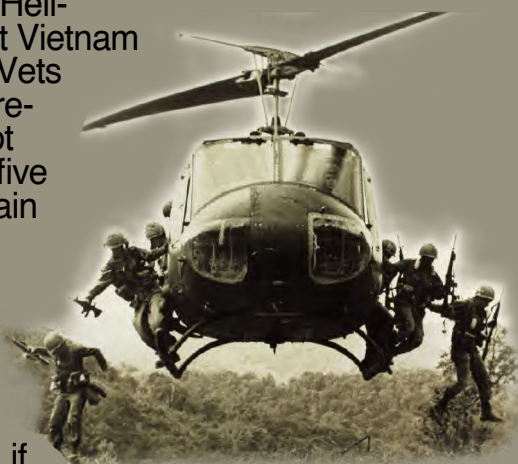
Mills, Francis John (3rd contingent).

Morris, Garrie David (3rd).

Terrell, Graham Victor (3rd).

Homer, Raymond Harold (1st).

Varley, David Nelson (1st). →



In the last edition of *FlyBy* we asked why three of the Navy's Bell 429s were painted in different livery, considering they were only in service for a relatively short time.

Graeme Kenderdine pointed us to the excellent [ADF Serials website](#), which explained they were actually Augusta 109E "Power" helicopters, four of which served from 2007 to 2012 and which did indeed come in different livery (see image left). The Bell 429 "Global Rangers" followed on, serving from 2012 to 2019, and were all painted Gull Grey.



Plaque Finds Home Outside FAAM

A plaque remembering the service and sacrifice of all those who served in the RAN Detachment of No.9 Squadron in Vietnam and the RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam has now found a permanent home outside the FAA Museum outside the gates of the Naval Air Station at Nowra. It is imposingly mounted under the 'Albatross' sculpture, as shown.

Thanks to **John Balazic**, who made it happen. →

Skyhawk Book Making Good Progress

A couple of weeks ago Avonmore books (the publisher) received the amended text file from the book's editor. The next step is for them to review this work and have photographs and captions incorporated into the draft.

The Graphic Artist is progressing with that task and will provide a digital PDF file for review. This will be done in collaboration with the authors, when final changes will be made prior to final proof-reads.

Once the publisher has a final page count a price can then be confirmed with the printer in Hong Kong and a place reserved in their production schedule. There are still a few unknowns but the book should be available for readers in the July-September period. We'll have a more specific ETA in a few weeks. →





Missing for 80 years

What happened to A34-47?

Shortly before 10.00 am on 17 Apr 43, Pilot Sergeant Doug Doyle, co-Pilot Sergeant Frank Doyle and their three passengers departed Mascot airport in A34-47, en-route to Forest Hill, NSW. The flight was expected to take 2 hrs 40 mins, with arrival at Wagga Wagga being anticipated at approx. 12.30 hours same date. The aircraft was to maintain an altitude of 3,000 ft.

The last positive sighting of the aircraft was made at 10.07 am by an observer at No. 18 Searchlight Battery. It was at about 2,000 ft, heading in a westerly direction, approx. 2 miles south of Prospect Reservoir, NSW. The spotter continued to observe the aircraft until it flew out of sight; (Many researchers believe this to be the last 'official' sighting of A34-47).

The last probable sighting of this aircraft was made by Catherine Adams, at Werombi (NSW). She reported an aircraft fitting the description of the Dragon, flying approx. 1.5 miles SE of Werombi, and heading in a southerly direction.

A34-47 and its five occupants were reported overdue on 17 April 1943. No attempt was made to search for the aircraft until 11.00 am the following day. A message later released by the RAAF provided that the aircraft was 'last seen in the vicinity of Goulburn'.

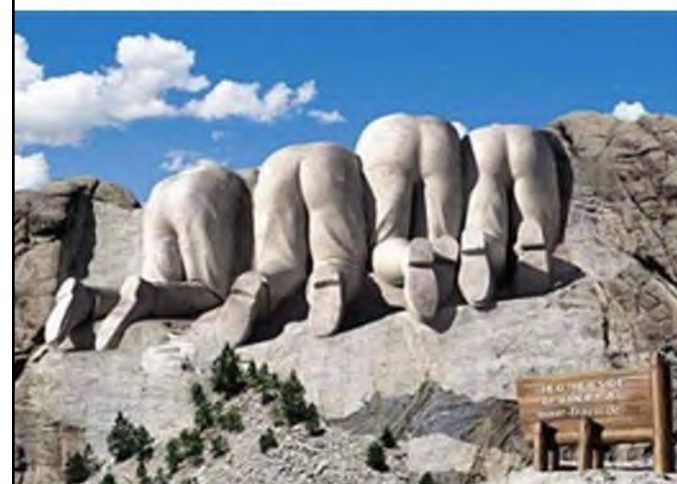
For the next three days a number of Anson aircraft from 73 Squadron and No. 3 Communication Flight conducted an intense aerial search of localities between Camden and Goulburn, including the Burratorang Valley and surrounding areas. These searches were hampered by poor weather conditions (i.e., storms and strong winds), and were

abandoned following the last search on 21 April 1943.

All five on board were declared "missing presumed killed". The 1943 Court of Inquiry found that severe engine vibrations had been reported five times, and on the previous day Sergeant Doyle had reported Magneto problems on both engines. On the morning of the flight Sergeant Doyle had requested a check of both engine magnetos, control wires and propeller bolts. The Aircraft had no radio and no parachutes were carried. →

Aviation Safety Network.
Painting by Peter Connor.

You know, there are some things that you just never think of like Mt. Rushmore from the Canadian side.



Phil Thompson sent in a little snippet which we'd not seen before. It was an email from Col Stubbs, who was one of the two lead hook men aboard HMAS Melbourne when Skyhawk 888 ditched back in May of 1979.

Col wrote:

"My name is Col Stubbs. I was hook man the day 888 went over after the cable broke under the deck, lucky to be here I guess.... A hook man is the silly bugger who runs out as the A/C has just touched down on deck. Timing is critical here, you would be ducking under the wing as it's still coming to a stop. The day 888 went in, everything seemed to go in slow motion as the A4 didn't stop where it normally would after catching the middle wire. My partner and I started our run as normal but, as we approached the A4 safety line we noticed something had gone wrong. We both came to a halt and watched in horror as the A4 continued past our point at a great rate of knots.

I remember the hook separating from the wire then this boom as LCDR Finan [USN exchange] ejected just before it went over the side. Meanwhile I managed to jump over the wire as it recoiled back down the deck. My partner was not so lucky, he wore it on the shins, knocked him flying. Luckily he did not suffer any major injuries. I remember standing there in a bit of shock as these green and orange pieces of paper came floating down. It was note paper from the pilot's legs, most probably from the NATOPS manual.

I remember Commodore Martin saying after the Skyhawk crash, 'Oh well we have just started our two week work up, we might not be able to fly fixed wing but we have plenty of helicopters to carry on with'. That lasted all of 5 hours. [then helo ditched]."

By Ed. The ditched helicopter was N16-908 captained by Vic Battese, which suffered a tail rotor failure as it came to the hover alongside the deck. Not a good day for the Fleet Air Arm. →





Ron Marsh, who keeps an Eagle Eye on Facebook for us, found this photo from the Aviation Historical Association site, courtesy Alan Flett. It has the following text:

"This was a chance visit to Mascot, 23rd November 1972 and I was surprised to see 2 S2E Trackers 'round the back' having just had some work done and being prepared for a return flight home to HMAS Albatross. A nearby friendly MIWO (Man In White Overalls) advised that they "had just had new underwing bomb racks fitted"? The Trackers, both from VS816, are N12-163605/850 and N12-153606/851. Anyone know what the mod was? ➔

Gannet XA350 only had a relatively short service life, cut short when an engine problem during relight caused it to ditch near Manus Island in March of 1963. The crew all made a safe recovery, having been rescued by canoes belonging to the local population. There was talk of the Gannet's canopy subsequently being seen atop a "GTI canoe" a little later, but aside from that, not much. But "[Pacific Wrecks](#)" is sporting a photo of the propeller shaft, complete with two rather bent props, leaning against a tree on Manus. Somebody went to a lot of trouble to recover the heavy item as a local sculpture. ➔



The King's cypher will feature on Royal Navy uniforms for the first time at His Majesty The King's Coronation. Most notably, the Crown of St Edward, used during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, will be replaced by the Tudor Crown as depicted above the cap badges to the left. Presumably, since the King remains our Head of State, RAN cap badges will follow suit in due course. ➔

Ribbons

As HMAS Sydney shaped course to celebrate the new Queen's coronation, she was laden with the ribbons of the men aboard her. Graeme Lunn takes a look at a few of the stories behind them.



Only seven years since the Japanese surrender, and with the war in Korea stalemating towards a mid-year armistice, it was not surprising that among the ship's company of Sydney heading for the Coronation Review in 1953 there were medal ribbons adorning most uniforms.

The Fleet Commander, Rear-Admiral John Eaton DSO DSC RN, had shifted his flag to Australia before Sydney's departure taking his Secretary, Commander (S) Ralph Lowe DSC with him. Ralph had been Supply Officer aboard Perth when she was sunk in the Battle of Sunda Strait in 1942. For rallying the survivors in the water, and later while slaving as POW's on the Burma-Thai Railway where so many died, Ralph had been decorated with a DSC in 1946.

Sydney's Commanding Officer for the Coronation Review was Captain Herbert Buchanan DSO MiD. A gunnery specialist, Herbert was awarded a DSO commanding the anti-aircraft destroyer Valentine in the Scheldt estuary supporting French troops and covering the evacuations from Antwerp between May 10th and May 15th, 1940. Hit by three bombs from attacking Stukas thirty-one of her crew were killed and twenty-one injured as Herbert beached his sinking ship. Immediately taking over command of the destroyer Vanity he received a Mention-in-Despatches two weeks later during the Dunkirk evacuations.

Also at Dunkirk had been Sydney's Executive Officer, Commander Ronald Robertson DSC MiD. Signals Officer aboard the destroyer Malcolm, Ronald received a DSC and several mentions for his services in recovering troops from the beach and the evacuations from the Hook of Holland.

Herbert had gone on to command Norman and then Napier as Senior Officer 7th Destroyer Flotilla,

which earned him another Mention. Napier was HQ ship for numerous landings in the Burma campaign between January and March 1945, and Herbert led the British Landing Force that secured Yokosuka Naval Arsenal on Tokyo Bay. Ronald meanwhile had won another Mention aboard Shropshire in the Lingayen battles when he calmly and quickly organised repairs to damaged signalling equipment during kamikaze attacks.

Wearing the bronze oak leaf on the ribbon of his 1939-1945 War Medal to indicate that he had been Mentioned-in-Despatches was Commander (Air) John Stenning (P) MiD RN. John had volunteered to extend his loan period to serve aboard Sydney after being Commander (Air) at Albatross since January 1951.

In a coincidence not unusual given the close association between the RN and the RAN, John had been piloting the aircraft from which Lieutenant (O) Victor Smith RAN led six Swordfish of 821 and 823 Squadrons in the historic first mass torpedo strike against a capital ship at sea. The daunting defensive fire put up by Scharnhorst and her screen of seven destroyers on June 21st, 1940, saw only four aircraft survive to fly safely away from their unsuccessful attack runs. In typical understatement Victor later described it as 'a rather frightening experience'. Both Victor and John received mentions for 'bravery when attacking the German Battle-Cruiser Scharnhorst'.

Sydney sailed from Melbourne on Tuesday, March 24th, in company with the RNZN cruiser Black Prince. To ensure sufficient room for the

Coronation Contingent only eight aircraft of 817 (Firefly) Squadron embarked. The Squadron mustered a meagre six pilots, including their CO and SP, so *Sydney's* Lieutenant-Commander (Flying) Daniel Buchanan was also assigned flying duties with 817, as was the Deck Landing Control Officer Lieutenant Andrew Hamilton RN. Although Daniel was wearing Korean ribbons they were not for carrier service but as a senior watch keeper in *Anzac* as she had, among other actions, escorted the carriers *Sicily* and *Glory* during operations off Korea's west coast

Daniel had joined the RNVR in World War Two and, after converting to Grumman Avengers in the USA, joined 857 Squadron aboard *Indomitable*. In late 1944 he participated in attacks against Sumatra before *Indomitable* joined the British Pacific Fleet in 1945, seeing the squadron striking as far north as Formosa. 857 had been disembarked to Nowra in July 1945 when the first RANVR (ex-RAAF) pilots carrier qualified aboard *Indomitable*.

Re-embarked shortly afterwards they flew the last combat strikes of the war against suicide boats in Hong Kong Harbour. Daniel, an early volunteer to the forming RAN FAA in 1948, famously became a 'reverse ace' in a single memorable day in March 1949. He was sadly fated to be killed flying a Vampire in 1956 when Commander (Air) at Albatross. You can read his story [here](#).

Sydney's Coronation Contingent numbered two hundred and forty-one personnel of the Australian services and one hundred from New Zealand who had assembled in Melbourne. All were especially chosen to be their Services' representatives at the Coronation ceremonies in June. The Light Horse Contingent had been training at the Police Depot stables at Southbank. Due to ride besides the Queen's coach and the Prime Ministers coach with drawn swords, the Hangar Control Officer would have been relieved when he heard that they were traveling without their mounts. Horses were to be borrowed from London's Metropolitan Police on arrival.

Leading the Naval Contingent was Lieutenant-Commander John Austin DSC. He had forty-one RAN, eleven RANR and three WRANs in his contingent. As a young Lieutenant John was awarded the DSC as a Gunnery Control Officer in *Shropshire* during the action against the battleship *Yamashiro*. After *Arunta* led two USN destroyers in a torpedo attack *Shropshire*

had joined the action and fired thirty-two broadsides from her eight 8" (203mm) guns.

The Naval contingent in *Sydney* were borne as ship supernumeraries subject to the normal carrier's daily routine and work. Both the Army and Air Force contingents asked that their men and women also take their share of ship's duties. On the long journey to England all worked part of ship, stood watches, took turns on the mess decks and went ashore with their leave parties in the various ports.

The New Zealand contingent included Maori officers and men as well as three Fijian soldiers and one Samoan. The Australian press published several articles critical of the lack of colour in the Australian ranks, especially the exclusion of Captain Reg Saunders. Reg had served in North Africa, Greece and Crete before becoming the first Aboriginal Australian commissioned in the Army. He served as a platoon officer in New Guinea where his younger brother had been KIA in the Kokoda campaign. Mobilised for the Korean War Reg had led C Company, 3 RAR, at the Battle of Kapyong.

The senior officer of the RAAF Contingent was Group Captain Keith Parsons DSO DFC AFC RAAF. Keith had survived 100 Lancaster missions and was a member of the Caterpillar Club having parachuted clear after a night mid-air collision over allied lines. But Keith's was not the only DFC ribbon worn onboard. The Air Force ribbon also adorned the naval uniform of three ship's officers and one CAG officer, reflecting the huge contribution ex-RAAF volunteers had made to the establishment of the RAN's Air Branch.

Sydney's Operations Officer, Lieutenant-Commander (O) Ronald Thomson DFC, had won his decoration as a Navigator with 625 (Lancaster)

Squadron RAF, while the Flight Deck Officer, Lieutenant-Commander (P) John Campbell DFC, had flown fighters from North Africa to Sicily with RAF squadrons and was decorated for operations in Borneo with 457 (Spitfire) Squadron RAAF. Joining the new Fleet Air Arm John had then flown Sea Furies with 808 Squadron over Korea. Lieutenant Gerard Riley (O) DFC, Photographic and Assistant Ops Officer, had won his decoration as a Pathfinder Navigator over Germany in 156 (Lancaster) Squadron RAF.

The final DFC was worn by the Commanding Officer of 817 Squadron, Lieutenant-Commander Albert 'Annie' Oakley DFC. A RAF Volunteer Reserve pilot with 254 (Beaufighter) Squadron RAF, Annie was decorated for anti-shipping strikes in 1944. Annie's Senior Pilot, Harold 'Jim' Bailey, was also a shipping strike specialist having received a Mention in 1944 flying with 8 (Beaufort) Squadron RAAF in the South West Pacific. The 'most outstanding strike pilot' of the *Sydney* CAG Jim was awarded a DSC in 1952 for his Korean service.

Amidst all the ribbons worn were four of dark blue with a simple silver cross in the middle. This was the ribbon for the George Cross, second only to the Victoria Cross and indicating exceptional gallantry not in the immediate presence of the enemy. At the new Queen's special invitation the Naval Contingent included four RANVR officers who had been decorated with the medal instituted by her father, King George VI, in 1940. These were Acting Lieutenant-Commanders John Mould GC GM, George Gosse GC and Leon Goldsworthy GC DSC GM, along with Lieutenant Hugh Syme GC GM*. As Australia's most decorated servicemen their awards had been for the extraordinary personal courage and high degree of skill under the most arduous of conditions during mine disposal work.

All received the Coronation Medal but in the Queens Birthday Honours List of June 1953 Captain Humpries was made a CBE. While the timing coincided with the Coronation Review it was in fact recognition of his previous service especially as Commodore Superintendent of Training at Flinders Naval Depot. In that role he had enlisted community support to found the White Ensign Club in Melbourne for sailors on leave.

When the Coronation Contingent disembarked in Portsmouth for Purbright army camp, and final intensive training for their Coronation procession duties, *Sydney* and 817 Squadron prepared for the Coronation Fleet Review and Flypast. →

The Coronation Medal

To mark the special occasion of her Coronation, the Queen awarded a personal souvenir medal to a range of people who had been involved in the occasion. This included members of the Royal Family, selected Officers of State, members of the Royal household, government officials, mayors, public servants and, importantly, members of the three Services of the United Kingdom and her Dominions. They were, for the most part, unnamed.



It was also awarded to members of the Mount Everest expedition, who had reached the summit four days before the Coronation. These were the only engraved medals, as they bore the words "Mount Everest Expedition" on the rim.

Members of HMAS *Sydney's* company would have worn their ribbons with pride. In the mid 50s, Britain was still very much regarded as "the mother country" and there was great pride in being a member of the Commonwealth, and having the Queen as Head of State. The death of King George VI just over a year earlier had been keenly felt, as demonstrated by an 817 Squadron Diary entry of the time, just as the ship was returning from Korea:

'It was a great shock to receive the news of the death of King George VI on February 6th. This had a profound effect on the colony at Hong Kong. Divisions were held on the morning of February 7th and a salute of guns was fired from the shore. The King's death meant the cancellation of the Royal Tour to Australia and a consequent change of programme for the ship...' →



The Coronation Cruise HMAS Sydney III

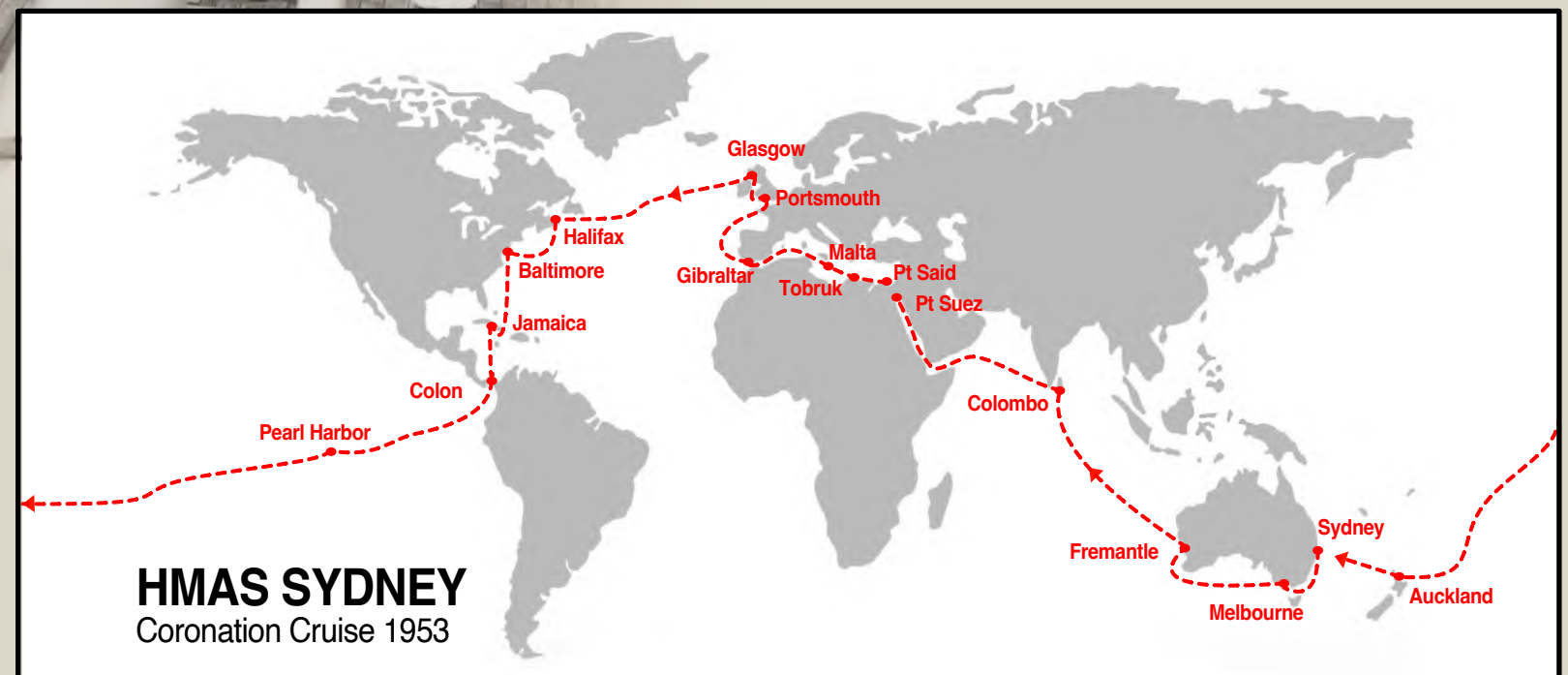
As the days count down to the Coronation of King Charles III we remember the Fleet Air Arm's role in a different event, seventy years ago.

“This spirit centering round our young and lovely Queen and released in a wave of unprecedented fervour during the Coronation, was Britain's declaration that her new Elizabethan Age was not just a catch cry to be taken up for a day and then cast aside, but is something vital, something which the people have sought, and something which, now they have found it, will inspire them to meet and overcome their problems with renewed vigour.”

The Journey

Every Dominion in the Commonwealth was swept up in the mood, and journeyed from far and wide to welcome the second Elizabethan Age. Australia was no exception.

HMAS Sydney and HMNZS Black Prince arrive at Melbourne early in 1953, the first port of call on their epic 30,000 mile around-the-world journey to celebrate the new Queen.



Snippets from the Cruise



At 0845 on April 4, an 817 Squadron firefly piloted by Sub-Lt Hayward with Lt Len Kenderdine as Observer departed SYDNEY apparently with this flight - laden with beer; on a goodwill mission to the Cocos-Keeling Islands, at that time a British dependency administered from Singapore [pursuant to British and Australian Acts of Parliament, the circle of atolls became Australian Territory on November 23, 1955, some 2-1/2 years after this photo was taken].

At 1100 hours the planes would depart Home Island for the 45 minute flight back to the carrier, laden with return gifts of coconuts and boxes of other island produce to carry them along their Coronation voyage. ➔

A bit of excitement during the visit to Ceylon, as reported in Sydney's Record of Proceedings. The sunken boat belonged to the Cylonese Navy and the rating in question must be congratulated on his rapid evaluation of the situation.

APPENDIX E.

"CUTTING FROM 'TIMES OF CEYLON' - 11TH APRIL, 1953.

PARTY GUESTS JUMPED TO SAFETY AS LAUNCH SANK.

NIGHT RESCUE DRAMA IN MID-HARBOUR.

A dramatic sea rescue rescue took place in the Colombo Harbour last night just 200 yards off the jetty.

The Ceylon Navy Captain's launch was bringing ashore ten guests, including two women, after a cocktail party aboard the Australian Aircraft-Carrier H.M.A.S. SYDNEY, when it sprang a leak and the engines failed.

The passengers were speculating on the cause of the engine failure when they noticed that water was seeping into the launch rapidly.

"It's sinking Sir", said a Ceylon Navy rating to an Officer onboard. Then the stern went completely under water.

The passengers hurried on to the bow and held on precariously to the railing. Then they shouted for help. Their cries of distress were heard by men in a launch from the "SYDNEY", which speeded to the rescue and drew alongside the sinking vessel. The ten passengers jumped to safety - first the women, then the men, it all happened so quickly that there was absolutely no panic.

29. On Monday 13th a talent quest on the flight deck under ideal conditions revealed some excellent performers in all three Services. First prize went to a Stoker Mechanic with an unusually clear and true falsetto voice but others were loudly acclaimed by a large audience.

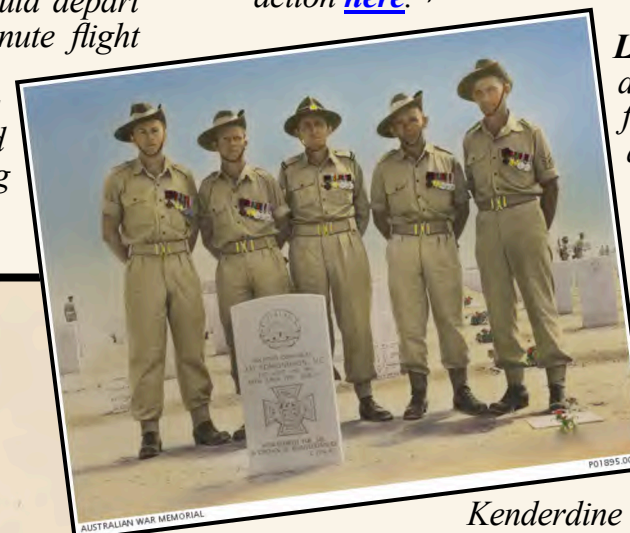
Who would have thought Stokers could have Falsetto Voices?

7. During the afternoon the ship passed close to the scene of the "SYDNEY" - "EMDEN" action but there is now no sign of the wreckage of the "EMDEN" on the reef.

The above entry is of special significance to HMAS Sydney III as it refers to an action by her great-grandmother, HMAS Sydney I, during which the German Raider "Emden" (right) was heavily damaged in an engagement and ran aground on a reef not far from the Cocos-Keeling Islands. The wreck remained visible for a few years but had evidently disappeared by 1953. You can read about the action [here](#). ➔



Left: The Army contingent aboard the ANZAC ships had four Victoria Cross recipients, as shown in the photo. They are, L-R, Private F.J. Partridge VC; Private E. Kenna; Sergeant J.D. Hinton VC (New Zealand); Private R. Kelliher VC and Sergeant R.R. Rattey VC. The five are standing behind the grave of Corporal J.H. Edmonson who was posthumously awarded the VC in 1941. ➔



Right: 23 April 1953. Sydney's Fireflies on the ground near Tobruk (Lt Len Kenderdine collection). Believed to be at El Adem, 17km south of Tobruk, a former Italian air base captured during WW2. The Vampires in the background are from the RAAF's 78 Squadron which also took part in the flypast of the Tobruk War Cemetery during the memorial service. ➔



Below. HMAS Sydney passing through one of the locks on the Panama Canal. She was too wide and various sponsons had to be removed prior to entering the waterway. **Bottom Right.** The Kangaroo, Kiwi and greeting "Aloha" presented a challenge for those organising this welcome as Sydney entered Auckland harbour to return her NZ contingent. ➔



The Parade

*A junior sailor remembers
the nine-hour wait for the
Queen to pass by Sydney's
Detachment.*

As HMAS Sydney steamed across the Bight, the traditional Naval Call came for volunteers to form a Street Lining Party for the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. "You, You, You and You!", a simple but effective way of getting 60 'Volunteers.'

Then hours and hours of hateful drill on the Flight Deck, together with some abuse from the Air Department and various others wishing to use the deck for work and play.

The Chief G.I. must have spent some sleepless nights, as the only places these boys had lined were the local bars back home and the rails of Flemington and Randwick.

At last the ship arrived at England and thoughts turned to wine, women and song, but how wrong can you be, as over to Whale Island we were herded daily, and started the first period of the dreaded "Standing Still Routine."

Finally we graduated from Whale Island and left the ship bound for Clapham Deep Shelter. Our stay there was to be short, so only the barest of essentials, those things that could safely be crammed into one cabin trunk sized suitcase, were carried.

Clapham Deep Shelter, as the name applies is an old wartime innovation situated in the subterranean depths (192 weary steps down and 192 more wearisome steps up). There was a lift of course, to be used only by the Staff and those officers too weak to walk. How we cursed the Staff as we arrived at the lift door in the expectation of getting a ride to the top, only to be thwarted by the slamming of the door and the whirring of the lift as it rose and left us for dead.

Despite these arduous climbs, no single incident was reported of a rating being so exhausted as to have to refuse his tot of rum. Those of us who knew the grog server (an R.P.O. who had spent 2 years



in the R.A.N.) noticed his hand invariably tremble in our favour as he carefully measured the tots.

Life was not all rum and steps however, as we formed up next morning and marched through the gaily decorated streets of Clapham to stand for an unflinching rainy hour in preparation for the big event. From mid-day onwards this day, the time was our own except of course for the several hours taken up in cleaning equipment and listening to speeches on the necessity for complete abstinence from moral laxity of any shape or form. Even if it killed us we solemnly promised to refrain from partaking of any form of liquid refreshment, our motto was to be "An empty bladder or bust."

And so the Coronation morning dawned—a typical English summer day—driving rain and biting winds, and with typical faultless organisation the Wild Colonial Boys found them selves with negative transport to take them to the forming up area on the Embankment. Then three red buses hove into view and we were off.

Once at the Embankment we were quickly under way marching through London via Trafalgar Square to The Mall to take up our Street Lining positions. The Commonwealth Battalion, consisting of three Platoons of the RAN, two from RNZN., one from RPN. and one from the Royal Ceylonese Navy, were given a warm welcome as we stepped out.

How the hell these people could even raise a cheer after living out on the pavement for 48 hours had us beaten, but there they were yelling and cheering like a crowd of Aussies at the Grand Final on the MCG, same type of weather too, but more so!!!

After 2½ hours of maintaining vigil the tumultuous cheers of the crowd heralded the approach of the Queen as she passed on her way from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey. As the Queen smiled and waved, each of us in the party thought "She's smiling at ME," and held ourselves even more erect.

Then the rain really set in and we felt the Blancoe drip from the edge of our caps on to the tip of the nose, where it ran in rivulets down our faces. But the English girls cannot see a sailor in distress, and soon they were mopping our weather beaten faces with dainty perfumed handkerchiefs. Under such conditions we would willingly have stood in the rain all day, which just proves that it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good:— Officers and Petty Officers don't use Blancoe.

It helped, too, to know that the crowd was aware of our discomfort as one wit started up with that old song "It Ain't Going To Rain No More, No More," and soon everyone between the age of eight and eighty were joining in.

With 4 hours of the long wait behind us and 5 still to go, it was with mixed feelings that we noticed that the crack English Regiment "The Brigade of Guards," trained to the peak for such an occasion, and resplendent in their scarlet tunics, busbies, and capes (repetition capes) were being relieved every 2 hours.

Then as laid down in the Admiralty Handbook on Street Lining—a pause was made for lunch. The lunch, to be eaten at the relaxed position of attention, consisted of two hard, dry, bread rolls, an apple and a piece of chocolate. One could not help but marvel at the foresight of the English people —faintly discernible on the bottom of each bread roll were the words "For use of Coronation Troops only—G. IV.R.—Coronation 1937—."

But even a Coronation Pageantry could not hush Nature's nagging call and so the now famous "Heads Drill" was carried out.

As the order went down the line 'Carry out Heads Drill,' the marker and each third man grounded arms, took a pace back, turned right or left as appropriate and marched smartly away, or, as smartly as may be expected of legs that are frozen stiff. As each man returned to his former position, wearing a relieved look and blushing furiously so the next man fell out to commune with Nature. At the end of this complicated manoeuvre the R.A.N. again stood, an unbroken line with an immense weight off its mind.

The tedium of the next three hours was some what relieved by several minor incidents:

Able Bodied Seaman Perkins, teetering on the brink of oblivion, saved by a timely draught

of brandy administered by a St. John Ambulance bearer, the personification of the re-birth of man. You could see it doing him good.

Then there was the case of the mad cyclist receiving the raucous cheers from the crowd as he sped madly up The Mall.

And of course the Gunnery Officer refusing at first to eat the malted milk tablets proffered by a sweet young Ambulance girl, and accepting only when he felt he was in danger of having them forced down his throat.

The announcer's voice over the loudspeakers describing the Queen's triumphant return to Buckingham Palace warned us that soon she would again pass our way.

Then for nearly an hour the Pageantry and Splendour that is the British Empire unfolded it self before our eyes and one felt that the 9 hour stand and the many days of drill were well worth while.

We were all sure that the Queen had had a much more trying day than us, but still remained as radiant as ever, and once again that smile and wave that seemed specially for me.

And so a Queen was crowned and our long day was nearly at an end.

Again these splendid English people rallied and to the strains of "Waltzing Matilda," "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows" and with three cheers for the Aussies ringing in our ears, we formed up to march away.

Our job was done—we hoped well done—and before us loomed the rosy prospect of a double tot of rum and six days' leave.

J. E. F. McKay, A/B. ➔

5. At 0730 the Naval Street Lining Parties, preceded by a Bluejacket Band moved off, the Commonwealth Battalion led by the R.A.N. Platoons proceeding up Northumberland Avenue, across Trafalgar Square and into the Mall. Here they took up their positions next to the Battalions of the Guards and opposite Admiralty Arch.

6. With one break of five minutes to visit the heads, the Platoons remained in position until about 1700. During this time, with the exception of ten minutes to consume a bag lunch, they were not permitted to move and were "at ease", at the "slope" or the "Present". The party remained without moving throughout, although for half the time exposed to a cold wind accompanied by rain. Some amelioration was provided by members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, who, moving unobtrusively at the rear of the ranks, massaged numb arms and wiped white cleaner from ratings' eyes. The bearing of every member of the Party was admirable and contrasted with that of the Guards, who moved about continuously.

7. On the passing of the Procession from the Abbey the Officers moved out into the centre of the Mall to form up their Platoons prior to marching off, but the cheering of a most appreciative crowd was too great, and it was not until about five minutes had passed that they could make themselves heard. As the Platoons marched off the cheering broke out afresh and together with the singing of "Waltzing Matilda" was most heartening to all concerned at the end of a trying and most memorable day.

The Fleet Review

With over 280 ships paraded at Spithead, HMAS Sydney was part of the greatest peacetime fleet ever assembled.

At 3.00pm on Monday 15th June 1953 the Despatch Vessel HMS *Surprise* (Cdr R A M Hennessey DSC RN) wearing the Royal Standard and preceded by custom by THV *Patria*, slipped from South Railway Jetty, HM Dockyard Portsmouth for the Solent; and at 3.30 pm to a thunderous gun salute from the ships at Spithead, she entered the review lines. There to greet the new Queen were 197 ships of the Royal Navy, 13 ships of Commonwealth navies, 16 ships of foreign navies, 51 merchant ships and auxiliaries and 4 RNLI lifeboats. The 9 lines of ships ranged from No Man's Land Fort in the east to the River Medina in the west (see next page). ➔

Top. HMS *Surprise*, bearing the Queen, passes between rows E and F of the assembled fleet. HMS *Eagle* is behind her, and HMAS *Sydney* just five ships to her starboard quarter (not yet visible).

The Royal Yacht *Britannia* had not yet been completed, so HMS *Surprise* was a substitute. Painted pale blue and with a glass enclosed platform for the Royal Party mounted where 'B' turret had been, she served her purpose well.

Painting by C E Turner (1883-1965). Watercolour.

Right: HMS *Surprise* approaches HMAS *Sydney* for inspection. ➔



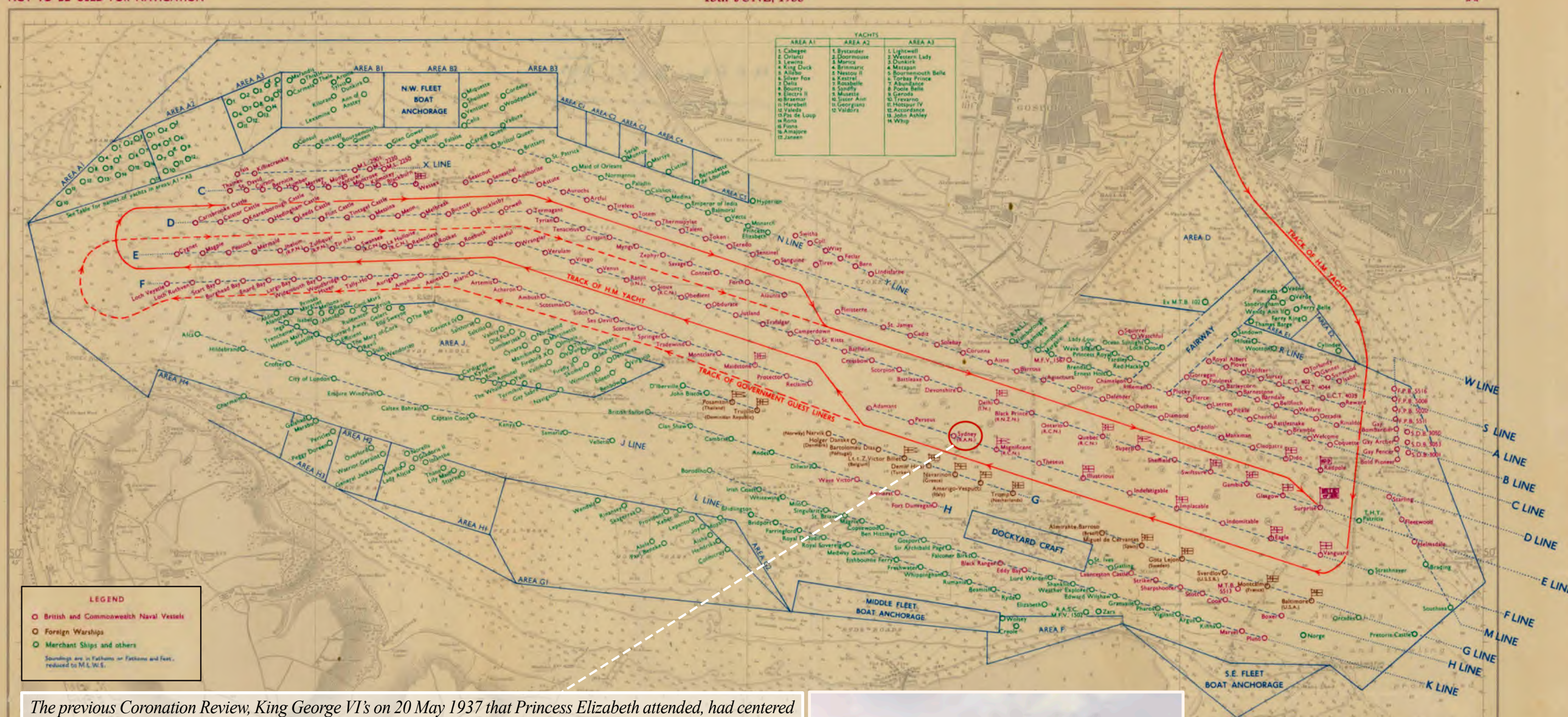
Top: After HMS *Surprise* (foreground) had anchored at around 1710, there was a flypast of naval aircraft from 42 squadrons comprising some 300 aircraft, which passed over her at 45 second intervals; and not just fixed-wing - a swarm of Westland Dragonflies, buzzing like angry insects, made their debut. As they receded into the distance, night fell and the watching thousands were treated to the spectacle of hundreds of dressed ships (**lower**), and a mammoth fireworks display. ➔

SPITHEAD

REVIEW OF THE FLEET BY HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

15th JUNE, 1953

NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION



The previous Coronation Review, King George VI's on 20 May 1937 that Princess Elizabeth attended, had centered on eleven battleships and battlecruisers. There had also been four aircraft carriers, all four having been constructed on converted hulls. Her Majesty's Coronation review in 1953 had but a single battleship in the review lines. Vanguard had seen no war service and her second-hand 15 inch guns had come from the Admiralty Armament reserve, where they had sat since being removed from the battlecruisers Courageous and Glorious when they acquired flat-tops in the 1920's.

A never-to-be-repeated 300+ naval aircraft from 42 Squadrons, including 817 Firefly Squadron off Sydney, participated in the Flypast. They overflew nine built-for-purpose fleet and light fleet carriers of the RN, RAN and RCN. The navy's fundamental shift towards air power occasioned by six years of World War and the ongoing conflict in Korea could not have been clearer. Graeme Lunn. ✈



Sea Venom Memories

(With a bit of Skyhawk)



By Clive Blennerhassett

On 02 November 1964 three fresh faced Acting Sub Lieutenants arrived at HMAS ALBATROSS straight off No. 51 Pilots Course at RAAF Pearce posted HMAS ALBATROSS (Additional) for No.5 Sea Venom OFS.

Unremarkable, you might say. But there was a bit more to it than that. Nearly two years previously, they had responded to a recruiting drive seeking Helicopter Aircrew to man the newly purchased Wessex. This was a consequence of a decision to cease fixed wing operations (this was the Mark 1 Version; Mark 2 was to come some 20 years later). All through their BATC training and up to about half way through their 1 BFTS course they were destined for helicopters. At the time Australian forces were involved with the Indonesian Confrontation and the powers that be decided HMAS Melbourne and the Fleet could not operate without dedicated air defence cover which could not be met from RAAF assets. So, fixed wing was back on the cooktop, but Navy was suffering from a serious lack of Sea Venom aircrew. Answer: change plans for some of the trainees on 51 Pilots' Course and send them on to RAAF Pearce for jet training and then to Nowra for Sea Venoms. Only four Navy trainees were remaining on course at that time so three were tapped on the shoulder for Pearce (Barrie Daly, Garrett Geerlings and myself) and one (John Wilkie) would continue as planned for helicopter training.

Before I start rabbiting on about my chosen subject I first need to mention a couple of things that always baffled me about RAN Sea Venom operations. The first is the apparent lack of available Sea Venoms available for flying duties. The RAN purchased 39 aircraft in 1955. My calculations show there were still about 27 left in the inventory near the end of 1964. Yet, it was always the case that we had difficulty in mustering more than about six fit for flying on a regular basis. I really had no idea where the remaining aircraft were and why they were not available.

The second mystery is the apparent lack of training of Sea Venom crews preceding our arrival. My research shows that No.2 OFS was in 1955. Presumably No.1 was in early 1955. I could not find course dates for 3 and 4 OFS but, having only two courses in the years 1956 to 1963 showed a marked lack of forward planning and explains the lack of crews when we came on the scene. I would also venture to say that the total number of crews trained over the entire Sea Venom operating years would be close to the number of Sea Venoms purchased in the first place. Compare this with the Skyhawk years where the number of crews far exceeded the number of aircraft available (except in the first year of course). I put this disparity down to the historical loss rate of aircraft in the straight deck era and therefore the system allowed for a lot of spare aircraft. The Sea Venom purchase and sub-

sequent crew training reflects this attitude but the loss rate was far less than expected (angled deck, you see) but crew training did not reflect this.

Anyway, back to my stories. It was interesting to note that, while we were on course at Pearce, Navy had posted three Wessex observers to 724 Squadron (Max Speedy, David Cronin and Guy Cooper) for Sea Venom AI 17 radar training in preparation for our arrival but they were never posted to No.5 OFS. Presumably, an OFS consisted purely of a Sea Venom conversion and not the more important air intercept training that followed. Or it was a Posting oversight (more likely).

On arrival at 724 Squadron, LEUT Bob Muffet was assigned as our course officer and he arranged for instructors to teach us the appropriate stuff. LEUT Neil (Limpy) Louer was assigned to aircraft systems and boy, was he thorough. His own knowledge and that of the maintainers he called upon was simply encyclopaedic. We walked away from that instruction with a new-found knowledge that would stand us in good stead for the future.

My first Sea Venom flight was on 24 November 1964 and it was an embarrassing start. The only thing that Limpy had forgotten to mention was the location of the Starter Button. Obviously, it had to be located in a position that would preclude accidental actuation and in this case the designer exceeded the brief. I could not find it so I asked the maintainer looking after me whether he could advise me. No luck! Eventually a PO was found that was qualified for engine runs who gave me the hot word. The button was located behind the instrument panel and you had to reach under the panel, lift up the safety panel with the index finger and then press the button towards you. Jesus wept!!

Less than two weeks later, Sub Lieutenant Gerrit Geerlings was tragically killed when he was caught in the dreaded Runway 26 down-draught while doing circuits. We were both in the circuit at the time and we had been briefed to do a couple of practice hydraulic failure landings.

The Venom had hydraulic ailerons and these could be disconnected in the event of a hydraulic problem. The aileron control became very heavy in manual mode and there was a special screw located on the stick below the trigger which increased the mechanical advantage by adjusting a lever but the range of aileron movement was correspondingly reduced.

A practice hydraulic failure landing involved a no flaps, manual aileron, no speed brakes and a long approach. While on the ground during the touch and go, the aileron could be set back to normal and the sortie could continue as required. There was a strong gusty westerly blowing at the time (not unusual at ALBATROSS) and unfortunately Gerrit was caught in the downdraft late in his flapless landing. I witnessed the whole event and it was a bit traumatic to have to land over the still burning site afterwards. No counselling in those days!! Even less for his family I might add.

The number of serious accidents arising from the RW26 downdraft eventually prompted Navy to fill in the gully short of the threshold using material from the hill at the other end of the runway. I am sure there are many of us remember those months and months of trucks carting fill on a purpose-built road south of RW26. Truckies heaven! The remnants of that road can still be faintly seen on Google Earth.

I must mention that the Skyhawk had a similar aileron system to the Venom. The difference was

Below. Sub Lieutenant Gerrit Geerlings' Sea Venom shrouded in foam after striking the ground on approach to runway 26 in December 1964. You can read about him [here](#). →





that once the ailerons had been disconnected there was no turning back. Reconnection had to be done on the ground by maintenance. Another drawback to the Skyhawk system was there was no aileron trim when in the manual mode. Consequently, if the aileron was badly rigged, for example, and a hydraulic failure occurred, the pilot had to fight both the load of handraulic ailerons and an out-of-trim condition.

To counter this, a post-Progressive Aircraft Rework (PAR) test flight, normally done out of QANTAS in Sydney, called for the test after completing the flight test, to disconnect the ailerons with hands off the pole and time how long it took for the aircraft to roll left or right through 30° (I think). The aircraft would recover back to QANTAS which caused a complete embuggerance to Sydney ATC as the long approach required for a manual hydraulic landing caused delays in the system. Once the aircraft was on the ground and if the timed roll period was out of specs, the maintainers would use some magic formula to adjust the fixed tab on the right (?) aileron. Another quick test flight was required and if the roll was within specs, the pilot would proceed to ALBATROSS. If out of spec, it was back to QANTAS to do it all again. Sydney ATC did not like Skyhawk test flights.

Back to the Venom. I felt very comfortable flying this aircraft. It felt right and it had, in retrospect, some endearing qualities not present in the far more capable A4G. The brakes, for instance. A4G brakes were an abomination. They were foot powered (no hydraulic power to help here), so A4G pilots had the strongest toes and calf muscles in the aviation world. There was no park brake, making long delays during taxi a nightmare. No wonder they fitted later models (including the A4G) with nosewheel steering which alleviated the problem quite a bit.

The Venom, however, had magnificent brakes. They were powered and had the maxaret anti-skid system. And...the Venom had a park brake! The brakes were hand controlled, using a lever just like a bicycle brake, mounted vertically on the upper left side of the pole. Differential braking was achieved by using rudder. Landing ashore, if one desired a short landing in a hurry to get to the bar, you simply squeezed the handle as hard as you could until the aircraft slowed to the desired speed. No blown tyres, no black rubber, just a smooth, but quick, stop. Looovely!

The Navy Vampire, however, was a different matter. Unlike it's RAAF counterpart (and what we

had been trained on) Navy's Vampire had air operated brakes using a similar control system to the Venom. Unfortunately, these brakes were very sensitive and there was no anti-skid. Consequently, blow-outs were not uncommon, and early in our ALBATROSS days the CO (Alex Ignatief) issued a decree to the effect that anyone blowing a tyre would have to walk back to the hangar and accompany the maintainers back to the aircraft to assist in replacing the blown tyre. This decree did not last long as the first post-decree offender was the CO himself! I vaguely recall a similar decree applying to Skyhawks, with shutting down the engine by retarding the throttle past the idle detent on landing being the designated crime.

The Venom had a self contained starting system, using a large cartridge for engine windup and a battery for the electric side of things. This was a godsend on land-aways, not that we did many of those. The A4G did not have a self-start capability which in my opinion was a serious design lapse. I understand that some Skyhawks currently in use as civilian defence support aircraft in the USA have been converted to internal start. Despite guidance that Venoms should be faced into wind for starting, this practice was never followed and I do not recall ever having to use a second cartridge to get started. Two cartridges in the starter and spares stored in racks in the flap bays was more than enough.

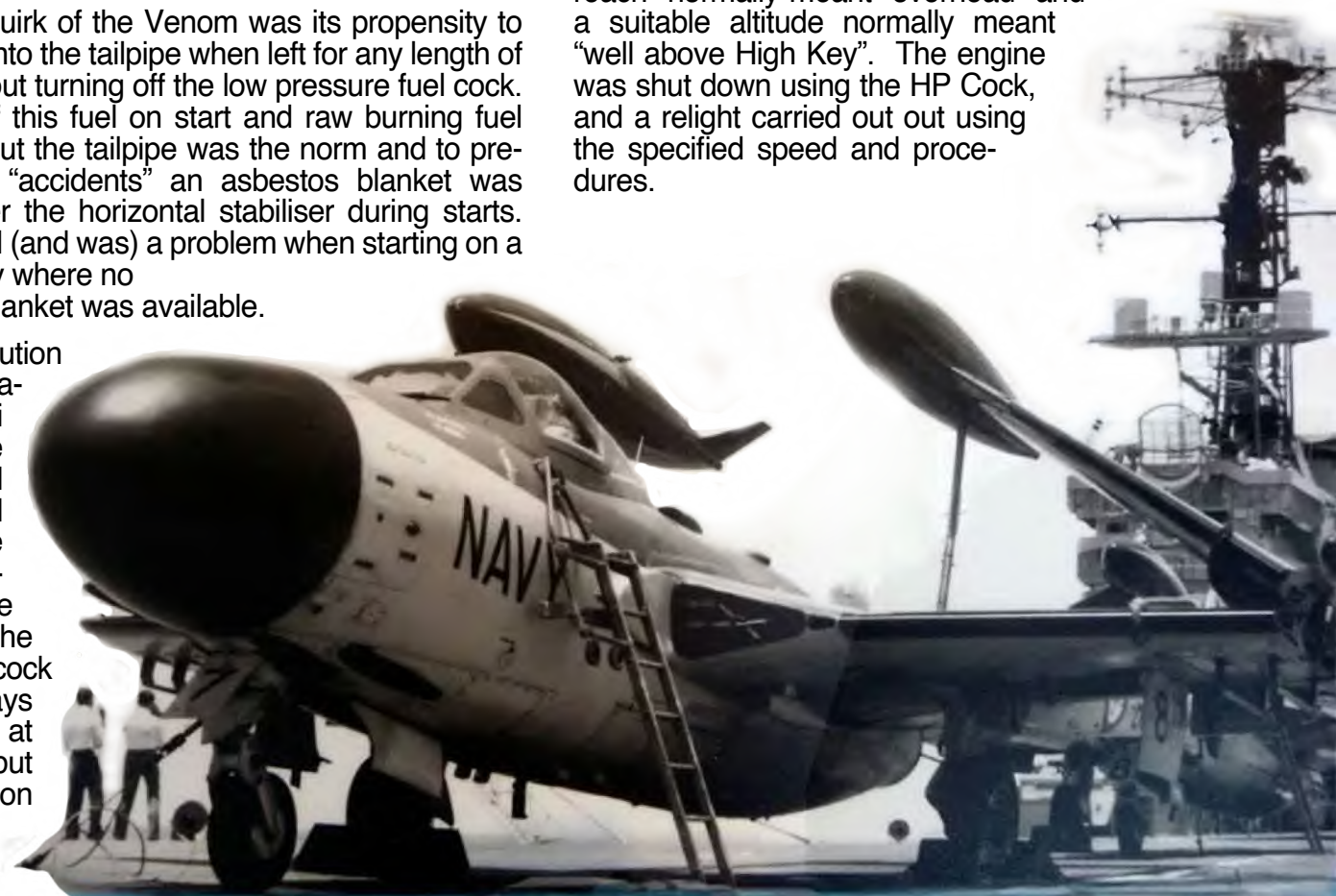
Another quirk of the Venom was its propensity to leak fuel into the tailpipe when left for any length of time without turning off the low pressure fuel cock. Ignition of this fuel on start and raw burning fuel dripping out the tailpipe was the norm and to prevent any "accidents" an asbestos blanket was slung over the horizontal stabiliser during starts. This could (and was) a problem when starting on a land-away where no security blanket was available.

The solution was to casually taxi out of the affected area and leave the fire problem to the hosts. The LP fuel cock was always turned off at sea, but leaving it on

was the norm ashore. I don't know why (laziness?).

One feature of the Sea Venom that is never mentioned in articles and stories about the aircraft is that intentional spins were permitted. It may come as a surprise to many that the first time Navy pilots experienced a deliberate spin in a jet aircraft was solo, in a Sea Venom. Spinning was not permitted in Vampires. Needless to say, we read up on spin recoveries prior to the first authorised spin flight. Recovery was straight forward and immediate with no nasty trends. Test flights after major servicing required a spin in both directions. I am willing to bet that no other front line jet aircraft serving with the Australian Defence Forces was authorised for spinning. Back then, and now. Being spin-capable is an important capability for a fighter. As many Air Combat Manoeuvres (ACM) end up in slow and low situation, the capability for pilots to recognise and be comfortable at such low high AoA situations is an asset. Macchi spinning provided a later capability for the Skyhawk (and the RAAF)

I was talking about Sea Venom test flights earlier. One of the tests carried out would horrify the purists amongst us today. This involved voluntarily shutting down the (only) engine in flight and effecting an air start. At the end of the test flight one would climb to a suitable altitude and position the aircraft within "easy reach" of the airfield. "Easy reach" normally meant "overhead" and a suitable altitude normally meant "well above High Key". The engine was shut down using the HP Cock, and a relight carried out using the specified speed and procedures.





Above: Clive Blennerhassett's Venom incident in April '65 when the port mainwheel remained locked up requiring a two-wheel landing. The fault was later traced to a broken torque tube which prevented the port undercarriage door from opening. ➔

Relight was pretty much instantaneous and a normal recovery made to base, after, of course, ticking the relight entry as "Successful" in the test report. To my knowledge no other entry other than "Successful" was ever used!

Continuing discussing the comparisons between the Venom and A4G I come to the issues of gunsights. Now, I understand the two aircraft were initially designed for vastly different roles and that fact explains the gunsight difference. The Venom was a fighter from the start and the Poms had gyro gunsights down to a fine art. The A4G had a fixed, but adjustable, gunsight that was next to useless for anything air to air. However, the aircraft was purchased as a Fleet defence fighter and I would have thought the retrofitting of a suitable gunsight to reflect this role would not have been an undue expense. After all, the Kiwis did it!

The Venom gunsight, by comparison, was a work of art for its age. Not only did it have ranging through a twist throttle arrangement it also had radar ranging when the observer had a radar lock on and the collimator was swung into place in from of the gunsight. This not only gave radar ranging, it also gave the A scope picture superimposed on the gunsight so the pilot could follow the target's movements without instructions from the observer.

I must add at this point that the once your observer achieved a lock-on it was almost the equivalent of a pokey jackpot. We never tired of it. As an aside it was generally understood that the radar would break lock if the guns were fired. As that event never occurred in my time I cannot attest to the truthfulness of it. I think it is probably true, but by the time the radar breaks lock the target, hopefully, would have a few rounds of 20mm up his arse!

The Sea Venom was a solid and reliable aircraft built to Admiralty Specifications (will work 900 feet underwater). I did have the odd emergency during my time. One of them was early in the OFS (5 April 1965), before we started Air Intercept training. I was tasked to do a sortie involving gyro gunsight simulated attacks on my leader (Bob Muffett with Barrie Daly as his passenger). On return to ALBATROSS my port main gear remained locked up and a two wheel landing would be required. Bob landed first to get out of the way and I prepared for a hairy landing. To my eternal shame, my base call was 'three wheels and a hook'!!! I was obviously a bit flustered at the time.

Anyway I put it down on the piano keys as every Naval pilot does (irrespective of runway length) and to my surprise, kept the port wing off the ground all the way down to about 50kts. In those

days a chain style arrestor gear was located well down the runway to catch the odd errant aircraft. I just made it to the arrestor wire which I picked up with my hook just as the aircraft left the runway to port. I had been keeping the aircraft straight (or tried to) with brake but as I left the runway I noticed all the emergency vehicles parked on the port side of the runway right in front of me. I let go the brakes and the aircraft spun to the left and stopped quickly (200 tons of anchor cable helped).

Undoing my harness, I leapt out, only to have to climb back in and undo my emergency oxygen. An Iroquois was sitting there ready to take me to wherever I needed to go – back to the squadron was my preference. That was not to be. For some reason I was carted back to 723, then I had to walk to the tower to see Wings and then walk back to the Squadron. A lot of walking for someone who had just had a prang! No sympathy from anyone. That aircraft had not finished with us though. I heard later that a broken door unlock torque tube was the cause of the failure and a maintainer suffered a serious hand injury when they were trying to unlock the door.

There was one facility at ALBATROSS that very few people, other than Venom crews, knew about. That was the Night Vision school, located in a nondescript fibro hut next to the old sick bay. As far as I know, it was used once during my whole time in aviation and that was during our OFS. We rocked up for the course, got a lecture from the SMO on the Mark1 eyeball, cones, rods and all that stuff and then got some unforgettable instruction and tips on how to see at night. The lights were turned down and a little display of fairy lights appeared along with various models of aircraft and other structures. The lights were turned off and the fairy lights slowly dimmed to the point where they could not be seen and then we applied the lessons we had just learned.

It was amazing just how much you can see using the correct procedures. This new-found knowledge proved invaluable later in the OFS during night intercepts. What happened to the school I have no idea but no doubt it was bulldozed along with everything else. Think of the wonderful display it would have made in the FAA Museum.

Finally, I ask the question: *What was the date the first time an RAN aircraft landed on HMAS Melbourne in Australian waters?* What type of aircraft was it and who were the crew? It seems to me to be a very significant event that does not seem to have been recorded. The present history seems to end with the aircraft being offloaded in JB and moved to ALBATROSS. That was probably the start of a fairly long process which also does not seem to be recorded. Were all of them unpacked,

test flown and put into service? Or what? How long did it take? Endless questions which culminate in the first flight to the carrier. ➔



Above: L-R. Sub Lieutenants Gerrit Geerlings, Barrie Daly and Clive Blennerhassett in early 1964, in front of a Venom. ➔

About the Author

Originally from the WA Wheatbelt town of Moora, Clive Blennerhassett completed his Leaving Certificate at John Curtin High School, East Fremantle and served 12 months as an apprentice pharmacist before joining No 1 Basic Aircrew Training Course at HMAS Cerberus in April '63, in response to a drive for Wessex helicopter aircrew.



After selection for pilot training he went to Point Cook for No. 51 Pilots' Course and then later to Pearce for Vampire training. Arriving at HMAS Albatross in November 1964 he undertook No. 5 Sea Venom OFS and subsequently posted to 816 "B" Flight on board HMAS Melbourne. He was subsequently selected for the first Skyhawk course and on completion served on VF 805 on its first sea deployment. His career path from then on was pretty much a mixture of sea and shore postings, including as a QFI at Pearce and Nowra, Bridge watch-keeping training (HMAS Vendetta), Senior Pilot VC 724, Naval Operations Officer at AJWE (RAAF Williamtown), CO VC 724, CO VF 805 (where he ejected after catapult launch), Operations Officer NOCWA, XO HMAS Leeuwin, Deputy Commander NAVCOMSTA Harold E.Holt, Director of Navy Recruiting, Deputy, then Director Facilities Planning Navy and acted as the DG Naval Facilities and finally as the Project Officer HQ Australian Theatre. He paid off in 1998 and has enjoyed retired life ever since, in Canberra. ➔

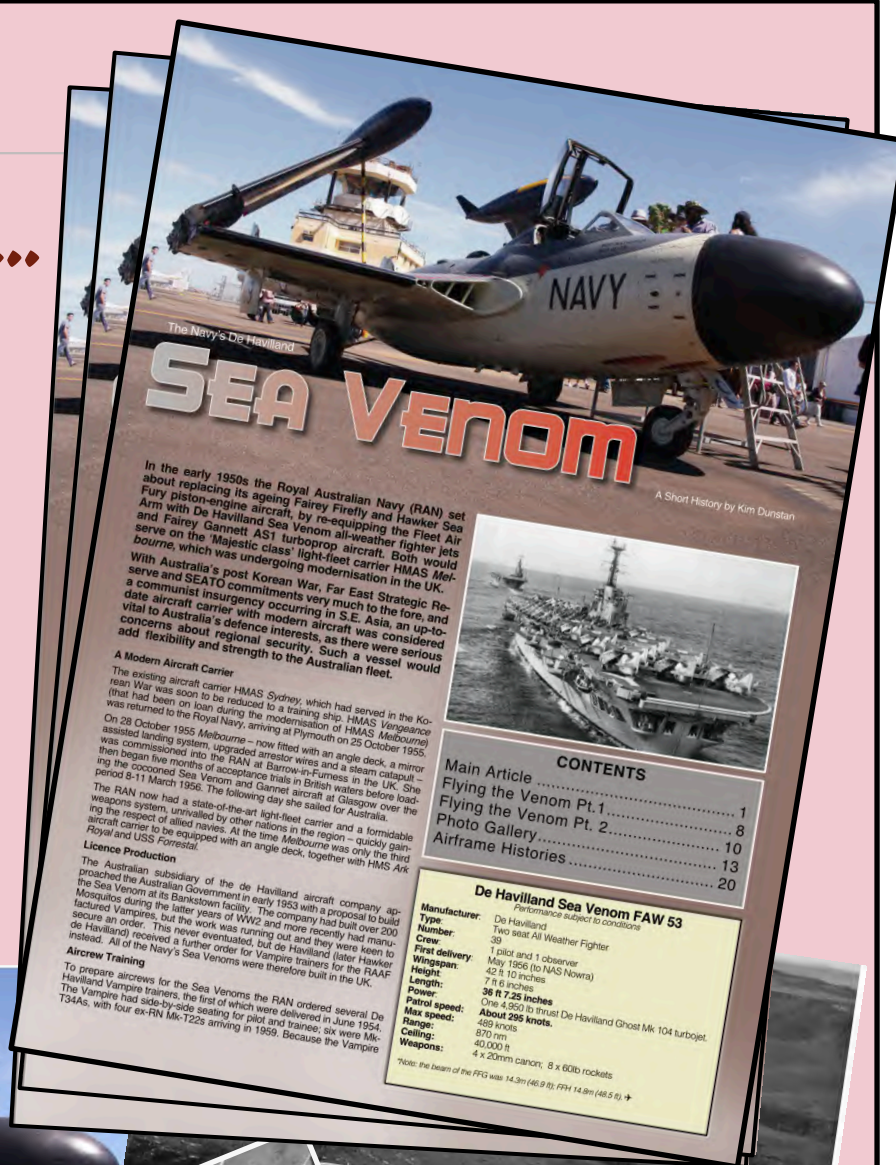
But wait! There's more...

If you enjoyed reading Clive's article on Flying the Sea Venom, why not check out the completely refurbished RAN Sea Venom Heritage pages on our website?

Telling the full story of this iconic aircraft, the article contains dozens of photographs as well as first-hand accounts of operating the Venom on good days and not-so-good. It also contains a complete list of airframes, and what happened to them.

The article is entirely free and can be accessed by simply clicking on the red button below. ➔

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Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 083 961

Account: 3108 23 774.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA VIC Division, PO Box 2179 RMH Post Office, PARKVILLE 3050. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

SA DIVISION

Amount: If you receive 'Hard Copy' Slipstream - \$49.00. If you receive Electronic Slipstream - \$37.00

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 065 118

Account: 009 05 668.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA SA Division, 6 Somerset Avenue, CUMBERLAND PARK, SA 5041. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

TAS DIVISION

Amount: \$35.00 per annum.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 037 013

Account: 133 119.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA TAS Division, 7 Danbury Drive, LEGANA 7277. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

WA DIVISION has declined to publish its payment details. If you have any queries please contact the Secretary, Jim Bush.

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