SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

Defence Emblems Wear New Crown

Original article from CONTACT Magazine; abridged by Editor

Defence has begun updating digital images, brand marks and logos bearing Queen Elizabeth II's St Edward's Crown after service chiefs approved new versions featuring King Charles III's Tudor Crown. The new pattern comes into effect from August 1. Digital uses, including website, intranet pages, social media platforms, Microsoft Office templates, Outlook signatures and brand guidelines, will be among the first to be updated.

The rollout will occur in phases across Defence groups and services, aligning with the King's wish to avoid unnecessary expenditure. Uniform updates will occur gradually, as stock runs out and opportunities arise, and will be aligned with the evolving design for each uniform type. Most units are expected to receive the updated branding within the year. The last change to Defence's royal symbol occurred in 1952, following Queen Elizabeth II's accession, with the St Edward's Crown incorporated into Navy's Ceremonial Badge on December 3, 1957.

For the first time, a full suite of Adobe InDesign templates is available to graphic designers and multimedia technicians.

Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, approved the new CIIIR pattern of the Royal Australian Air Force badge

Former Royal Australian Air Force badge

Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, approved the new CIIIR (Charles III Rex) pattern of the Royal Australian Air Force badge, featuring the Tudor Crown. Air Force is also bringing its badges into the 21st century by redrawing each as digital-by-design. Some important corrections have been made, including a new rendering of the national floral emblem – modelled

on the Governor-General's cypher – and a return to the monumental style of typeface used in the sovereign-approved badge of 1939.

Some units are expected to receive updated badges this year, including those participating in the upcoming Richmond Air Show. Officers' Training School will also be an early change, coinciding with the presentation of new colours. Badges for inactive units will continue to reflect the pattern in use at the time of disbanding.

Humanitarian Ops Commemorated at AWM Canberra: 50th Anniversary of Deployment of HQRIC Det 'S' to South Vietnam 1975

From Col Coyne, 37SQN (RAAF) Association President

On Wednesday 23 July 2025 the No 37 Squadron [RAAF] Association, in collaboration with the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, held an event to commemorate the 50th Anniversary since HQRIC Det 'S', which incorporated Operation Babylift, deployed to Southern Vietnam. The deployment was the Australian Government response to the evolving humanitarian crisis as the North Vietnamese Army moved towards Saigon which fell to communist forces on 30 April 1975.

The ceremony at the AWM was opened by Ms Emily Hyles, the AWM C-130 Curator, Mr Matt Anderson, PSM who welcomed approximately 150 attendees around the Pool of Reflection in the AWM forecourt on a cool Canberra morning of $+5^0$C. Dignitaries attending included The Hon Darren Chester MP; ACM (Ret'd) Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC; AIRMSHL Darren Goldie CSC (Retd); AVM Nic Hogan, Head of Air Force Capability, representing CDF and CAF; and AVM (Ret'd) Roxley McLennan AO, former CO37SQN/Defence Attaché London/CDRIADS/DCAF/ Patron 37SQN [RAAF] Association; CDRAMG, AIRCDRE Brad Clarke; CO 36SQN, WGCDR Rob Krupinski; and CO 37SQN, WGCDR Dianne Bell.

Representatives from Royal Thai Embassy, Defence Attaché France, Defence Attaché NZ, and staff from the AF History & Heritage Branch were also in attendance. Following on from the AWM ceremony, the 37SQN (RAAF) Association hosted a commemorative plaque dedication at the RAAF Memorial Grove at Majura, ACT. The original plaque, previously dedicated in 2016, was removed and refurbished and reinstalled on a sandstone plinth, unveiled by 37SQN Association Patron AVM (Retd) Roxley McLennan AO and Association President, Col Coyne, a former C-130E Loadmaster at 37SQN. Chaplain Dennis Park rededicated the 'old' plaque then proceeded with the consecration of a 'new' plaque dedicated to the aircrew, maintenance personnel, Airfield Defence Guards, Nurses, nuns and support staff who contributed to HQRIC Det 'S' and Operation Babylift in Southern Vietnam March/April 1975. This new plaque was unveiled by CO 36 Squadron WGCDR Rob Krupinski and CO 37SQN WGCDR Dianne Bell.

One of the adoptees, Dominic Golding, displayed his appreciation for the uplift from Saigon by C-130 with a tattoo on his forearm depicting the year 75 over the profile of a C-130 Hercules which he was proud to show to 36SQN CO WGCDR Rob Krupinski, 37SQN CO WGCDR Dianne Bell and AWM RAAF Representative WGCDR 'Gus' Garside.

A bit of background information; a total of 271 orphans were evacuated from Saigon to Bangkok, where they were uplifted by QANTAS B-747 charter flight to Sydney on 4th April and QANTAS B-707 to Melbourne on 17th April 1975. The children, ranging in age from 3 days to approximately 10 years, had no knowledge of the other orphans who flew out on the same aircraft but their documentation revealed the date each arrived in Australia, therefore providing a link between the flight dates and orphans on each of the C-130/QANTAS charter flights in April 1975.

Some of the adoptees at the Majura plaque dedication.

After the plaque dedication approximately 120 attendees gathered at the Mercure Hotel Braddon ACT, which provided a venue for the RAAF personnel involved with HQRIC Det 'S' to meet with the orphans and their family members in what was a very emotional day for all the attendees. The primary purpose of the gathering at the Mercure Hotel, Braddon ACT was to enable those orphans to meet with the RAAF and QANTAS aircrew involved with these mercy missions in April 1975. Additional HQRIC Det 'S' participants including maintenance personnel, former RAAF Nursing Officers and air movements personnel travelled to Canberra to attend these commemorative events.

Former RAAF Nursing Officer Val Lawrence.

Representatives from various Vietnamese communities and/or organisations included Dr Indigo Willing [Co-founder Adopted Vietnamese International (AVI) network], Ms Tammy Nguyen [CEO Vietnamese Museum Australia], Sr Mary-anne Duigan [Sisters of Mercy] and Liz Allwood [Aus Nurses Memorial Centre]. All enjoyed a convivial afternoon mingling with the adoptees, RAAF personnel and QANTAS Charter flight aircrew.

Correction to Last Issue of SITREP

From Simon Ford GPCAPT (Ret'd)

I would like to point out (maybe to the author) a couple of errors in an article in the recent SITREP Issue 33 named: *Vietnam: 9 SQN Royal Australian Airforce*

I refer to the description of the Dust Off in the 'Long Hai Hills' (we called them 'mountains') on 17 April 1971. The statement 'FLGOFF Tony Ford had been burned on the face and hands' is incorrect. Tony Ford did not fly choppers in Vietnam…it was his younger brother Simon Ford.

More controversially, the statement (ironically one of the dead was the legless soldier for whom this had all started) is incorrect. Being directly involved, and subject of the same dust off, I can assure the author that the South Vietnamese troop was alive when loaded onto the aircraft and again was alive at the 'Army hospital at Vung Tau'. Indeed in 2011, I visited Vietnam and hunted down the gentleman (in a wheel chair with no lower legs) and had a cup of tea with him!!! I say 'more controversially' because official war documents actually state that the guy was killed by the land mine. I tried to get these records changed many years ago…with no success!

Iconic 'Lucky' Bomber G For George Returns to the Australian War Memorial

From www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-31/Iconic 'lucky' bomber G for George returns to the Australian War Memorial - ABC News, by Monte Bovill, abridged by Editor

The iconic Lancaster bomber G for George is back at its home at the Australian War Memorial

The fuselage of an iconic World War Two Lancaster bomber believed to be lucky has been returned to the Australian War Memorial (AWM). G for George is one of the memorial's most beloved and well-known exhibits and has been in storage for the past five years while the memorial underwent significant redevelopment.

Hundreds of people lined Anzac Parade in Canberra to see the aircraft's fuselage return to the memorial under police escort. The aircraft will now be reassembled to return to public display. Murray Vogt's father Brian flew with 460 Squadron, of which G for George was a part, in WWII.

In honour of his father's service, Murray turned out to watch G for George drive by. 'It reminds us of the service of dad and all of his friends and mates who helped to defend Australia,' he said. 'Dad was pretty stoic and didn't really talk about bad experiences; he spoke of mateship and sacrifice. It's a great thing for people to see and understand some of the sacrifice people have made.'

AWM director Matt Anderson described the aircraft as a significant part of the institution's collection. 'Of all the moments this morning, the most powerful moment for me was when school children spontaneously applauded as she came around the roundabout,' he said. 'It just reminded me of the first time I saw George - I was 10 years old - and they will have that memory now forever. It's a very powerful moment; it's a historic moment.'

The aircraft carried out 89 bombing missions over Germany and occupied Europe between 1942 and 1944.

The Lancaster aircraft G for George of No. 460 Squadron RAAF. (Supplied: Australian War Memorial)

There were zero casualties among the 250 aircrew who flew on George throughout the war, leading many to believe the aircraft was 'lucky', according to AWM senior historian Lachlan Grant. 'There were no casualties amongst the aircrew flying on George itself, but over 80 of the aircrew who flew G for George were later killed in operations flying in other Lancasters and other squadrons,' he said. Dr Grant said George had 'a lot of very near misses', returning to base damaged on several occasions.

Over the next month, the remaining parts of G for George will be transported to the war memorial where it will be fully reassembled. It will form the centrepiece of a new exhibition, opening to the public next year, after renovations at the memorial are complete. Emily Hyles, a curator at the memorial, said the exhibition would

G for George arriving on a truck at the AWM where it will be the centrepiece of a new exhibition. (ABC News: Stuart Carnegie)

provide powerful new insights for visitors. 'We have got a lot of new objects that have never been on display before and in doing that we can tell our visitors a whole range of new stories,' she said. 'What we are very keen to do is always tell the stories of the people behind those objects.' Her fellow curator Garth O'Connell said George was an 'icon'. 'I have been coming to the memorial since I was a little boy and I have got drawings I have done from age seven on my office wall here of G for George,' he said. 'It has been a professionally and personally very rewarding experience to help put George back on display and to help bring other stories to life.'

Butterworth Charter Adventures

From Geoff Cowell

From Geoff's book "*From Plastic Parrots to Flying Kangaroos: Big Boeings and Hovering Helos*". This excerpt about his experiences flying the 707 on its regular milk runs to Butterworth and back in the mid-1980s.

In 1983, RAAF Base Butterworth, in Malaysia, was the home away from home for two permanently deployed RAAF Mirage fighter squadrons, which patrolled the Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Malacca as part of the Five Powers Defence Arrangements (between Australia, the UK, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore). The 2,000 personnel stationed there to support these two squadrons (along with the occasional deployment of Orion maritime patrol aircraft) resulted in Butterworth being Australia's second-largest RAAF base – only Amberley was bigger.

One of 33 FLT's (33 Squadron was initially 33 FLT until 1984, I think, when it went from two 707s to four) regular 'milk runs' was a fortnightly service to Butterworth that ferried deploying personnel and their families to the base, and then returned those who had completed their postings back to Australia. The base at Butterworth also had an Australian School attended by the servicemen's children and therefore many young civilian teachers, usually fresh out of college, also travelled with us regularly.

RAAF B-707 A20 637

The flights operated out of (and back into) Sydney International Terminal so that customs and immigration formalities could be efficiently carried out for the large numbers of passengers that we carried. On the return journey, the 8,000-foot runway at Butterworth wasn't long enough (in the high ambient temperatures) to allow us to uplift enough fuel to reach Sydney direct, and so a

refuelling stopover was always conducted at Darwin. The Butterworth Charter, as it was known, was a three-day trip that left Richmond for Sydney at 3pm on Monday, flew to Butterworth direct on Tuesday, and then returned to Richmond via Darwin and Sydney on Wednesday, arriving back home just before the unofficial Richmond curfew commenced at 11pm. While Monday evening involved a nice dinner and a night's accommodation in a King's Cross hotel, these luxuries were more than offset by the long and tiring return legs back to Richmond on Wednesday.

Being the most junior squadron pilot (in terms of both rank and experience), I flew a lot of these trips – so many that I decided I wouldn't tally them up until I left 33 FLT on my next posting. Carl was the captain on my very first Butterworth Charter (BC) in late May 1983, but over the ensuing two years, I would fly to Butterworth with nearly every other pilot in the outfit. The very short leg from Richmond to Sydney (little more than ten minutes in the air) would usually see us check into our hotel at about 5:30pm. Most of us then ate dinner together at a restaurant in the Cross, where I soon fell in love with their delicious Oysters Kilpatrick and Filet Mignon. But we were free to eat wherever we liked, and a funny story circulated within the unit about Tim (one of our more colourful characters), and his dining experience one particular evening.

Tim was a pocket dynamo who marched to the beat of his own drum. A keen mountaineer, he'd earned himself the nickname of 'Sherpa' due to his ambition to one day tackle Everest. It wasn't unusual for Tim to take his camping gear on a trip and, rather than sleeping in his hotel bed, set up a tent in his room and then sleep on the floor. Tim also enjoyed vegetarian meals, so while most of us were scoffing steaks in the Cross, Tim would head off alone to his favourite organic restaurant in Darlinghurst. One night, a contingent of Rajneeshis (the followers of a controversial Rolls-Royce driving, multi-millionaire Indian cult leader referred to at the time as 'The Bhagwan') walked into the restaurant attired in their flowing, bright orange robes. Tim must have been feeling a bit lonely that evening because he tried to engage them in a little casual conversation:

> 'Who are you guys?' Tim asked innocently.
>
> 'We're the Orange People,' the nearest one replied.
>
> 'Oh, okay,' Tim replied chattily. 'I'm from Bathurst myself.'

On the Tuesday morning that followed, we were always up bright and early, with the transport arriving at about 7:30am to pick us up and take us to Mascot for our 9:30am departure. During these flights, I soon discovered what a 'Boy's Own' adventure flying the 707 was, with the hijinks usually starting just as soon as passenger boarding was underway.

To my knowledge, every large airliner has its cargo doors on the right-hand side, with the passengers boarding from the left. While I can't say why this is the case, as a consequence, the captains on early passenger aircraft began occupying the left-hand control seat so that they could check out the passengers (particularly the pretty girls) as they climbed the stairs to board the aircraft. Of course, enclosed aerobridges eventually came along and ruined everything. The 33 FLT 707s had five seats in the cockpit – two pilot seats, a flight engineer's seat, a first observer's seat (behind the captain) and a second observer's seat (behind the first observer's seat – the long-unused navigator's station). Because a BC crew normally consisted of three pilots and one flight engineer, there was always a spare seat in the cockpit for every takeoff and landing. Sometimes, the newly graduated teachers travelling with us to Butterworth included some very young and very attractive ladies. But it was also a convention for any spare cockpit seat to be offered to the highest-ranking military passenger. This situation could have presented a conundrum elsewhere; but not in Air Force Airlines.

When boarding commenced, the aircraft loadmaster (who travelled in the passenger cabin) was charged with the important task of identifying the prettiest girl onboard the aircraft and noting her seat number. When he subsequently presented the captain with the completed weight and balance load sheet just before departure, he would say something like, 'A gorgeous girl is sitting in 10C'. Shortly afterwards, as we were taxiing out for departure, it was customary for the third pilot to make a PA to the passengers detailing the direction of turn after takeoff and the planned flight time, and then concluding with the instruction for the cabin crew to be seated for takeoff. On a BC though, the pre-takeoff PA would be more like this:

'Well good morning, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. Shortly we'll be taking off from the northerly runway and turning left to set course for Butterworth with a flight time of about seven and a half hours. Now today, we happen to have a spare seat on the flight deck, and to be fair to everybody, we've decided to put all the seat numbers into a hat and whoever's seat number is drawn out can come up and join us for the takeoff, as well as for the descent and landing into Butterworth. Okay, so…I've drawn a number…and the winning seat number is…10C!' The whole thing was a sham, of course, and just as soon as the announcement had been made, the pretty young lady down the back would let out a squeal of excitement before being met and escorted to the flight deck by the courteous and attentive loadmaster. So, instead of having to play host to some stuffy old group captain or air commodore, we instead got to enjoy the company of a delightful young lady, and nobody ever seemed any the wiser.

On departure, the 707 was a noisy old girl thanks to her inefficient Pratt & Whitney JT3D-3B engines that not only made an ear-splitting racket but also left a stream of black sooty exhaust in the aircraft's wake. The departure track out of Sydney usually passed very close to Bankstown Airport – an airfield used predominantly by light aircraft for charter work and pilot training. It was protocol on departure to set the right-hand VHF radio to the emergency 'guard' frequency so that a distress call could quickly be transmitted if something went badly wrong on the climb-out. But one day, as we overflew Bankstown Airport, we heard a very excited voice call up on the guard frequency:

'*Heavy jet aircraft overflying Bankstown… you have black smoke coming out of all four of your engines*,' he reported breathlessly.

'*Thanks*,' replied Woofy indifferently. '*We certainly hope so*!'

Once we were in the cruise and our passengers had eaten their meals, there would usually be a steady stream of visitors to the flight deck (if the captain was feeling in a sociable mood). Without fail, they would comment on the plethora of switches, knobs, buttons and dials in the flight deck, and we would try to reassure them by saying that, fortunately, we only ever had to operate them one at a time. Unlike the 'glass' cockpits of modern aircraft, there were no television screens in the 707 flight deck; instead, every conceivable system component – leading edge flaps, trailing edge flaps, utility hydraulic pumps, auxiliary hydraulic pumps etc, –

had its own controls and indicators. The most dated piece of equipment on the flight deck was a 24-hour clock which had to be checked, manually wound, and set for every departure.

Oftentimes, 'baby knucks' (baby 'knuckleheads' – newly qualified fighter pilots) would travel with us on their very first operational postings. Woofy loved to kid these impressionable young rookies that the 707s were built in France. 'No…they were built in Seattle!' the young knuck would reply unhesitatingly. 'Oh yeah? Well, how do you explain this then?' said Woofy. 'Le flaps,' he said pointing to the leading edge flap indicator (labelled LE FLAPS), 'and aux pumps,' he added, pointing to the auxiliary hydraulic pumps switch (labelled AUX PUMPS).

With his 'mark' now momentarily confused, he'd move in for the kill by saying, 'And you probably think that the 707 is an old piece of junk, but this aircraft is so advanced, that the clock even takes the wind into account.' Leaning forward, he'd point to the winder on the 24-hour clock that had an arrow above it labelled WIND.

The penny would usually drop at this point but, for all I know, there might still be some middle-aged pilots around who believe that the 707 was built in France, and that time can be adjusted for the wind.

Butterworth Airmovements (the military equivalent of a passenger terminal) was nearly always a hive of activity, both for our arrival on a Tuesday evening and for our departure at 8am the following morning. With only fourteen hours on the ground, we usually stayed overnight in the Butterworth Travelodge on my early BCs, and there was only ever enough time to check in before quickly heading over the road to an outdoor eating area to sample the local fare. On my first Butterworth trip, I was convinced to try the chilli crab, but just the heat from the sauce was enough to make my lips burn. Being in no hurry to ever experience another 'Keema Steamer,' I offered mine to the grateful flight engineer. I did, however, immediately fall in love with the local delicacy of Malaysia – the satay stick.

Beef and chicken satays are sold by the dozen, and there was great honour accorded to anyone who could consume a hundred satays in a single sitting, thus becoming entitled to automatic membership of the illustrious "Hundred Satay Club." The authentic Malaysian peanut and chilli sauce is delicious, and I must say that I haven't had satay sauce anywhere else in the world that comes close to replicating that unique flavour.

Back on that first trip, one thing I couldn't help noticing as I ploughed through my satays was that nearly every stray cat that was wandering around foraging for food scraps had had its tail docked. One of the crew offered the explanation that, in local folklore, cats are considered perfect creatures, so their tails are docked to prevent them from occupying space in the afterlife that might otherwise go to less-than-perfect human spirits. It all sounded a bit suss to me, but I

couldn't help wondering aloud to my dining companions, 'I wonder what happens to all those tails?' 'Where do you think the satays come from?' one of them mischievously replied.

Early morning departures allowed us to maximize our takeoff weight in the cooler temperatures that prevailed before the onset of the typical steamy Butterworth afternoons. There were always crowds of people at the terminal (either saying goodbye to others or being farewelled themselves), and for particularly esteemed colleagues, there could be some elaborate ceremonies. Sometimes, we carried more cargo than passengers, and on one particularly sorrowful occasion, we transported a serviceman back to Australia in a flag-draped coffin. He'd fallen victim to the notoriously lethal traffic on the Kuala Lumpur-Bangkok highway that passed by just outside the base. His parents and a RAAF chaplain accompanied him, and the cockpit that day, unsurprisingly, was devoid of its usual hijinks. Eerily, every landing on that flight was as smooth as any I ever felt on the 707.

On happier days, the return legs usually saw us transporting joyful service families home who could have been in Malaysia for as long as three years. Often, the servicemen's children would visit the flight deck and they'd always be excited by the prospect of seeing their grandma and granddad again very soon. Greg 'Gibbo' Gibbins devised an ingenious way to have a bit of fun with these kids that involved the Passenger Address handset, which looked exactly like a big black telephone, and the Max Airspeed Warning System that, when tested, sounded just like a ringing telephone. The purpose of this latter system was to warn of an impending exceedance of the maximum permissible airspeed – known colloquially as 'ringing the bells' – and it was tested before every flight by pressing a switch on the overhead panel just above the right-hand pilot's head.

When Gibbo was in the mood for some fun and a youngster was visiting the cockpit, he would look over to the pilot in the right-hand seat and wink. The copilot would then pretend to yawn and stretch his arms up over his head – pressing the Max Airspeed Warning System test switch in the process. The bell would ring, Gibbo would pick up the PA handset to answer the imaginary call, and then tell the incredulous child that it was their grandparent on the line calling from Sydney. Gibbo would then pretend to pass information back and forth between the non-existent grandparent and their grandchild, in what could sometimes be quite a lengthy conversation. One day, however, things didn't quite go according to script. Gibbo gave me the signal, I yawned and pressed the test switch and Gibbo answered the 'telephone' – just as I'd seen him do many times before.

> '*Your name's Johnny, isn't it*?' Gibbo asked the young fellow standing beside him.
>
> '*Yeah*,' said Johnny dubiously.
>
> '*Well, I've got your grandma on the phone here, Johnny – your Mum's mum. She said she can't wait to see you in Sydney, and she wants to know how you're going*,' said Gibbo.
>
> '*That's not grandma on the phone*!' replied Johnny with a surprising degree of certainty.
>
> Looking sidelong at me with an expression on his face that said, 'This kid's pretty smart – I think he's onto us,' Gibbo then asked sweetly, '*Why's that, mate*?'
>
> '*Because grandma's dead*,' said Johnny succinctly.

Night had always fallen by the time we finally descended into Sydney, and if we were lucky enough to have clear skies and a southerly breeze blowing, the passengers would be treated to one of the world's great spectacles – the city, the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge all spectacularly illuminated and sliding slowly down the aircraft's left-hand side. The only entertainment system on the 707 was a largely unused and ancient eight-track sound system

that could pipe music through the PA. Rags, one of our loadmasters, managed to track down an eight-track recording of Peter Allen's *I Still Call Australia Home* (long before Qantas unofficially 'acquired' it) and to welcome home the passengers after their long absence, he would dim the cabin lights and play the song for them. There was rarely a dry eye in the back of the aircraft (for both passengers and crew alike).

World War II bomber Hell'n Pelican II Sets Sail for Port Moresby After 10-year Restoration

From https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-06-06/ By Baz Ruddick and Lucy Cooper

Eight decades after it was last in the sky, an American bomber known as the Hell'n Pelican II is making its way back to Papua New Guinea, where it crash-landed during World War II. The Douglas A-20 Havoc bomber was loaded by crane onto the Navy's ADV RELIANT at Townsville, after being transported by truck from RAAF base Amberley, Queensland. It will take three days of sailing to get the plane to Port Moresby, where it will take pride of place at the PNG National Museum and Art Gallery.

Michael Claringbould, who found the Douglas A-20 Havoc bomber, sits atop the aircraft on the salvage mission in 1984. (Supplied: Michael Claringbould)

Colonel Boniface Aruma, from the PNG Defence Force, said it was a significant moment. 'It's emotional, but it's also a moment of happiness,' said Colonel Aruma, who is posted to the Australian Army's 3rd Brigade as Deputy Commander. 'I'd like to say that the aircraft is going back to its final resting place.'

In April 1944, the Hell'n Pelican II and crew - Captain Charles Davidson and Sergeant John McKenna - crash-landed when a weather event hampered their return from a mission. 'They were struck by a weather event, and that caused the aircraft essentially to run out of fuel and they were forced to land in the Madang province,' Warrant Officer Craig Smith, from the RAAF's History and Heritage division, said. Warrant Officer Smith said the two American airmen were 'essentially behind enemy lines' and evaded Japanese infantry as they trekked for 15 days through the jungle to safety. He said the downed plane had been strafed with bullets by Japanese Zero planes in an attempt to kill the downed airmen.

The bomber was found in 1976 by war historian and author Michael Claringbould. In 1984, it was removed by Mr Claringbould and a team from the Australian Defence Force, which used a Chinook helicopter to lift it from the bush. It was brought by sea to Brisbane, and over 10 years was painstakingly restored and eventually displayed at a museum at the Amberley air base.

The bomber on the road from Amberley Base to Townsville Port. Image: ADF

For Colonel Aruma, the task to retrieve and restore the aircraft speaks volumes about the relationship between PNG, Australia and the allied forces that defended the Pacific. 'If it wasn't discovered, it will be left to ruins in the middle of the jungle in Madang, but selfless effort by those that went before us to restore this aircraft, to bring it back to life [will prevent that],' he said. 'Madang is very mountainous and rugged - the hardest conditions, steep ravines, high mountains, deep valleys, and so I wouldn't be surprised if that aircraft was sitting in the middle of a ravine or in thick tropical jungle that you have to cut through to pull that aircraft out.'

Remarkably, the bomber was found in good condition, which Warrant Officer Smith said was all thanks to the unforgiving PNG jungle. 'Where it actually finally came to rest was in swamp land and, essentially, the mud and the environment preserved a lot of it,' he said. Warrant Officer Smith said the wrecks of six other Douglas bombers were retrieved from PNG to help the restoration. Variations of the Douglas bombers were used widely across all fronts of World War II, with an estimated 7,500 Douglas A-20 Havocs manufactured. 'It was a light bomber aircraft, and that was its main purpose in life,' Warrant Officer Smith said. He said the pelican painted on the side was the emblem of Second Lieutenant Charles Davidson, who flew the aircraft. 'This is the first one to go back to Papua New Guinea,' he said.

'Australia and the UK also operated an aircraft very similar to this, and we called it the Boston bomber, but it was essentially the same A-20 aircraft. I know that approximately six were retrieved out of New Guinea to reassemble this one, and there's a second aircraft that's been reassembled and restored and is now on display in Point Cook [near Melbourne],' Warrant Officer Smith said.

The Hell'n Pelican II, an American Douglas A20 Havoc bomber, was found in the PNG province of Madang and restored in Australia. (ABC News: Lucy Cooper)

Colonel Aruma said the return of the aircraft was a historic occasion. 'This gift not only demonstrates the relationship between the ADF and PNG, but it goes above and beyond the two forces, and it's so significant,' he said. 'I'm sure there will be hundreds, if not thousands of people in the capital of Port Moresby lining up to have a look at this aircraft that has been so nicely put together. It really speaks to the history we share.'

Colonel Boniface Aruma and Warrant Officer Craig Smith say the return of the Douglas A20 bomber to Papua New Guinea is a historic moment. (ABC News: Lucy Cooper)

Last Zeppelin Raid on Britain Defeated

From Jim Stewart, 41WG Honorary Historian

A force of five Imperial German Navy '*Zeppelin'* airships attempted to raid the British Midlands on 5 August 1918. The German force was under the command of the Head of Imperial Navy Airship Division (*Fuhrer der Luftshiffe*) Kapitan Zur See (Captain) Peter Strasser, a holder of the *Pour le Merite* (aka the 'Blue Max') – Germany's highest award for gallantry. Strasser was flying as commander of airship L-70.

The German force was intercepted over the North Sea by a Royal Air Force De Havilland DH-4 two seat aircraft flown by Major Egbert Cadbury. L-70 was shot down by the DH-4 gunner, Captain Leckie. The remaining airships scattered for home and jettisoned their bombs into the sea.

Imperial German Navy Zeppelin L-70

Operational limitations on speed and manoeuvrability forced the airships to bomb from a height above the range of air defence artillery, without sophisticated aids; the resulting bombing accuracy was poor. Relative to the wholesale destruction and slaughter on the Western Front, the effect of the air raids on Britain was negligible. However, the panic that these raids generated amongst the British public was out of all proportion to the actual damage inflicted. Public panic, as expected, caused an equal panic reaction amongst British politicians.

In retrospect, and whilst unintended, the greatest effect of the German raids (both airship and heavier than air bombers) was that it led to the UK establishing the world's first integrated Air Defence System. This provided a sound model for the future air defence of the UK, which stood the country in good stead 22 years later during the Battle of Britain.

I accidentally passed my wife a glue stick instead of a chap stick...she's still not talking to me.

One good turn gets all the blanket.

Did you hear about the dyslexic, insomniac, atheist. He stayed up all night wondering if there really was a dog.

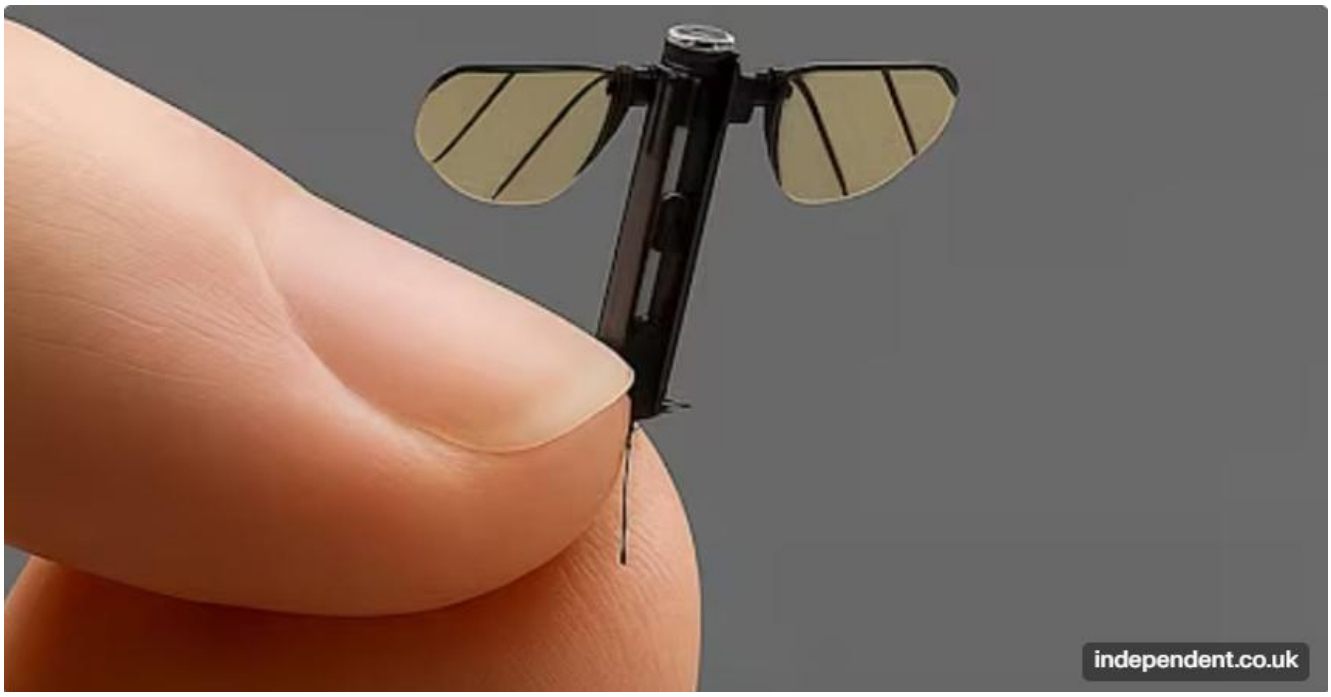
Yesterday I locked my keys in the car. I was able to unlock it by rubbing my leg against the car door. Luckily, I was wearing my khaki pants.

China Unveils Mosquito-Sized Spy Drone for Covert Ops

From https://www.perplexity.ai, published Jun 26, 2025

China's National University of Defense Technology (NUDT) has unveiled a mosquito-sized drone designed for covert military surveillance operations, marking the latest advancement in the country's push toward miniaturized warfare technology. The device, roughly 1.3 centimeters long, was demonstrated on state television this month and represents a new frontier in military reconnaissance capabilities.

The development underscores China's accelerating investment in micro-robotics and 'intelligent warfare' as global powers race to deploy increasingly sophisticated unmanned systems in 'military operations. The bionic drone features leaf-shaped wings, a stick-like body, and three hair-thin legs designed to mimic insect flight patterns. According to CCTV 7, China's military television channel, the device integrates ultra-small cameras and microphones capable of capturing images, sound, and electronic signals.



'Miniature bionic robots like this one are especially suited to information reconnaissance and special missions on the battlefield,' said Liang Hexiang, a student at NUDT, while demonstrating the device between his fingers during the televised broadcast. The drone can be controlled via smartphone and represents what researchers described as a complex engineering challenge requiring collaboration across disciplines including microscopic device engineering, materials science, and bionics.

The mosquito drone emerges as part of China's broader military modernization strategy, which includes developing AI-powered drone swarms and autonomous systems. Earlier this year, China introduced another micro-drone weighing less than a kilogram that can carry twice its weight and be armed with grenades. The timing coincides with global competition in micro-UAV development. Norway's Black Hornet series, widely used by Western militaries, offers palm-sized reconnaissance capabilities, while the U.S. Air Force has confirmed development of similar micro-drone programs.

Defense experts see potential applications beyond traditional warfare. 'These drones could be used to track individuals or listen in on conversations,' said Sam Bresnick, a research fellow at

Georgetown's Centre for Security and Emerging Technology, according to The Telegraph. Timothy Heath, a senior defense researcher at the Rand Corporation, noted that smaller drones could bypass detection and enter secure locations such as 'intelligence or secure government facilities'. The device's near-invisibility to radar detection systems makes it suitable for confined environments where larger drones cannot operate effectively. However, experts note that the drone's miniature size likely limits battery life and payload capacity compared to larger reconnaissance systems.

First Flight of the de Havilland DHC-4 Caribou

From Today in Aviation History, by Austin Hancock

On July 30, 1958, the de Havilland DHC-4 Caribou took flight for the first time, introducing a rugged twin-engine cargo aircraft with exceptional short takeoff and landing (STOL) capabilities. Serving military forces around the world - including in Vietnam - and later commercial operators, the Caribou became a vital transport aircraft in remote and challenging environments.

The DHC-4 Caribou is an impressive beast, even on the ground!
Photo by Phil Buckley

Built in Canada by de Havilland Aircraft of Canada Ltd., the Caribou was specifically designed for tactical cargo transport and short takeoff and landing (STOL) operations. Its rugged design and exceptional performance on short, unimproved runways made it highly valuable to both military and civilian operators around the world. The DHC-4 was the third STOL aircraft in de Havilland's lineup, following the success of the DHC-2 Beaver and DHC-3 Otter. However, it was the company's first twin-engine STOL aircraft. From the outset, it was designed with military utility

in mind—capable of landing and taking off from runways as short as 1,200 feet. This made it ideal for remote and austere environments.

The Caribou was adopted by the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Royal Australian Air Force, and the U.S. Army - later transferred to the U.S. Air Force and redesignated from CV-2 to C-7. It saw extensive use in Vietnam, where its ability to operate from frontline airstrips proved essential for tactical airlift missions. The aircraft also served with Air America, the CIA's covert airline, during Cold War operations in Southeast Asia.

The first Caribou prototype, CF-KTK-X, seen here with a nose probe, made its maiden flight on July 30, 1958. It featured the original short fuselage design, which was later extended forward of the wing to better align with the aircraft's center of gravity

In addition to military use, the Caribou found favor with commercial operators. Early adopters such as Ansett-MAL and Amoco Ecuador utilized it for cargo hauling in remote regions. Its impressive STOL performance made it especially useful in areas with minimal aviation infrastructure. Between 1958 and 1968, a total of 307 Caribous were built. A number of these aircraft survive today, with several still flying in utility roles across the globe.

The DHC-4A Caribou was typically crewed by two pilots and a loadmaster. It could carry up to 30 civilian passengers, 32 troops, 26 fully armed paratroopers, or 22 stretcher-bound patients along with four standing patients and four nurses. Powered by two 1,450-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-2000-7M2 Twin Wasp radial engines, the Caribou had a maximum speed of 215 mph and cruised comfortably at 182 mph. With a full fuel load, its range extended to 1,136 nautical miles, though that dropped to just 211 nautical miles when fully loaded with cargo. The aircraft had a service ceiling of 24,800 feet, reduced to 8,800 feet in the event of an engine failure. Reliable, rugged, and adaptable, the de Havilland Caribou earned a reputation as a true workhorse - proving itself in combat zones, on jungle airstrips, and in the world's most remote operating environments. Its legacy endures today in the few remaining examples that continue to take to the skies.

In Vietnam the Caribou was used to re-supply fighting forces in-country because of its unique ability to fly in and out of camps on short, unimproved airstrips.

Supersonic Surfing

From Ron Haack, Test Pilot (WGCDR Ret'd)

The RAAF led the USAF in the employment of Laser Guided Bombs (LGBs) on the F-111 and one of my tasks in the early eighties was to qualify a carriage and release envelope for the GBU-10 (2,000lb LGB) from the pivot pylons on the F-111. The release envelope required by 82 Wing extended to a 45 deg toss at 600 Kts. As with any test activity, it is prudent to approach boundary conditions in sensible increments and in flight test we typically extend slightly beyond the required limit to ensure there are no handling quality or behavioural cliff edges – unexpected excursions to an unsafe state.

The F-111 supersonic 'wave generator'...this one clearly not over water

After stepping through the release envelope, we had the quite extreme, 45 deg toss condition remaining to demonstrate. I was flying a Mirage IIID photo chase to observe and record the weapon behaviour at release and the pair of aircraft transited in formation at high level to a desolate region of ocean to the South of Adelaide. As you can imagine we needed a lot of speed before the pull-up to achieve 625kts in a 45 deg climb.

So, from 20,000ft, the F-111 rolled into a 20deg dive with the chase in echelon right to level at 100ft and 730kts/M1.1. Normally, the Mirage could not sustain that sort of speed without full afterburner, however, I found myself holding echelon right in 'dry' power (core engine – no afterburner) and needed about 10deg of left bank to remain in close formation. Obviously, the Mirage was 'surfing' on the F-111 bow/shock wave. At one stage I stepped over the back of the wave and then manoeuvred right, now in full afterburner (A/B), to break through the wave and then slid up the face back into close formation.

ARDU Mirage IIID - not your usual surfing platform!

A brief but exhilarating exposure to an environment seldom experienced, and I think I can safely say that I and my backseat photographer are possibly the only people in the world to surf at supersonic speed.

My First Squadron as an Armourer

From John Clarkson

It was in April 1964, I had been an LAC Armament Fitter for a whole three months, and this was my first squadron experience. I had been posted into No 1 Squadron. I was still three months away from my 20th birthday. On arrival in the hangar, (yes one of the old igloo hangars of 82 Wing) and had a look around at my fellow Armourers. The section comprised of 1 FSGT, 2 Corporals, and 6 LACs. I, of course was the most junior, and the most senior LAC had been an LAC for about 7 years. The others varied between 2 years and 6 years, so yes, I had a long time to serve. Both of the Corporals had seen WWII service, one in the Army and the other in the RAAF. The second of the two had been on a Lancaster squadron right through until the end of the war, then was discharged in 1946. He signed on again in 1950, as an Armourer, and by the very late 1950s or very early 1960s, he became a Corporal. The other fellow served in the Army in Borneo, and left the Army in 1946, and enlisted in the RAAF, as an Armourer in 1951. He too became a Corporal around the very early 1960s. Well, it seemed that my ambitions for a career were going to be rather slow, considering those who served before me.

Then I spoke to my FSGT who quickly outlined his service. He had joined the RAAF in Australia House from the RAF in the mid-1950s. However, prior to that, to give me a bit of empathy, he told me of his very first experience as an armourer on an RAF squadron. His first squadron was in the south east of England re-arming Spitfires in the Battle of Britain in 1940! So, you could imagine how I felt after being introduced to my fellow armourers.

Vivigani, Goodenough Island, Papua. Armourers of No. 8 (Beaufort) Squadron RAAF

After about three weeks, I was to be introduced to the Warrant Officer Engineer (WOE); yes, it was a formal introduction. My FSGT took me to his office and introduced me and I saw that he had my service file in front of him. He looked at me and said, 'I normally don't like having boys in my squadron, but now that you are here, we shall see how you go'. So, I thought that was a good start. Between he and my FSGT, they outlined his service experience. (the WOE, at the age of 52, was 32 years senior to me in age). He had served in a number of fighter squadrons in the Far East during WWII, then staying in the RAAF. He had seen operational service in Japan, Korea, Malta, then Malaya. Later that day, I was talking with a few of the SNCOs in the hangar commenting on what outstanding careers some of the SNCOs had experienced. The WOE heard me as he was walking past and said to me, 'You don't join the RAAF to pursue a career son, you join the RAAF to serve!'

ELECFITTERS at RADS

From Lloyd Cutler

It was late 1989, I was a CPL ELECFITT at RAAF Base Amberley and was located at the 3AD Eng Section. Jan 1990 postings were due, but I was not expecting anything; life was great. But that was about to change - I had gone to the toilet and as I exited there was one of the officers standing there with a beaming smile and he said, 'Congratulations, you've been posted to RAD School.' This news left me a little stunned as I tried to comprehend what he had just told me, a real WTF moment. After seeing my face, he then asked, 'Is this not good news?' I just said I'm not too sure and excused myself.

I headed back to the Elec Top Shop to get more information. Upon arrival, I was informed that a few other ELECFITTS from 3AD were also posted to RAD School; Mark Leishman (not too sure of the spelling) and Leo Hutten. These postings were to relieve RADS Instructor shortages.

Upon arrival at RADS we discovered that a few more ELECFITTS had been posted there, one of them being Tony Styes. Tony was in BTS with me under the watchful eye of FSGT Mark Burger. Other names I recall were David Mair, Ross Magno, Terry Avion, Jock Auld, Dave ?, Mick ?, Terry Bryant and another chap who was referred to as Fluffwah. In general, everyone seemed good natured about our arrival, but I recall one person, 'Dog' Brown, who was located up in RADAR; he made no secrets about his thoughts on the matter and took every opportunity to let it be known.

A few days later I picked up my third stripe and then all the new arrivals began the Instructors' Course, which was actually run at RADS, due to the number of students there. Upon completion of our course, we returned to our various sections and began pulling together our instructor notes. All this time I had one hell of a case of anxiety and Mark Burger picked up on this. Eventually came the day of my first course - Mark had been trying to give me a few pointers - he said start off by telling them about yourself and tell a few jokes. Righto, that sounded like a plan.

When I entered the classroom, I found approximately 20 students looking at me intensely. I introduced myself and gave a little bit of my service background; all students very straight faced and looking serious, so I started to tell a joke and the next thing I knew, one student put up his hand and when I prompted him, he blurted out, 'Can we skip all that and just get on with the learning?' Well, that just stopped me in my tracks, all students just staring at me. Well, so be it, I kicked off the training and got into it. Before I knew it, the first break had arrived, and I headed back to the staff room for a well-earned breather and strong coffee. Upon entering the office, all the other instructors were sitting quietly looking at me, so I knew something was up. Sure enough, it turns out that Mark had snuck down to the classroom and gee'ed the students up.

As it turned out, I thoroughly enjoyed instructing and earned the nickname of 'Captain Compassion'; the CO even referred to me as such during one visit when he found out that one of my courses had achieved the all-time second highest average score. So, take that Dog Brown! I ended up being there three years, some of the best years of my career.

Commemorating 80 years since Victory in the Pacific

Reprinted with permission from CONTACT Magazine

On the morning of August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito of Japan publicly announced that Japan would accept the Allies' ultimatum to surrender. For Australians, this meant the end of World War 2, as Germany had surrendered to the Allies three months earlier.

The signing of the surrender document by Allied personnel and representatives of the Japanese forces aboard the United States battleship Missouri, September 2, 1945.

Story by Rosalind Turner. Photos from Australian War Memorial.

Nearly a million Australians served in the armed forces during this war. Of those, some 40,000 never returned to their families. More than 17,000 had lost their lives while fighting in the war against Japan, some 8000 of whom died in Japanese captivity.

At 8.44 on this August morning, the Australian Government received the news that Japan had surrendered. 'Fellow citizens, the war is over,' Prime Minister Ben Chifley announced via a radio broadcast to the nation at 9.30am. 'Let us remember those whose lives were given that we may enjoy this glorious moment and may look forward to a peace which they have won for us. On behalf of the people and the Government of Australia, I offer humble thanks to the fighting men of the United Nations whose gallantry, sacrifice and devotion to duty have brought us to victory.'

Australians celebrated the news in a variety of ways. The Sydney Morning Herald estimated that between 100,000 and 150,000 crowded into the Sydney Domain to celebrate. During the following days, more organised activities – such as church services, gala concerts and parades of returned military personnel – took place. In Brisbane, people filled the streets in spontaneous celebration. Ragtime bands played, people banged pots, car horns sounded, whistles blowed, soldiers played two-up, people hugged each other, and there were even kissing competitions.

This year is the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific (VP). On VP Day, August 15, we remember Australia's war efforts from 1942-45 in the Pacific region, including Singapore, Borneo, Malaya, New Guinea and New Britain. On this day, we acknowledge the service, sacrifice, and courage of all the men and women who fought to protect our nation, values, and way of life.

...and another view of VP Day

From Chris Beazley

15 August 1945...my Aunt Lorna with handbag, is in the left of this photo taken on Park Street

But Sir, there is no 44 Wing!!

From AIRCDRE TC Delahunty AM (Retd)

In my time at Amberley on the F-111C, I got to know and appreciate the Air Traffic Controllers who often joined us in the crew room debrief and for beers after night flying, sometimes to provide advice on our shortcomings with good humour. When I was on an RAF exchange 1983 to 86 flying the Buccaneer at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, my appreciation for ATC was further increased when I had to be 'duty pilot' in the tower monitoring the circuit with a mix of Buccaneer, Jaguar, Shackleton, Sea King helicopters and visiting aircraft at different speeds and heights! Also, recovery to the airfield was either visual or GCA so we were very much reliant on ATC. Little did I know that my future career would lead to the inaugural command of the newly reformed No 44 Air Traffic Control Wing. This article is a recollection of how I became the first Officer Commanding No 44WG and the early days of formation.

Editor's Note: No. 44 Wing was formed on 14 December 1942 in Adelaide River, 100 kilometres south of Darwin. Coming under the control of North-Western Area Command, the Wing was responsible for controlling the radar stations that acted as an early warning system for Japanese air raids. After the fighting in New Guinea had ceased, the threat of air raids on mainland Australia eased, and No. 44 Wing was disbanded on 22 August 1944.

In 1997, I was a four year seniority Wing Commander and the first Military Assistant to Commander Australian Theatre at HMAS Kuttabul in Sydney with a posting preference (including periodic harassment of the DPO manner) to return to F-111C at Amberley to command No1 Squadron. When I left Amberley in 1992 as a SQNLDR, I had achieved Category A F-111 Navigator and was 82 Wing WGCDR OPS, so I thought I was in with a good chance. To my surprise, I was informed by DPO that I would be promoted to GPCAPT and offered a position as an attaché, initially in the Philippines, but then as Air Force Attaché Jakarta. The DPO manner said it would put me in line to return to Amberley as OC82 Wing so, thinking the attaché position would mainly involve golf, cocktail parties and travel, I accepted and undertook a short crash course in Bahasa Indonesian. Well, as the history goes, my attaché tour included the 1998 monetary crisis in Asia, riots in Jakarta and across Indonesia, evacuation of civilians including our families, followed in 1999 by the East Timor vote for independence and subsequent UN INTERFET intervention. Accordingly, my golf clubs rarely left the bag!

Sadly, was not to be...

In September 1999, the Army Attaché and I were in the vacated Australian Embassy in Dili, in anticipation of the arrival of INTERFET. Dili airport was controlled by a civil Indonesian controller who had good English language, but the airport had few daily movements. On the morning of the arrival of the INTERFET C-130 deployment, I went up to the Dili tower. The aircraft were arriving in numbers and overwhelming the controller with requests for landing instructions. I tried to give assistance to interpret the 'Aussie dialect' but it became obvious that my ATC abilities were not great, and we needed our controllers to do the job. I made a call to Darwin on my Inmarsat phone to the Command HQ and made the point that while I realised the initial emphasis was on getting troops on the ground, ATC needed to get to Dili ASAP! To my relief, four ATC soon arrived, and I took them straight to Dili tower. What greatly impressed me was that they didn't ask for instructions or appear worried, but literally jumped into the tower, got on the radio and took control.

After two interesting years as an attaché, DPO suggested I had 'done enough damage in South East Asia' and rather than stay the third year I would go back home and go to the 12 month Defence College. DPO said the plan was that after Defence College I would be posted to OC82 Wing, and near the end of the course the posting was confirmed. At the time I was aware that the investigation into the 1999 F-111 fatal accident in Malaysia was due to be released and would have a major effect on my future command. In late 2000 I was trying to leave Defence College early to do an F-111 refresher when I received a call from DPO informing me that CAF, AIRMSHL Errol McCormack, wanted to talk to me. I assumed it would be a new commander conversation, but CAF said that, considering the F-111 Investigation findings, he was appointing the accident investigating officer to be OC82WG. The investigation findings affected several F-111 postings at the time. Obviously disappointed, but pleased that my replacement would be an outstanding officer, I was resigned to the outcome but now somewhat 'in limbo'.

F-111 days

A week later, I was told that CAF wanted to see me again. I had flown many F-111 hours with CAF so we were on friendly terms. CAF said, 'TC I know you are disappointed at not getting OC82WG, but I had to comply with the report recommendations. However, TC I have decided to give you another command, as Officer Commanding No 44 Wing'. I hesitated as I thought he meant to refer to the very well regarded No 41 Air Defence Wing which I knew from Amberley. I assumed that CAF had made a numerical mistake, so I diplomatically said to him: 'But Sir, there is no 44 Wing'. CAF laughed and explained 44Wing would be Air Traffic Control and my job was to make it an operational command capability and noted that there were challenges ahead. I said that my knowledge of ATC was pretty basic, and CAF joked 'The less you know about it the better!' In hindsight he was quite prophetic!

So, on 27 November 2000, the Wing was reformed at Williamtown under my command as the inaugural Officer Commanding No 44 Wing. With the sage advice of WGCDR Dave 'Thommo' Thompson I quickly realised that ATC had organised themselves efficiently to deliver the regular base ATC services as well as the tactical requirements. The responsibility to support Navy and Army was an obligation from single service capability outcomes that resulted from the Defence Efficiency Review (DER). Ironically, a factor in establishing ATC as a capability was the lack of awareness in Air Force that it had a joint responsibility. I often had to explain to even very senior officers that the RAAF ATC capability was more than just 'clear to land check three green'.

Whilst I had a good appreciation of how a Wing should function from my 82WG experience, it very quickly became apparent that acceptance of 44WG ATC would involve not only the category but the whole of Air Force. I soon realised that OC 44WG would not involve 'making friends' but certainly having to 'influence people'. The first 'contact' came in week two, when I received a Directorate of Air Force Safety (DAFS) 'RAAF Darwin ATC Audit' report. The report made comment on deficiencies in base infrastructure such as emergency power, runway lighting and communications that I thought were not the responsibility of 44WG ATC which, from my perspective should operate as a base unit and airfield user like a flying squadron. This became more apparent when I received further reporting which included an unreliable arrester cable at another base.

The pushback on these issues highlighted the need to better define 44WG capability responsibilities and led to the first Airworthiness Board for 44WG and a subsequent better outcome for both ATC and Combat Support on bases. It also resulted in support from Air Command that 44WG should have command and control of the technical and engineering workforce to maintain the ATC system. The deployable ATC elements were also considered but left for another day as the Australian Defence Air Traffic System (ADATS) was the priority. The increase in 44WG staff necessitated more office space and when the old Tactical Fighter Group (TFG) headquarters became available, 44WG HQ moved in. I also became aware of a lack of appreciation in Air Force that ATC had been deployed to the Middle East and Rwanda, supported Navy and trained with Army's 2 Commando, which included parachute qualification. A little-known fact was that the first Middle East ATC deployment in 2002 was an air traffic controller on board a Navy ship.

Whilst there were a group of older ATC members that were more comfortable with a base support role, most of the category embraced the concept that 'Wings go to war' and the need to provide the capability for the ADF. Subsequently, in April 2003, 44WG was ready to deploy a team of 13 controllers as part of the RAAF Combat Support Unit to Baghdad airport. The detachment controlled some 500 movements a day, often under rocket and mortar fire, until a handover to Iraq in August 2004.

Subsequent ATC deployments for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) have reinforced the importance of the capability provided by 44WG to the ADF. I witnessed this first

hand in Banda Aceh, Indonesia after the tsunami in December 2004. There, in a tent on duckboards in the mud, was the 44WG ATC detachment!

The Baghdad deployment cemented 44WG ATC as a distinct combat capability at a time when recruitment and manning of ATC in both the civil and military sectors was at almost critical levels and under the scrutiny of the respective Ministers. Air Services Australia (AsA) had become a government business unit to gain revenue from airspace users which was a worldwide phenomenon with the introduction of automated traffic management systems. In 2001, AsA was bedding in The Advanced Australian Air Traffic System (TAAATS) with Thales, while 44WG and Defence were in the process of installing the Advanced Defence Air Traffic System (ADATS) under contract with Raytheon. Defence controllers had been offered retention bonuses, however AsA recruitment resulted in tension between the two organisations which was not helped by AsA proposals to provide ATC services to Defence, which was predicated on utilising the Defence workforce.

Whilst it was accepted that the transition of Defence ATC personnel to the civil organisation was (and still is) a natural progression and of benefit to Australian civil aviation, in my time, we couldn't reach a 'win-win' situation. Hopefully progress has been made in this regard. An argument at the time which also persisted into the OneSKY project development was that Defence had erred by choosing a different Air Traffic Management (ATM) system to the AsA civil system. In truth, the Tomson (later Thales) TAAATS system was not included in the Defence ADATS tender which was awarded to Raytheon.

RAAF ADATS

During the AsA tender process, AsA initially recommended Hughes Aircraft Systems International as the preferred contractor but then reversed and awarded the contract to Tomson (later Thales). Hughes successfully sued AsA in the Federal Court and Tomson (later Thales) subsequently did not offer the TAATS system to Defence. A fact that was conveniently overlooked! The Minister of Defence at the time was not in favour of further bonuses or service provision by AsA to address the manning issues and asked for 'some innovative solutions'. When CAF asked me to come up with some ideas, I realised my lack of ATC knowledge could perhaps be a positive on this occasion! I must admit though that some of my naïve and possibly 'dumb' ideas did provide some humour to 44WG HQ staff.

However, some immediate 'innovative' decisions were called for and implemented. On some bases, the number of controllers was not the constraint; the lack of radar rated controllers and the time to achieve ratings at main bases was an ongoing constraint. This was a major issue at RAAF Darwin in Air Force office at the time. The 'innovation' to give Darwin capacity to train their way out of the shortfall was to send a controller from Nowra who was still current and fully rated at Darwin to do a one-man overnight shift (with tech support) with tower and approach control combined. While not ideal, it did give Darwin the breathing space required. I did however come under criticism from DAFS for not producing a formal risk assessment. A fair cop!
The main innovative idea for retention was to establish ATC public servant civilian positions on some bases to provide an option for controllers (and later technical staff) to remain permanently at a location. Whilst criticised in later years as unsuccessful, it met the minister's remit at the time. I also got a laugh when an AsA controller (also ex RAAF) who was head of their union and under pay negotiations at the time, accused me in a QANTAS lounge of attempting to 'bust their union' and take over civilian control as well! I didn't attempt to dissuade him from a wonderful conspiracy theory!

When I stepped back from the day-to-day problems and started to look at the management of the ATC category, a couple of things stood out. Firstly, there were too many 'fingers in the pie' involved in ATC management. Postings were decided by PERS which included filling ATC instructor positions at East Sale to meet Training Command requirements which were predicated on recruitment targets that were never achieved. In short there was potential to overman the school at the detriment of capability on bases. Hence, the Wing (to meet Air Command requirements) provided input into the posting plots including coordination with Training Command. Coordination with the School of ATC also led to the development of a course to graduate students in both tower and approach basic qualifications. Perhaps not as successful as initially hoped but it was a time for 'innovation'.

Secondly, the ATC officer category was the third largest behind pilot and navigator, yet the maximum rank was WGCDR and there was only one WGCDR position and four SQNLDR at the time and most positions were in the field. In short, the ATC rank structure and employment was limited and did not provide any incentive for retention in Air Force. Statistics also showed that the category had many members with tertiary qualifications including ADFA graduates.

Contemporary RAAF Air Traffic Control Officer

My observation to Air Force HQ was that, putting the current manning issues aside, the large ATC category had talented members and that from an organisational perspective was a human resource that was underutilised and a major retention factor. I suggested that more ATC officers should be considered for staff college including overseas colleges for promotion and career progression outside the category. I was not surprised later that ATC members were subsequently selected for colleges in Malaysia, Singapore, UK, and Canada and for ATC officers to attain senior positions including one and two star promotion in

due course. The expansion of career opportunities to all categories has since been an overwhelming success for the Air Force.

My command was cut short by six months in mid-2003 when the Air Commander tasked me to implement the amalgamation of Maritime Patrol Group and Surveillance and Control Group, which became Surveillance and Response Group. PERS were considering an aircrew member for my replacement but agreed, with support from CDR SCG, that for the development of ATC, my replacement needed to be an ATC officer. I had the pleasure to hand over command to newly promoted GPCAPT Dave Thompson.

I have not included the names of all the brilliant people in the ATC community that I had the pleasure and honour to work with, lest I fail to mention someone. However, the progression of the many ATC individuals in Air Force and Defence has given me great satisfaction over the years. Equally, in the year of the 25th anniversary of the reformation of No 44 WG, I take pride in the small part I played in its development and thankful that the Wing survived and flourished despite my lack of ATC knowledge!!

USAF F-4C Operations from Ubon from 1965

(A follow on from last issue's *SEATO Fighter Operations RAAF Ubon Thailand*)

From AVM (Ret'd) Bob Richardson

The first of eventually three squadrons of USAF F-4Cs only arrived just before the last of my four deployments there, in July-August 1965. Ubon was the closest airbase in foreign friendly territory to Hanoi, so they were mainly involved in bombing around North Vietnam and its capital Hanoi. It was fascinating for us to observe them operating on 6-8 hour bombing strike, strafing and fighter combat missions into North Vietnam from Ubon. We quickly got to know them and spent quite a lot of time socialising with them. They loved our Australian Fosters full-strength beer; all they had access to in the 'MASH 'style all-ranks chow facility was 2.4% alcohol Olympia and Budweiser beer cans.

Photo courtesy of AVM (Ret'd) Dave Rogers

So we spent quite a lot of time with the Americans; my colleague Dave Rogers in particular got to know them very well, and we all enjoyed mess games and talking with them about their operations in an aircraft that was so technically superior to ours.

We heard that the whole war was being driven from the White House, and because the Russians were building surface to air missile (SAM) batteries around Hanoi, they were not allowed to attack them because of the need to avoid killing Russians. After a few drinks they would say to us, 'We're photographing these SAMs; we know they're going to fire them eventually, and we're not allowed to attack them until they do'. And that's what inevitably happened. A four-ship F-4C mission from Ubon was attacked by the newly installed missiles one day. I believe one aircraft and its crew was lost immediately in the attack, the other three got away with proximity SAM shrapnel damage. One went down inside North Vietnam and both crew were eventually rescued; another went down in

Laos, and the last one, the only one of the four that got back to Ubon, had about a hundred holes in it from the missile's proximity warhead.

USAF F-4Cs of the 45th TFS of the 15th FW at Ubon, 1965
Photo courtesy of AVM (Ret'd) Dave Rogers

So the squadron lost four aircraft, two pilots were killed, including I believe the Squadron XO. THEN, of course, the White House and Pentagon changed the rules, so the USAF went back and destroyed most of those missile batteries. But we pilot officers, who didn't know much about military strategy of course, nodded to ourselves: 'Well, if that's the way they're going to fight that war, they'll lose it.' This was in 1965 - and they eventually did, at appalling cost…

To us, the performance and overall capability of the then new F-4C aircraft in multi-role fighter ground attack and offensive counter air fighter combat compared to our Sabres was simply breathtaking. No other combat aircraft in the world had the capability of the McDonnell Douglas F-4C. For operations into North Vietnam USAF squadrons based at Ubon (eventually there were three) normally operated with three external fuel tanks and always assisted by air refuelling. They had KC-135 airborne tankers operating all over Thailand, based at Bangkok's Don Muang Airport, and there was normally at least one airborne in safe airspace over the north of Thailand as emergency refuellers in the wet season. This was because there were often severe afternoon thunderstorms that would close Ubon, which had no precision approach aids.

The USAF squadron would generally deploy for early morning attacks into North Vietnam when the targets were clear of cloud. After dropping their ten 750 lb bombs they were usually tasked for air defence patrolling off the North Vietnam coast, being refuelled by tankers there for up to several hours after their initial strike. This was to look after other attacking aircraft in case of MIG fighter attacks. Then they would return to Ubon, sometimes strafing North Vietnamese jungle supply routes on the way. I remember one occasion when thunderstorms over Ubon in the afternoon prevented them from landing. So they waited for about two hours on the tanker in northern Thailand before coming back. That turned out to be a 10-hour mission, strapped tightly into an ejection seat throughout. Climbing out after their long missions, they were totally exhausted and could barely walk; it was a very tough role.

Nearly all the USAF pilots were very inexperienced in their aircraft and its combat role, with almost no air defence training. Dave Rogers and other RAAF aircrew have written quite a bit about this issue. Their F-4C conversions had trained them to operate in a friendly radar environment, assuming they'd always have airborne or ground radar controller support. Despite having a wonderfully capable radar, their lack of tactical air combat training made them vulnerable to North Vietnam's Russian-trained MIG-17 and -21 pilots. We occasionally 'stooged' for the F-4Cs on request, so they could practise intercepting us on their return from combat

missions. They realised that they badly needed training in air combat manoeuvring - and they were adamant that they didn't want our Sabres anywhere near Vietnam, because 'We can't distinguish between you guys and the MiG-17s'. We couldn't be there anyway, because there was nothing useful our Sabres could have done in that theatre.

I remember tuning into the F-4C's frequency when we were briefed to loiter for them to practise intercepting us. I listened while the four F-4Cs reported locking onto us head-on - at 90nm range! And then at about 50nm they successively advised Lion radar they'd 'fired 'their Sparrow radar guided missiles at us, and the calls 'splash 1, splash 2', etc. Knowing that they were carrying live missiles that would have been armed earlier in their combat area, we had to hope they'd remembered to ensure their armament switches were on safe! With ten 750 pound bombs and the air-refuelling support, along with their two Sparrow radar directed missiles, four Sidewinder missiles and a six barrel 20-millimetre Vulcan gun firing at 6000 rounds a minute, we were obviously very envious of USAF combat capabilities. That was a truly state-of-the-art fighter/bomber capability, only 20 years after the Second World War! In 1965 there was nothing on earth that could counter that incredibly capable fighter/attack weapon system. However they were still highly vulnerable to attack by the Soviet trained Vietnamese MiG fighters, especially because of their lack of prior air combat training. At their request our highly regarded Fighter Combat Instructor (and my valued 77 Squadron neighbour and mentor friend) Mick Feiss gave them a series of lectures on air combat tactics.

Photo courtesy of AVM (Ret'd) Dave Rogers

Their air refuelling capability was what we were most envious of. There's a famous photograph around that shows Dave Rogers (and then me) posing with an F-4C refuelling probe and nozzle that Dave had dragged out of the USAF dump. We attached it to the Sabre and took a photo of each other standing there to disguise the ropes holding the probe in place under the left wing. That photo got back to Butterworth with a quote saying something like, 'We've

Bob Richardson with a Sabre 'fitted' with re-fuelling probe

solved the air refuelling problem'! And the engineers sent it back to Canberra, where someone apparently initially assumed we'd actually done it. There was hell to pay there for a short while, but it was just good fun - to make a much-needed point!

We were also placed on combat alert at Ubon for a period on my fourth detachment there in 1965, but again it wasn't too much of a problem except for the boring hours. Our occasional scramble intercepts were mostly about CIA Air America unmarked aircraft running clandestine flights without clearance to and from Laos and beyond - later graphically portrayed in the film 'Air America'. Overall, I remember my eight months in four Ubon tours as a very educational experience over 2.5 years for a young pilot - much tougher for my wife and infant daughter back in Penang than for me, in retrospect.

Later in my 77 Squadron Butterworth tour, I was delegated to carry out post-major D and E servicing air tests for 478 Maintenance Squadron. One fine day I took off on a post-E servicing air test, and on the climb out at about 20,000 feet an enormous tropical spider emerged from the gunsight in front of me. (For this major overhaul the aircraft had been in the hangar for a month.) It was quite a shock to see this beautifully coloured LARGE insect looking at me about 300mm from my face! It had red and green patches, as I recall. Anyway, I didn't have much skin showing, and it quickly scuttled back out of sight. I just turned around and went home and placed the aircraft unserviceable, telling them 'I'll fly it again when you find that bloody spider' – which was probably harmless anyway.

Australia's Secret War: RAAF Ubon Thailand – 1962/1968

From Bill 'Slim' Maconachie

At the end of May 1962, 63 years ago, Australia joined other nations (US, Britain and NZ) of the South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) at Thailand's request, to bolster that country's deficient air defences against a perceived threat from neighbouring Laos. It was agreed that RAAF 79 SQN would be formed from units at Butterworth in Malaysia, and eight CA-27 Mk 32 Avon Sabre jet fighters sent to Ubon Ratchathani in eastern Issan. This location, on the Mun River, (tributary of the Mekong) in north-eastern Thailand, was about 488 km NE of Bangkok and 80 km west of the Laotian border.

On 1 June, 79 SQN was officially formed at Tengah, Singapore in respect of Malaysia's neutrality. The aircraft were flown via RTAF Base Don Muang, Bangkok, then on to Ubon, arriving in bad weather by the skin of their teeth. During the next 10 days, C-130 Hercules from RAAF Richmond NSW, flew in a Base Squadron of 200 airmen and 450 tonnes of supplies. Originally living in tents

by the airfield, the RAAF contingent at Ubon evolved into a semi-permanent base with living quarters, messes, medical, admin, stores, a cinema, canteen, chapel and other facilities. On the air side over the runway a hangar, flight hut, ORP (Operational Readiness Platform), concrete parking bays with revetments, were all provided by No.5 Airfield Construction Squadron over time. The living quarters were located 300m from the main runway, so the sound of pairs of J79s in full afterburner were a constant companion.

Personnel deployed to Ubon on rotation for two months from Butterworth for 79 SQN and six months from Australia for Base Squadron. Although the crisis with neighbouring Laos was defused by negotiation, 79 SQN remained at Ubon until August 1968, as part of an integrated air defence system to protect USAF forces engaged in bombing North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By then, the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) of four F-4D Phantom squadrons, AC-130 Gunships and Blind Bat flare ships had occupied RTAF Base Ubon. Because of these assets, the base was under constant threat of incursion by unfriendly forces. Security was provided by armed RAAF ADGs and USAF Air Police. With adequate USAF air cover of their own, the need for the Sabres had diminished; 79 SQN withdrew to Butterworth in late July/August 1968 and disbanded, the air and ground crews rejoined 77 SQN.

The last 79 Sqn Ubon unit photo mid-1968 (Bill Mac is 8 from left rear rank).

Following a long battle with the Australian Government agencies, the 2500 RAAF personnel who served with the RAAF Contingent at Ubon were finally awarded the Australian Active Service Medal 1945-75 and the Vietnam Logistic and Support Medal for warlike operational service, Return from Active Service Badge and access to the Veterans' Entitlement Act. The King of Thailand graciously approved a commemorative medal, bearing a Garuda with a ribbon in Thai national flag colours. Three of our Cairns Sub-Branch members served at Ubon at various times;

Ralph James, Tony Perry (BSQN) and Bill Maconachie (79 SQN). There is also a small display in Kokoda Hall Museum in with the RAAF Vietnam cabinet. If there are any other members out there who served in Ubon, we would like to know them. 'Sawasdee khrup!

*RIP to LAC J. Kirkwood ADG and PLTOFF M. McGrath Pilot, who never returned.

Towards the end of 1968: the morning 77 SQN departed Butterworth on the ferry flight to Australia via Singapore, Denpasar, Darwin to Williamtown.

'Slim' Maconachie served with No's 77 and 79 SQNs in 1967/68 as a CPL ELECFITT2.

Smoking a Definite Health Hazard

From Warren O'Grady

I was posted to 77 SQN from 75 SQN, Butterworth, in 1978-ish. The squadron was tasked to participate in a Firepower Demonstration at Puckapunyal shortly after I arrived. Everyone who was anyone in Defence was going to be there in company with politicians– it was quite a big deal. As a newby to the squadron, I was not included in the demo, but I jagged a seat in the grandstand as an 'observer'.

Everything was going swimmingly when the FAC (aboard his trusty Winjeel) arrived, identified a dastardly enemy position half way up the hill in front of the audience, marked it with smoke and called in 'the boys' – a four ship of Mirages from East Sale, where they had positioned for the event. The aircraft R/T was broadcast over the PA system for all to hear.

'Smoke spotters'

The FAC gave his detailed briefing whilst the Mirages circled at 10,000ft overhead, ending with 'Call my smoke'. Lead called that he saw white smoke and the FAC gave them 'Clear Live'.

Shortly after, the FAC called Lead and asked him if he was sure he had the target. Lead replied 'I've definitely got the target'. Unfortunately, farmer Brown was burning off on an adjacent hill (still in the range area) and the smoke was white! Four jets pickled off their Mk82 500lb bombs on the farmer's bonfire – Ugg!

To make matters worse, the Army had just purchased their new tanks (Leopards?) and after the Mirages had departed, one majestically rattled to a halt in front of us, ready to wipe out the same enemy position on the side of the hill. The commentator effusively told us of the new weapons system which provided extremely accurate fire. The tank's turret turned towards the target and let a round rip, but there was no hit on the enemy target! Seconds later, an explosion, kilometres down range, caused a massive bush fire whereby the demo was called off so that the fire services could attend. The tank had not only missed the enemy target, but it had missed the whole hill!

Oops!

I would imagine that that particular demo was not regarded as the most successful. We 'observers' chuckled all the way home!

Wartime Spies Posed as Swagmen Near Townsville, Historian's Research Reveals

From ABC North Qld, by Meghan Dansie and Jessica Naunton

On a lush north Queensland cattle property in April 1942, a strange shape emerging from the clouds caught a woman's eye as she hung up the washing. A mushroom-shaped cloth attached to a glittering figure was descending from the low-lying cloud cover, the parachutist's feet furiously steering away from the farmhouse. Eyewitnesses quickly mounted their horses and rode to the landing site, but the shadowy figure had vanished.

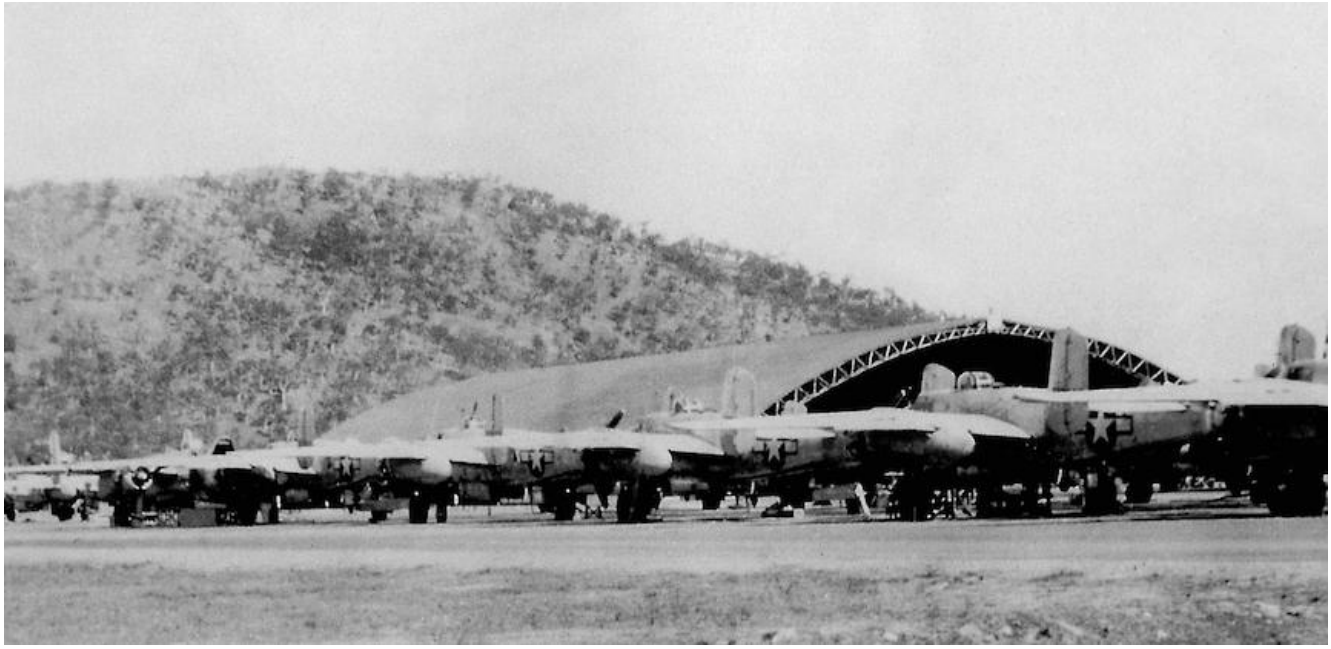
Ray Holyoak examines reports and eyewitness accounts. (ABC North Queensland: Chloe Chomicki)

It is a tale that seems almost fictional, one bound to happen far from Australia's shores. But Australian historian Ray Holyoak from James Cook University has uncovered radar records, police reports and eyewitness accounts revealing evidence of a concerted foreign espionage effort in wartime northern Australia. 'There is some detailed information in several Australian archive files that around the end of April 1942, there is at least one parachute drop of spies,' he said. 'There was somebody there passing on vital information.'

During World War II the northern Australian garrison city of Townsville was an important Allied base during the fight for the Pacific. The city's deep-water port, rail facilities and troop staging areas made it a key strategic location of great interest to wartime enemies. 'After the Pearl Harbour attack in December 1941 they really do think there's going to be a landing, or at least a heavy attack, to the north of Australia,' Mr Holyoak said.

American landing ships on the Strand beach in Townsville. (Supplied: Geoff Hansen)

The fall of Lae in Papua New Guinea gave Japanese forces a base closer to Australia, allowing them to step up surveillance efforts. 'We've already had the bombing of Darwin in February 1942, and by March there's Japanese surveillance aircraft coming over Townsville,' Mr Holyoak said. 'To be able to come this far was possible.'



American bombers stationed near Mount Louisa in Townsville. (Supplied: Geoff Hansen)

Allied intercepts from the time show records of spies or sympathisers feeding information from Townsville about troop movements and popular pubs in early 1942, Mr Holyoak said. Then came the parachute drop of a suspected spy onto a north Queensland farm by a Japanese aircraft, on the Woodhouse pastoral holding near Giru, south-east of Townsville. 'It sounds like a story or a training exercise, but on the day, there are radar records of a particular Japanese aircraft, an MC-20, that was used in the early stages in South-East Asia for spy and parachute drops,' Mr Holyoak said. An initial search of the area near the farm was fruitless, but later that night, a sentry fired two warning shots at an unknown man who had approached an American airfield at Woodstock, roughly 8 kilometres from the landing site.

The next morning, Mr Holyoak said, authorities noted an itinerant swagman walked along the road towards Townsville, near Toonpan. 'Somebody walking through farms or in an Allied uniform — they would have got stopped and checked,' he said. 'But somebody in a swaggie's outfit walking towards Townsville would have been ignored, so the Queensland Police thought really this was the perfect disguise. They weren't challenged, and they walked on to Townsville and were never seen again.'

August 15 marked 80 years since the Allied victory in the Pacific, when Japanese forces surrendered following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. North Queensland historian and author of Townsville in War and Peace 1942-1946, Geoff Hansen, said the war developed the northern region into the important defence base that it is today. 'It changed very, very quickly. Business premises and private homes were commandeered for military occupation and other purposes,' Mr Hansen said. 'We had air strips, forts, air raid shelters, search lights, anti-aircraft gun emplacements being built, large military camps and hospitals, schools were closed.
We had lots of Americans and Australians come in, and it was also where the fifth US Air Force was formed, so it was a big transformation.'

Mr Hansen said it was crucial that local historical accounts of the broader conflict were remembered and commemorated appropriately. 'As we move further and further away, there's less of that direct knowledge of what it was like,' he said. 'I think it's important to remind ourselves that the world can change very quickly, and north Queensland experienced that in 1942 to 1945.' The garrison city will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the war in the Pacific with a joint US-Australian commemorative service involving veterans, families and dignitaries.

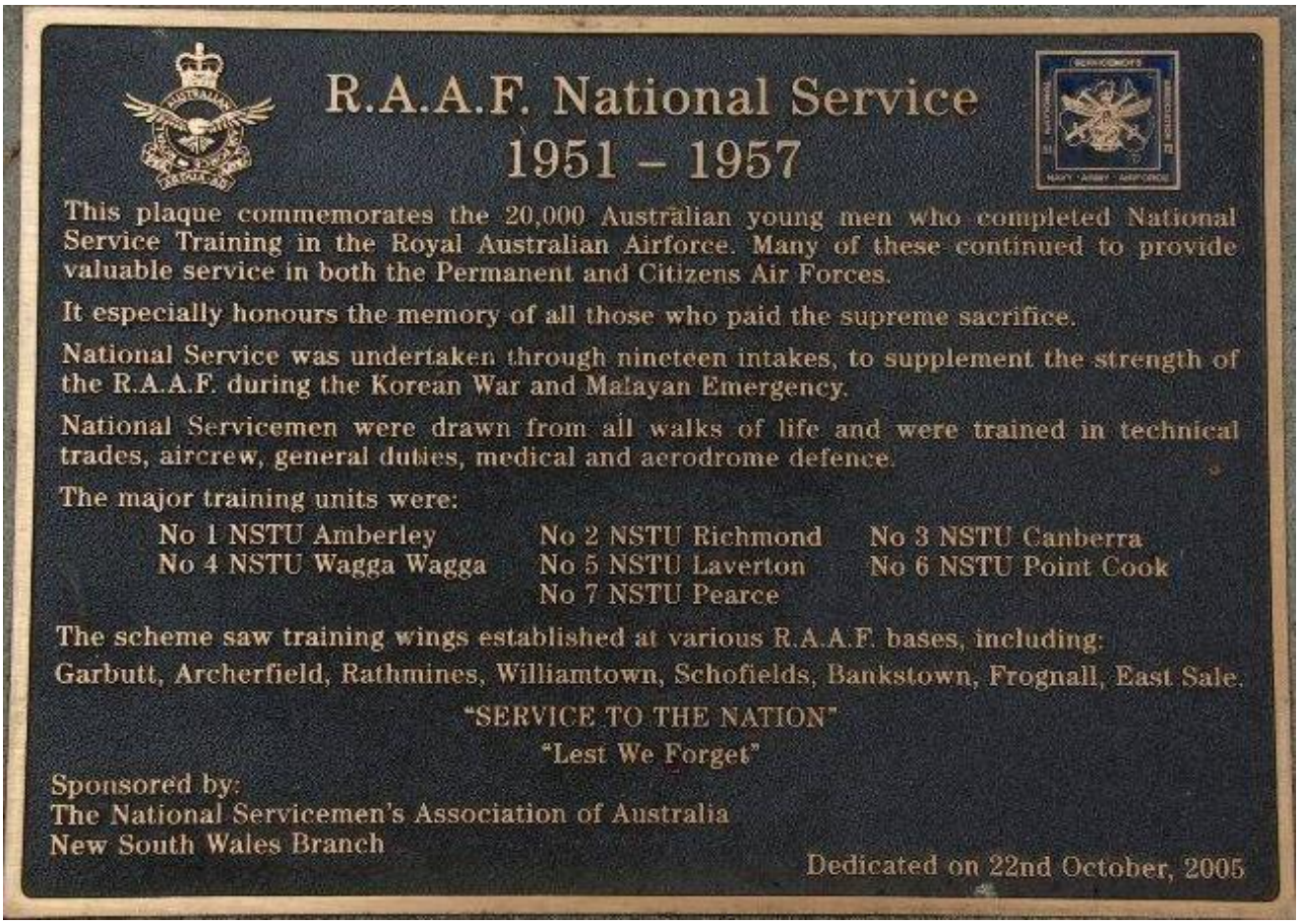
National Service - 1956

From Graham Brown

Not many of us would have had personal experience of National Service in the Air Force, so I hope this is of interest. In the context of the intensification of the Cold War in Europe, Communist insurgency and success in South-East Asia, and the declaration of war in Korea, the Menzies government sponsored the National Service Act 1951. The legislation provided for the compulsory call-up of males turning 18 on or after 1 November 1950, for service training of 176 days. Trainees were required to remain on the Reserve of the Commonwealth Military Forces (CMF) for five years from initial call up, except for those in the Air Force for whom there was no continuing reservist obligation.

Men could nominate the service in which they wished to be trained. Those nominating the Navy or the Air Force were considered only if they volunteered for service outside Australia. The first call-up notice was issued on 12 April 1951. I was called up in 1956 and did Nasho during the university vacation in 1956-57. Having nominated for the Air Force, I did service at Pearce Air

Force Base about 50km north of Perth. It was hard work with constant training as airfield defence personnel. I was Aircraftsman Recruit (ACR) Brown, serial number A55142, which I have remembered for over 60 years!



Eighteen of us were selected for flying training; I was number 19. If one of the others had pulled out, I would have been in, but that did not happen. If it had, I probably would have owned six aircraft over the years instead of six yachts. Those guys worked their butts off day and night, but in three months they were flying Vampire jet fighters. The rest of us had a rather enjoyable time and occasionally went AWOL to parties in Perth.

My only claim to fame at Pearce was being on guard duty for an RAF Vulcan bomber that was purported to have an atom bomb on board for the nuclear tests in Australia. I don't know what we were supposed to do with a loaded .303 rifle for protection, but I was on duty all night for several nights for this important assignment.

The Australian Government was very lax putting me there. That is an RAF Vulcan bomber at Pearce in the photo – a very beautiful delta-wing aircraft that finally played an important role in the Falklands War in 1982 for the UK.

I had to do a supplementary exam in statistics at Uni while I was in Nasho. I was given 10

days off to study for it and got paid extra for living away from barracks (at home). Not a bad deal at the time for a poor student.

Apart from the standard Lee–Enfield .303 rifle, we were trained on Vickers Machine Guns, Bren guns, Thompson Sub-Machine Guns (Tommy gun), Owen guns, mortars, hand grenades and anything else that went bang, all with live ammunition. They put us through some very hairy exercises with live ammunition fired above us by a Vickers, and TNT explosions while we crawled under a barbed wire tunnel that was just above bum height. It was a time trial as well and the sights on the Vickers were lowered periodically – too bad if you were slow or got hung up on the barbed wire!

Those of us at Uni were allowed to do our six months duty in two lots of three months, however between our first (1956) and second (1957) stints they abolished Nasho and so I only did the first three months. I found out a couple of years ago that I received an honourable discharge on 30th June 1960. This came about because watching the Sydney Anzac Day march on television one year, I saw a banner for Air Force National Service. I followed this up and I am now a member of the RAAF National Service 'Rare Breed' Association. We are called the rare breed because there were so few of us compared to the army, less than 20,000 compared to more than 200,000 in the army, which included Vietnam. Air Force national service only existed between 1951 and 1957 and so all the members of the 'rare breed' are now well over 80. Membership came with a blazer pocket badge, (never worn) and later two medals from Veterans Affairs (Australian Defence Medal and the National Service Medal). Nasho definitely affected my hearing as there was no hearing protection provided in those days, but I can't get any compensation because they also didn't do hearing tests, and so they say they have no baseline to compare it with.

Blazer Pocket Badge

National Service was good though, and it is certainly recognised at functions we attend for Anzac Day and on other occasions where medals are worn here in Newcastle where I now live.