

Warrant Officer of the Air Force



The position of 'Warrant Officer of the RAAF' was instituted on 15 February 1993 with the appointment of Warrant Officer Richard ('Dick') Newton.

The post was created by the then Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal I.B. ('Barry') Gration, to provide a key conduit between Air Force's senior leadership and the airman ranks. As the Service's senior airman, the holder of this singular appointment (later retitled 'Warrant Officer of the Air Force'—WOFF-AF) has been required to regularly visit all RAAF commands, bases and units; to keep abreast of and gain insight into the views, issues and concerns of airmen; and to communicate these frankly to the Chief of Air Force and other commanders.

Apart from representing RAAF non-commissioned personnel at ceremonial functions and social activities, and maintaining direct contact with his Navy and Army counterparts, the WOFF-AF also contributes to command and leadership training throughout the RAAF.

Some Personal Observations

In the early days:

“.. I hoped to be able to give the Chief all the information he wanted. I wanted him to feel as though the airmen and the junior officers and the COs could feel confident that he was getting the right information from his chain of command that may have at some stage broken down. I honestly think it had because morale at the time I took up the role wasn't very high.

The Air Force was going through a big transition. It was going through change and a lot of people couldn't accept that the Air Force was going to have to get smaller. We needed to put our aircraft in the air and be able to keep them there. Money was tight, budgets were tight, and really Australia was in grip of a recession. The money wasn't there for a large Air Force.

Initially it was with a little bit of distrust. They felt that I was spying on them for the Chief and the Senior Officers. There were a lot of the guys feeling that way. Especially the older contingent. Why is this person coming to see us? Why is he out here? We're going through changes, we don't need his input, we're going to have to do these changes our way, there was a bit of distrust.

You just had to sit down and talk to them and explain to them what the Chief wanted and say what my role in his Office was. All they wanted was to be a part of the loop. What I would do for them was make sure that the information that you're giving me today gets to him, it doesn't go around through channels and take three weeks to get there. CAS wants to know what's happening on his watch. What is happening to you? Is something bad happening to you that he doesn't know about that can be improved? “

Some 15 years later:

“.. I had to talk to promotion courses, and by doing that I would get the majority of the enlisted folk. I was basically spending every fortnight in Wagga, I was on the road continuously during my three year tenure, it was a lot of driving, but the Chief insisted I do what I do best, talk to people, therefore he wanted me to concentrate on the Promotion Courses. And I had no issues with that.

He also indicated that I should travel overseas. I was flabbergasted and once they called in the paramedics to revive me because of what he said - travel overseas, I immediately went about arranging travel to the States. I was the first ADF enlisted member to go on the Keystone Course which is similar to the senior officers Capstone Course. Keystone is for the senior enlisted so I got invited to that and went to Suffolk, Virginia for the week course. As I was the first one to go over there I had to do a report on my return to say whether it was worthwhile or not. A very enlightening course and it gave a great insight as to how the Americans operate. To this day they're still doing it.

He knew that I didn't need a boundary. He never told me there was a no go area. There were a couple of things as that first year went on where I was still trying to figure out where exactly was my left and right, where do I do and can I do this? And quite often there are some things that I'd be invited to and I'd go.

The greatest pleasure that that job ever gives you, for all the heartache that it is to travel and travel is nothing as romantic as people think it is. When you're traveling as much as you do in those jobs. So to travel and just see how people, to see our great men and women of Air Force just doing what they love to do. You see the smiles on their faces, their eyes dance. I've seen people in snow. I've seen people up to their knees in mud. I've seen people in 50 odd degrees. I've seen people sitting in air conditioning and they've all got the same smiles. They're doing what it is they've been trained to do. They're doing it way better than the best of their abilities and they're doing it in such a manner that it's holding the Air Force in such great esteem right around the world."

The Office of Air Force History intends to continue the practice of offering each Warrant Officer of the Air Force the opportunity to record his experiences shortly after relinquishing the position.