

# PATHFINDER

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## THE RAAF'S FIRST PEACEKEEPERS

Since World War II, military operations other than conventional war have become more common. The world-wide upsurge in intra-state conflicts has placed increasing demands on the ADF to conduct peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations, often under war-like conditions. Alongside members of the other services, the RAAF personnel have made major contributions to peacekeeping operations around the world, and continue to do so today.

The RAAF was part of the first UN peacekeeping mission in history in Netherlands East Indies (NEI), now Indonesia. On 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender, nationalists in the NEI proclaimed an Indonesian Republic and refused to accept the return of Dutch colonial rule. Sporadic fighting erupted on Java and Sumatra between Allied forces (who were trying to supervise the transition back to Dutch rule) and the Republicans. Two years later, the Dutch and Republicans still controlled separate enclaves.

In July 1947, the Dutch launched what they described as a 'police action' but which in reality was an invasion of Republican territory. The UN Security Council intervened to call a ceasefire and in August established a Consular Commission to monitor the separation of the two sides. The Commission was made up of the six UN Security Council member countries which had diplomatic representation in Batavia (now Jakarta).

The Australian representative on the Commission and its chairman was Group Captain Charles Eaton (Ret'd). When the Commission requested military observers, Australia responded promptly, sending a team of two Army officers, one Navy officer and a RAAF officer—Squadron Leader Lou Spence. They arrived in Surabaya on board a RAAF aircraft on 13 September, becoming the first ever UN peacekeepers deployed into the field.

After two weeks in country, Spence became ill and had to return to Australia. However, his report, co-written with Brigadier L.G.H. Dyke, argued that the ceasefire was unworkable and that a negotiated settlement between the two sides would not be

possible. A further 60 Australians, many of them RAAF, would serve as UN peacekeepers in the NEI, reporting on the sporadic outbreaks of violence. In early 1949, in response to international pressure generated by the UN observer reports, Indonesia was finally granted its independence. Australia, with a significant contribution from the RAAF, had played a central role in the UN's first peacekeeping effort and in stabilising the SE Asian region.

The UN also maintained a presence in Korea from November 1947. In early 1950, two Australian officers—Major Stuart Peach and Squadron Leader Ronald Rankin—arrived in South Korea as UN observers. Rankin was a fighter pilot with operational experience in both the European and Pacific theatres in World War II. The two Australians spent two weeks inspecting South Korean units along the 38th Parallel, the dividing line between North and South Korea. Within days of their return to Seoul, North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded the South. Armed with Peach and Rankin's

report, the UN deduced that the North was clearly the aggressor. The Security Council then passed a resolution to provide forces to oppose the Communist invasion. Having played a pivotal role in the Korean conflict, Peach and Rankin continued their UN duties until later that year. Their replacement in a volatile environment, as a part-time observer, was Wing Commander (later Air Vice Marshal) Keith Hennock, RAAF.



*Australian observers arrive Jakarta, 14 Sep 1947  
(Spence second from right)*

Between March 1975 and January 1979, the RAAF maintained in Kashmir a detachment of one Caribou aircraft, with air and ground crews, as part of the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan. The detachment's role was to move UN observers around an area of rugged mountain peaks and few roads. The observers monitored the ceasefire and prevented further violence between two hostile countries.

At the same time, another RAAF detachment was operating in a completely different environment. In July 1976, a detachment of four Iroquois helicopters from No 5 Squadron joined the

UN Emergency Force (UNEF II) in the Sinai region. The detachment returned to Australia in 1979, but a larger detachment of eight RAAF and two RNZAF Iroquois returned to the Sinai between 1982 and 1986 as part of the Multinational Force of Observers (MFO). The role of both detachments was to monitor the ceasefire agreements between Egypt and Israel. Despite the uncomfortable desert conditions and the volatile political situation, the RAAF carried out its peacekeeping mission commendably and contributed to peace in the Middle East.



***Rankin (second from right) on 38th Parallel at Kaesong, Korea, Jun 1950***

Since 1990, the number of ADF peacekeeping missions increased considerably. In 1992, the RAAF sent a Force Communications Unit of approximately 18 personnel to support the Australian-commanded UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Three years later, the Australian Medical Support Force sent to Rwanda in central Africa, included 51 RAAF personnel—some permanent and some reserve RAAF members. In 1992, the RAAF participated in Operation *Solace*, the stabilisation of Somalia after a period of civil war. RAAF transport aircraft flew the Australian National Liaison Team to Mogadishu and provided ongoing air logistic support to deployed Australian Army units in Somalia. RAAF specialists in movements and air traffic control provided valuable services on the ground at Mogadishu airport. At the end of the operation, RAAF and RNZAF C130 and RAAF B707 aircraft repatriated the ground force back to Australia.

Between 1999 and the present, the RAAF has participated in a number of UN missions in East Timor. The contribution included airlift of ground forces, organic airfield defence, support to air operations, maritime and land surveillance, medical assistance and aeromedical evacuation. Another UN

mission currently supported by the RAAF is the UN Mission in Sudan. The RAAF contribution includes airlift of personnel and equipment by C130 aircraft, provision of UN staff officers and a commander of the Australian contingent (Squadron Leader Ruth Elsley).

Some regional peacekeeping missions supported by the RAAF have not been under UN authority. In 1997–98, RAAF medical personnel formed part of the Combined Health Element deployed to Bougainville to support peace talks to end the civil war on the island. Other RAAF personnel were members of the Peace Monitoring Group. When law and order deteriorated in the Solomon Islands in 2003 and again in 2006, RAAF aircraft deployed the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Island (RAMSI). A RAAF Caribou detachment deployed to the Honiara allowed RAMSI elements to move quickly between islands.

RAAF contributions to peacekeeping missions around the world have demonstrated the professionalism of RAAF personnel and underscored the sound judgement and exceptional level of technical expertise accrued by the service since the 1940s. The contribution has also highlighted the breadth of capabilities in the RAAF, from the use of force to the provision of medical and logistic assistance.

- *The RAAF contributed to the first UN military observer operations in history and continues to support peacekeeping in many countries.*
- *In a range of UN and regional peace missions, the RAAF has demonstrated its versatility and flexibility in responding to crises.*
- *Air Power plays a key role in ADF operations supporting government policy to promote security and stability within the region, and increasingly, across the globe.*

*“Increasingly, the ADF must be capable of both executing effective combat operations and providing military support to national responses in more complex environments. In 2030, the ADF will be able to ... [inter alia] support United Nations activities and honour other longstanding multinational commitments.”*

*– Joint Operations for the 21st Century*



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