



## AIRCRAFT GIFTS TO REGIONAL FORCES

When the RAAF was formed on 31 March 1921, most of its aircraft had been donated by the British Government (see Pathfinder 145) for the purpose of assisting Australia with the establishment of an air service. Without these gifted aircraft, the RAAF would have had little, if any, operational capability in its first years. Like the British Government in 1919, the Australian Government in more recent times has seen the value in making aircraft gifts to assist neighbouring countries to develop their air forces.

Improving a nation's ability to defend its territory contributes to that country's stability, and the stability of countries in our region is very much in Australia's interest. However, aircraft on their own do not

provide any capability. Without the trained personnel to operate and maintain them and without adequate spare parts and weapons, aircraft are a liability rather than an asset. For this reason, the gifts of former RAAF aircraft have usually come with training for aircrew, groundcrew, and in many cases logistic personnel, as well as a supply of aircraft spare parts.

The RAAF's first gift of aircraft to another air force was small but significant. In April 1951, No 77 Squadron (77 SQN) flew its last Mustang sorties over Korea and withdrew to Japan to re-equip with the jet-powered Gloster Meteor. At a ceremony at Iwakuni air base in Japan in November 1952, two ex-77 SQN Mustangs were gifted to the Republic of Korea Air Force to add to the ex-USAF Mustangs already being flown in combat.

In April 1969, the Australian Prime Minister announced that 10 ex-RAAF Sabre Mk32 fighters would be gifted to the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF), which at that time had no air combat capability. As a sub-sonic,

first generation jet fighter, the Sabre was outclassed by supersonic aircraft such as the Mirage III and the MiG-21, but it provided a useful training and combat capability.

In May 1969, 12 ex-77 SQN Sabre aircraft, tools and spares were taken over by the newly-formed RAAF Sabre Advisory Flight (RSAF) at Butterworth and the training of RMAF personnel on the Sabre began. The first of 10 Sabres was handed over to No 11 Squadron, RMAF, in

October 1969, adding a new capability to the RMAF. A Sabre flight simulator and two other non-flying airframes were also supplied as training aids. Another six Sabres were gifted two years later, making a total of 18 aircraft.

They continued in RMAF service providing valuable introductory fighter training and experience until replaced by F-5E aircraft in 1972.

The easing of tension between Australia and Indonesia in the early 1970s led to the gift of 18 Sabres to the Indonesian Air Force (TNI-AU) in February 1973. In addition to the aircraft, the gift included aircraft spares, a flight simulator, air traffic control (ATC) radio transmitters and a radio direction finder to provide ATC with an instrument approach aid. The training package included formal training of 150 TNI-AU personnel at RAAF Base Williamtown and a team of RAAF personnel in Indonesia for three years to provide on-going aircrew, technical and logistics training.

Over a 10-day period in February 1973, 18 Sabres were flown from Williamtown to Iswahyudi Air Base in Java via Mt Isa, Darwin and Bali. RAAF pilots from No 2 Operational Conversion Unit (2 OCU) flew the aircraft to Bali where they were handed over to the TNI-AU pilots



for the last leg to Iswahyudi. One Sabre was damaged in an accident at Bali, but within days was replaced by another aircraft flown from Australia. In July 1976, an additional five Sabres were obtained from Malaysia and donated to Indonesia to cover attrition losses. The RAAF Sabre Advisory Unit remained at Iswahyudi conducting training until 14 February 1975, when it disbanded. The Sabres were flown by No 14 Squadron, TNI-AU, until 1982 when their role was taken over by ex-US F-5Es, A-4Es and British Hawks.

RAAF C-47 Dakota aircraft frequently proved to be useful gifts to other air forces in our region. Their ruggedness and ability to operate from rough airfields, and the ready availability of spare parts, made them an ideal general transport aircraft. In



November 1971 the Australian government made a gift of five ex-RAAF Dakota aircraft to the Cambodian Air Force. Another two aircraft were gifted to the Philippines Air Force in February and May 1973 to augment their existing Dakota fleet. Over the period 2-6 September 1973 two ex-RAAF Dakotas were flown from East Sale to Halim Air Force Base, near Jakarta, by RAAF crews and handed over to Indonesia for use as navigation trainers.

When Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975, the formation of an air transport force within the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) was a high priority. In a country consisting of many islands and jungle-covered, mountainous terrain, air transport was the only rapid way of moving ground forces, police and government officials around the country. In 1974, PNGDF members began training in Australia as pilots, loadmasters and aircraft technicians. Three Dakota aircraft with PNGDF markings were flown to Port Moresby in August 1975 to provide the initial air transport capability, with a fourth aircraft gifted in January 1976. The gift also included spare parts and ongoing training of air and ground crew. Another two aircraft and one airframe training aid were donated in 1981.

To expand its capability to support ground forces, the PNGDF was also gifted four Iroquois helicopters in August 1989. Although these aircraft had been in RAAF service, they were transferred to Army aviation regiments several months before being handed over to PNG. As with other aircraft gifts, the Iroquois came with spare parts and training. Another gift of ex-Army aircraft occurred in 1978 when 12 Bell 47 Sioux helicopters were gifted to the Indonesian Army for use as training aircraft.

As an air force that started its life with a gift of British aircraft, the RAAF has, on many occasions, seen the value in assisting its neighbours with gifts of aircraft and training. The value of these gifts is returned to Australia in terms of regional stability and strong

relationships with neighbouring air forces. The same policy continues today with the recent announcement of a gift of ex-RAAF C-130H aircraft to the Indonesian Air Force.

- *Ex-RAAF Mustang, Sabre and Dakota aircraft, with training and spare parts, have been donated to a number of air forces in the Asia-Pacific region.*
- *Former RAAF Iroquois and Sioux helicopters were also donated to regional defence forces.*
- *Gifts of aircraft strengthens regional stability and enhances Australia's relations with its neighbours.*

*The Imperial Gift ... of 128 aircraft and every conceivable piece of equipment to support an air force arrived in 1920, making it possible the following year to form an independent air service—the Royal Australian Air Force.*

John Bennett, *The Imperial Gift* (1996)



**Air Power Development Centre**  
TCC3, Department of Defence  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ph: 02 6266 1355 Fax: 02 6266 1041  
Email: [airpower@defence.gov.au](mailto:airpower@defence.gov.au)  
Web: <http://airpower.airforce.gov.au>

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