RAAF Air Power Studies Centre

The Post-War Years: 1945-1954

The Proceedings of the
1996 RAAF History Conference

Held in Canberra on 25 October 1996

Edited by John Mordike
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Papers have been printed as presented by authors, with only minor changes to achieve some consistency in layout, spelling and terminology. The transcripts of the discussions which followed the presentation of the papers have been edited for relevance.

I wish to thank Miss Carolyn Kirk for undertaking the task of transcribing the Conference proceedings. My thanks are also due to Mrs Sandra Di Guglielmo for her dedicated editorial assistance and her valuable administrative support.

John Mordike
Air Power Studies Centre
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACS</td>
<td>Airfield Construction Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMSE</td>
<td>Air Member for Supply and Equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZAC</td>
<td>Australian New Zealand Army Corp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZUS</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASR</td>
<td>Air Sea Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCAIR</td>
<td>British Commonwealth Air Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCOF</td>
<td>British Commonwealth Occupation Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Chief of the Air Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Commanding Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSDIC</td>
<td>Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>Directorate of Personnel Airmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEAF</td>
<td>Far East Asian Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLO</td>
<td>Ground Liaison Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOC</td>
<td>Joint Operations Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCOSA</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff Australia</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Leading Aircraftman</td>
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<td>NASMA</td>
<td>National Air and Space Museum of Australia</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-commissioned Officer</td>
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<td>Prisoner of War</td>
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<td>PSP</td>
<td>Pierced Steel Planking</td>
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<td>United States of America Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>United States Ship</td>
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<tr>
<td>VHF</td>
<td>Very High Frequency</td>
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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Dr A.W. (Alan) Stephens is the RAAF Historian, based with the Air Power Studies Centre. Before joining the Air Power Studies Centre he was a principal research officer in the Federal parliament, specialising in foreign affairs and defence; while prior to that he was an RAAF pilot, where his postings included the command of No. 2 Squadron from 1980-81. Dr Stephens is the author of numerous books and articles on defence, air power and military history. His most recent book is *High Fliers: Leaders of the RAAF*. He is a graduate of the RAAF Staff College, and the University of New England, the Australian National University, and the University of New South Wales.

Air Marshal S.D. (David) Evans AC, DSO, AFC joined the RAAF in June 1943, and trained as a pilot, graduating with the rank of sergeant. After completing pilot training in October 1944, Air Marshal Evans joined No. 1 Air Observer School as a staff pilot. He was posted to No. 38 Squadron in October 1945, and served with this squadron until May 1948. From August 1948 to November 1949 he was posted to RAAF London where he gained considerable experience as a transport captain during the Berlin Airlift.

Air Marshal Evans was employed on flying instructional duties for the next few years, including a two year exchange posting with the RNZAF between May 1951 and July 1953. Air Marshal Evans had a variety of flying and staff appointments. These included Assistant Air Attache Washington, January 1965; Commanding Officer No. 2 Squadron, Vietnam; Director of Air Force Plans; Director-General of Plans and Policy; Officer Commanding RAAF Base Amberley; Chief of Air Force Operations. He took up the appointment of Chief of Joint Operations and Plans and retained this position until becoming Chief of the Air Staff in 1982.

Whilst commanding RAAF Base Amberley, Air Marshal Evans further extended his flying experience by qualifying on F-111C and Iroquois aircraft. Throughout his tour at Amberley he maintained currency on these and Canberra aircraft. Air Marshal Evans has flown over 8,600 hours on a variety of Service aircraft.

Air Marshal Evans is a graduate of RAAF Staff College, the Air Warfare Course, and the Royal College of Defence Studies.

He was awarded the Air Force Cross for his high standard of flying and devotion to duty as a VIP captain, and appointed a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order for service in Vietnam in Command of No. 2 Bomber Squadron. On 26 January 1981 Air Marshal Evans was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service as Chief of Air Force Operations, and on 11 June 1984 he was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia.
Air Commodore (John) Jacobs graduated as a sergeant pilot on No. 6 Course, Flying Training School at Point Cook in 1951. After acquiring a few hours experience on Mustangs and Vampires he was posted into 78 Wing for the entire tour of the Wing in Malta and was granted a commission in 1953. On return to Australia he flew Canberras at Woomera and also at Amberley with No. 2 Squadron. He became a flying instructor in 1958; during the next eight years as an instructor he enjoyed an exchange with the United States Air Force in Oklahoma and a posting as Chief Flying Instructor at Central Flying School, East Sale. After completing the Staff Course in 1967, he had several staff appointments including CO Base Squadron Edinburgh and Assistant Commandant of the Staff College. On promotion to Air Commodore in 1978 he was appointed as Officer Commanding RAAF Butterworth. John Jacobs retired in 1981 as Director General Personnel Services (Air Force).

Warrant Officer D.W. (Dave) Gardner joined the RAAF in 1967 and trained as an airframe fitter at Wagga. He has seen service at various units during his 29 years in the RAAF. His aircraft experience includes C-47 Dakotas, SP2H Neptunes, Canberra Mk20 and Mk21, F4E Phantoms, F-111C, Iroquois and Chinook helicopters, and CT4 Airtrainers. He is also cross-trained to engine trade as well as having five year's experience as a non-destructive inspector. He was appointed Curator RAAF Museum in June 1986.

Presently, in addition to his primary duty as Senior Curator, he, as a Warrant Officer Engineer at the RAAF Museum, is responsible for the maintenance of airworthy and static aircraft as well as the restoration of aircraft and technical equipment. He also holds a Civil Aviation Authority Maintenance Authority for maintenance on all museum aircraft, which include a Fokker Triplane replica, a Sopwith Pup replica, a Tiger Moth, a Winjeel, a Harvard and a Lockheed Ventura.

Warrant Officer Gardner has been involved in the maintenance and restoration of historic aircraft and components under the Federal Government’s National Cultural Heritage Act. He is also a valuer of historic aircraft and components under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme and a member of the Civil Aviation Authority Steering Committee charged with reviewing the permit to fly.

Group Captain J.P. (John) Harvey is the Director of the Air Power Studies Centre. He joined the RAAF in 1977 and has had flying tours on Canberra and F-111 aircraft. He is a graduate of the RAAF Weapons Systems Course, the RAF Aerosystems Course and, before being posted to the Air Power Studies Centre, was a visiting fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University. Other postings include the Joint Intelligence Organisation, Force Development and Analysis Division in the Department of Defence, an exchange posting with the Ministry of Defence New Zealand, and as Flight Test Director for the F-111 Avionics Update Project.

Dr J.L. (John) Mordike was formerly an officer in the Australian Army. His military career spanned 17 years of commissioned service and included several regimental and staff appointments. During this period, he spent one year on active service in Vietnam. After leaving the Army, he was appointed in a civilian capacity as a historian in Army Office. He
is the author of *An Army for a Nation: a history of Australian military developments 1880-1914*. He is now working at the Air Power Studies Centre. John is a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and the University of New England and the University of New South Wales.

**Air Vice-Marshall R.E. (Ray) Trebilco AO, DFC** joined the RAAF in January 1945 and retired 37 years later on appointment as Administrator of Norfolk Island. He served as a linguist in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan in 1946-47 before resuming his interrupted aircrew career at No. 1 Flying Training School, Point Cook, in 1948. He flew Tiger Moths, Wirraways and Dakotas on course and converted to Mustangs at No. 21 Squadron at Laverton before being posted to No. 77 Squadron at Iwakuni in Japan in December 1949.

He completed a tour on Mustangs and a further one on Meteors during the Korean War. Between intelligence and other staff appointments, he had tours on Vampires, Sabres and Mirages at both training and operational units. He is a graduate of the United States Armed Forces Staff College and the Royal College of Defence Studies. Prior to his retirement from the RAAF, he was appointed as Air Officer Commanding Support Command and then Chief of Air Force Personnel.

Following his term as Administrator of Norfolk Island, he spent a further four years in Japan as Vice-President Overseas Telecommunication Commission. He lives on the Gold Coast, but remains active as a committee member of the Queensland Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and as chairman of the Queensland committee to raise funds for the long overdue National Korean War Memorial.

**Air Vice-Marshall W.H. (Bill) Simmonds AO** graduated from the RAAF College Point Cook in December 1951 after completing a four year course which included flying training. He then flew Vampires and Mustangs for a few months at RAAF Base Williamtown, before being posted to Iwakuni in Japan for a Meteor conversion. In Korea, he joined No. 77 Squadron which was based at Kimpo.

On completion of his operational flying tour he was posted to the Royal Air Force on exchange duty where he flew F86E Sabres with No. 20 Squadron RAF from the former Luftwaffe base at Oldenberg in West Germany.

Two years later he returned to Australia to undergo a weapons course at East Sale, followed by a posting to RAAF College as weapons instructor and then an appointment as the personal assistant to the Air Officer Commanding RAAF Training Command.

Postings to No. 3 Squadron in Butterworth, Malaysia, and the RAAF’s Aircraft Research and Development Unit followed. On completion of training at the RAAF Staff College in 1964, he was posted to the United States Air Force Academy. Three years later he was promoted to wing commander and posted to the Joint Intelligence Bureau.
Five years at Williamtown followed as Commanding Officer No. 77 Squadron, then Base Operations Officer and, after promotion to group captain, Air Staff Officer with responsibility for all flying operations at the base.

Other appointments held by Air Vice-Marshal Simmonds included Assistant Commandant RAAF Academy, Director Organisation and Establishments, Officer Commanding RAAF Base Williamtown and Commander of the Integrated Air Defence System of Malaysia and Singapore (Five Power Defence Arrangement).

During his last two and a half years in the RAAF he was the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff and Chief of Air Force Development. In 1986 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia.

**Air Commodore D.W. (Dave) Hitchins AM, AFC** joined the RAAF in late 1941 and trained as a pilot in Western Australia. In 1943-1944 he flew Beaufort aircraft with No. 100 Squadron in New Guinea and later instructed at No. 1 Operational Training Unit. After World War II he flew with several transport squadrons in Australia and the Pacific, and spent four years in Japan and Korea. He flew transports during the first year of the Korean War, and was the founding member of No. 30 Transport Unit (later No. 36 Squadron). He commanded No. 24 Commonwealth Squadron of the RAF for two years; spent four years on the Staff College directing staff; and then commanded No. 36 Squadron for four years. He retired in 1978 after commanding RAAF Darwin for three years and RAAF Pearce for two years.

**Wing Commander R.C. (Dick) Cresswell** joined the Air Force Cadet Scheme in 1938 and flew Demon aircraft with No. 3 Squadron until 1939. In 1940, he trained at CFS as an instructor and was then posted to Service Flying Training School at Wagga. He was subsequently attached to the US Army Air Corps, 9th Pursuit Squadron, as a liaison officer and trained RAAF pilots on P40 aircraft.

In March 1942, he was posted to Pearce and No. 77 Squadron. He commanded this squadron from April to August, 1943, while operating from Perth, Darwin, Milne Bay and Goodenough Island.

After service with No. 77 Squadron, he was posted as Chief Flying Instructor of No. 2 OTU Mildura. Early in 1944, he was posted to Darwin as Wing Leader of No. 1 Wing (Spitfires). In May of the same year, he was posted as formation commander and Wing Leader of No. 81 Fighter Wing Townsville. In September the Wing was reconstructed at Noemfoor with Wing Commander Cresswell as Wing Leader. He was also Commanding Officer of No. 77 Squadron for a couple of months.
OPENING ADDRESS

Air Marshal L.B. Fisher

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the fifth RAAF History Conference which assumes special interest in the 75th anniversary year of the RAAF. The previous RAAF History Conferences have dealt with the important subjects of Australia’s Air Chiefs, The RAAF in the South-West Pacific Area 1942-45, The RAAF in Europe, and last year The Home Front. Each of these conferences has been a great success, providing the opportunity for the delivery of research papers and for discussion. Furthermore the papers and proceedings of each conference have been published, creating a historical record for further research and education. I trust that today’s conference will achieve similar success and interest.

These history conferences provide a forum for studying aspects of RAAF history as well as bringing together serving officers, veterans and others with an interest in military history. For today’s conference we have taken a new step by having six veterans of past RAAF operations to present talks on their experiences. I am certainly looking forward to this aspect of the conference as I am sure you are too. I hope that many of you will want to ask questions today. Please let me encourage you to do so, especially during the last presentation on Korea. This segment has been set up with this specially in mind to provide an opportunity for the audience to interact with the speakers. In this way we will not only learn more ourselves but also enhance the quality of our historical record.

I am delighted to be here today to open this fifth conference. Its theme is The Post-War Years: 1945-54, and I might add that we have a record attendance for this conference. This in itself is a reflection of the quality of past conferences and I am sure that today’s proceedings will measure up to expectations. This conference will deal with the nine-year period between the close of the 1939-45 war and the end of the Malta-deployment in 1954. It was an eventful period which saw profound changes in the Defence Forces as Australia moved from a war to a peace-time footing. However, although we were at peace there was still much for the RAAF to do. To start with we had to help police the peace settlement with Japan, and even as this was happening the Cold War began to raise new concerns about the possibility of another full scale war. Communist movements also began to seek revolutionary changes in a number of countries in Australia’s region. Within five years of the close of hostilities in 1945, Australians were again deployed on active service - this time in Korea. It was an eventful period about which we will learn much today.

The following topics will be discussed:

- Demobilisation and the Interim Air Force;
- The Berlin Airlift;
- The Malta Deployment;
- The British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan;
• The War in Korea; and, as a special feature today we will also have a presentation on
• The RAAF Museum at Point Cook. I think all of you will be quite impressed with what has been achieved at Point Cook.

I trust that the presentations will not only be informative but also that they will promote some lively debate during the discussion period which will follow each presentation.

At the outset I would like to acknowledge the support given by today’s speakers to promote interest in RAAF History. I especially want to thank those veterans who will speak to us today. I look forward to your involvement in a day which I am confident will not only be enjoyable, as it always is, but which will also make a valuable contribution to the RAAF’s recorded history. Ladies and gentleman, I am very pleased to open the fifth RAAF History Conference. Thank you very much.
The day the war in the Pacific ended on 14 August 1945, all Air Force training ceased immediately and hundreds of thousands of men and women who were no longer needed by the armed services were told they would be released as soon as possible, regardless of whether or not they wanted to stay in uniform. That announcement marked the beginning of an extraordinary period of demobilisation as the RAAF began to reorganise for peace.

Before discussing the process of demobilisation, the actual composition of the RAAF in August 1945 is worth recording, for it stands as testimony to the remarkable administrative and organisational achievement of Chief of the Air Staff Air Vice-Marshal George Jones and his colleagues during World War II. In September 1939 the Air Force had comprised 3,489 personnel, 12 squadrons (of which half existed only in nucleus or were citizen force units) and 246 aircraft, every one of which was obsolescent. By 29 August 1945 the RAAF had grown about fifty-fold and consisted of hundreds of units in hundreds of locations, with thousands of aircraft, being operated by tens of thousands of people, as Table 1 illustrates.

The Air Force’s immediate post-war priority was to look after its people. While there may have been many young men eager to make the RAAF their career, the majority of wartime enlistees were desperately keen to put the past six years behind them and resume their normal lives. In October 1945 the total strength of the RAAF and the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force was 160,808, of whom 148,426 were in the Southwest Pacific Area (which included Australia) and 12,382 in other theatres, primarily Europe. Getting those people back home from the other side of the world or from remote islands scattered throughout the Pacific and out of the Air Force would be an enormous, complex task.

Three days after the Japanese surrender the Australian War Cabinet directed the services to implement their demobilisation plans as soon as practicable but no later than 1 October.1 Because the shape of the post-war world was far from clear, the RAAF’s demobilisation plan, which had been endorsed by Air Vice-Marshal Jones six weeks before the war ended, was cautious. While all personnel would be withdrawn from Europe, demobilisation in the Pacific would be controlled. By gradually increasing the discharge rate from 9,000 a month in October to 18,000 by January 1946, the RAAF would reach its planned strength of about 35,000 by June.2

1 War Cabinet Minute 4351, 17-8-45, RAAF Historical Section (RHS).

2 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 30-7-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, Australian Archives (AA). Some planning documents refer to 36 squadrons but 34 was the eventual figure.
### TABLE 1
**RAAF ORDER OF BATTLE, AUGUST 1945**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Unit</th>
<th>Numbers of Unit Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Personnel (1)</td>
<td>173,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Aircraft</td>
<td>5,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying Squadrons (2)</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flying Flights and Special Units</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance Units</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Air Supply Units</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airfield Construction Units</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radar and Signals Units</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airfield Defence Squadrons</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Base Units</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Units</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores and Equipment Units</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Units</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Units</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Units</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1) Includes 17,243 WAAAF and 472 RAAFNS.
(2) Includes 17 EATS Article XV Squadrons in Europe and squadrons which were partly formed or existed only on paper.

Source: Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 29-8-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA; RAAF, Australian War Effort (10th ed), 31-8-45, APSC.

Following a conference convened by the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) on the day the War Cabinet directive was issued, the plan to reduce the Air Force to the equivalent of 34 flying squadrons was put into effect. It contained two main features: all recruiting was to cease immediately, and all surplus personnel were to be released as soon as possible. Implementation of the plan was facilitated by the addition of Demobilisation Wings to the Personnel Depots which had been established during the war to manage the vast intake of recruits and which were now being used to reverse the process. The order in which individuals were demobilised was not left to accidents of location or the nature of their service, but instead was decided by ‘predetermined considerations’. A points system was devised in which an individual’s score mounted depending on his or her length of service, marital status, number of dependents, deferred education courses, and so on.\(^3\) The larger the score, the quicker the discharge.

\(^3\) *ibid.*, 4-11-45; ABO ‘N’ 607/1945.
Once points scores had been calculated, individuals were designated as either ‘surplus’ or ‘essential’, the latter category applying only to a small number of officers whose expertise would be critical to the new Air Force. ‘Surplus’ staff were posted to a Personnel Depot and transported to the mainland on an opportunity basis, with priority going to those with the highest scores.\footnote{4} Individuals were permitted to bring only ‘indispensable personal belongings’ back to Australia, with the kits of all ranks being searched to ensure that firearms, explosives and other dangerous goods, or any government property, were not imported. On arrival at the Personnel Depot they were re-posted ‘to the best advantage of the Service as a whole’, which meant that if at all possible they were discharged.

Like people, equipment was also categorised as ‘surplus’ or ‘essential’, modern fighters and bombers being the most prized items for the post-war RAAF. Once a unit’s people and essential equipment had been identified and, in the one case discharged and the other stored for future use, that unit was categorised as existing in ‘nucleus’ form only. It then became the responsibility of the nucleus organisation to arrange the redirection or disposal of the remaining stores and equipment, and to finalise administrative and equipment records.

As people were discharged in their thousands and equipment was written off or sold, units disappeared almost overnight. Demobilisation saw the rapid, widespread disbandment of Service Flying Training Schools, Operational Training Units, Advanced Flying and Refresher Units, Air Observers Schools, the Air Armament and Gas School and the Central Gunnery School. No further intakes were accepted into the Central Flying School at Point Cook, and the General Reconnaissance School at Bairnsdale was reduced to a nucleus staff.\footnote{5} Reductions were equally as severe for ground training establishments. The Staff School at Mount Martha was reduced to a nucleus; the School of Administration at Victor Harbour closed; and the Schools of Technical Training, Engineering, Signals and Radar, together with the Medical and Works Training Units, were closed immediately their current courses finished. At least the recruits on those courses graduated. Other courses which had a lower priority, such as Aerodrome Defence and Intelligence, ceased forthwith. Recruiting Centres were disbanded, as were (male) Recruit Depots and WAAAF Depots. The axe fell on the flying squadrons in five stages. Under Stage I, which was scheduled for completion by 30 September 1945, those units which were of least relevance to the post-war RAAF were either released from service or disbanded. Stage II was to be implemented by 31 December and involved the disbandment of a number of general reconnaissance and flying boat squadrons, and the phased reduction of several fighter squadrons from a Unit Establishment of 18 aircraft down to 12. Under Stage III, the fighter squadrons were to be further reduced to eight aircraft by 31 March 1946 and redesignated as ‘flights’; groups of three flights were then

\footnote{4} Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 23-10-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.

\footnote{5} Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 17-8-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.
reformed as squadrons. Stages IV and V, to be effected by 30 June and 30 September 1946 respectively, involved the disbandment of additional fighter/bomber and bomber wings and squadrons.\textsuperscript{6}

Disposing of the aircraft was no less challenging than demobilising the people. Contingency plans had rather optimistically identified a need for 661 aircraft in the post-war Air Force, leaving the Air Board with the daunting task of getting rid of about 5,000 machines.\textsuperscript{7} Pending firm advice from the government on the RAAF’s eventual shape, the Air Board instituted a ‘care and maintenance’ program under which all aircraft not needed to meet immediate tasks were placed in storage at one of scores of locations throughout Australia. The surplus machines were assigned one of five categories. Category ‘A’ aircraft constituted the reinforcement pool and were to be kept fully serviceable; category ‘B’ were placed in short-term storage and had to be ready for use within 14 days; categories ‘C’ and ‘D’ were long-term storage, with the former receiving some maintenance and the latter none; and category ‘E’ aircraft were stripped of equipment before being placed in long-term storage or disposed of. By far the majority were categorised as ‘D’ or ‘E’ as the RAAF could afford neither the manpower nor the material to keep them in a reasonable condition, let alone airworthy.

The list of aircraft was, quite simply, extraordinary, and warrants recording here in acknowledgment of an exceptional organisational achievement, both during and after the war.

Aircraft identified for storage were to be spread over an extraordinarily wide geographic area, at one of 40 different locations: Amberley, Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Benalla, Boulder, Bundaberg, Canberra, Cootamundra, Cunderdin, Deniliquin, Evans Head, Geraldton, Lake Boga, Laverton, Lowood, Kingaroy, Mallala, Maryborough, Mildura, Mount Gambier, Narrandera, Narromine, Nhill, Oakey, Parkes, Pearce, Point Cook, Port Pirie, Rathmines, Richmond, Sale East, Sale West, Tamworth, Temora, Tocumwal, Uranquinty, Wagga, Werribee, Western Junction and Williamtown. Simply storing the aircraft on a care and maintenance basis would require 436 technical personnel.\textsuperscript{8}

Ultimately the government decided that the RAAF did not need the great majority of stored aircraft, and with the approval of the Commonwealth Disposals Commission those machines were sold to other government departments, civil aircraft operators and private individuals. As the Department of Civil Aviation was not prepared to issue a certificate of airworthiness for many of the aircraft, large numbers were stripped of accessories, broken down, and sold as scrap metal or dumped, a process during which an irreplaceable part of Australia’s aviation and wartime heritage was lost.

\textsuperscript{6} ibid., 6-8-45.

\textsuperscript{7} ibid., 22-8-46.

\textsuperscript{8} ibid.; see also Air Board Agendum 6887, 20-12-45, RHS.
### TABLE 2
### AIRCRAFT STORAGE PLAN, 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aircraft Type</th>
<th>Total Held June 1946</th>
<th>RAAF Post-war Requirements (1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberator</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mosquito</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>103</td>
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<td>Mustang</td>
<td>378</td>
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<td>Auster</td>
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<td>Oxford</td>
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(1) These figures include Unit Aircraft Establishment (ie, how many aircraft each active unit had) and aircraft in short-term storage of 14 days, as per Category ‘B’.

Source: CRS A1196/36/501/589, AA.

Disposing of aircraft was the most symbolic act in dismantling the wartime Air Force, but aeroplanes were only one item in a staggeringly large and diverse amount of surplus equipment which ranged from radars and real estate through to pencils and paper clips. Authority was vested in the Air Board to designate aircraft, equipment and stores as surplus. Air Member for Supply and Equipment (AMSE) Air Vice-
Marshal G.J.W. Mackinolty was authorised to dispose of items up to an original value of £500, while the AMSE, the Business Member and the Finance Member together could deal with those worth more than £500 but less than £10,000. Items valued at more than £10,000 needed the joint approval of the Air Board and Board of Business Administration.9

The disposal of equipment which was categorised as ‘surplus to requirements’ was nothing short of phenomenal. It took the RAAF about a year to get fully into the swing of the task as the initial priority was to demobilise people. By mid-1946, however, a vast amount of equipment was being sold, transferred or destroyed as a ‘garage sale’ of enormous proportions gathered momentum. In August alone the Air Board made 66 separate recommendations to the minister to write off equipment which included Spitfires, Liberators, Beaufighters and Catalinas, and earth moving equipment, medical supplies and buildings.10 Among the more interesting or exotic items declared ‘surplus to requirements’ were ten kilometres of fur fabric (used to line flying suits), 300 kilometres of hessian, 400 kilometres of canvas, 53,539 mosquito nets, 3,800,000 razor blades and 20,711 pairs of corsets.11

* * *

While all of those necessary reductions to the wartime Air Force were being made, the members of the Air Board never lost sight of their responsibility to preserve the foundations of a peacetime force which, in their judgment, would have to be sufficiently powerful and flexible to confront the uncertainties of a new international order. Thus, notwithstanding the magnitude of the cuts which were being made, the eventual structure of 34 squadrons and 34,592 personnel they envisaged was not going to leave the RAAF destitute. But events were moving much faster than the Air Board had anticipated when it developed the 34 squadron plan. On 21 August 1945 - only four days after the RAAF’s contingency plan for mass demobilisation was activated - Air Vice-Marshal Jones was told by Minister for Air Arthur Drakeford that far deeper cuts were to be made at a much faster pace.12 The government’s priority was to rebuild the nation, and to do that it needed people, resources and money, all of which logically were going to come in great measure from the apparently now largely irrelevant armed forces.

By the end of October the RAAF had lowered its sights to an establishment of 31 squadrons and 29,711 people, concessions which seemed unlikely to impress Drakeford. That proved to be the case. The revised figure was unacceptable and prompted Drakeford to instruct the Air Board in January 1946 to re-examine fully its

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9 Air Board Agenda 6647, 29-6-45, RHS.

10 Air Board Agenda 7401-7484, 1-8-46 to 30-8-46, RHS.

11 Air Board Agenda 7367-7369, 19-7-46; 7388, 25-7-46; 7609, 7-10-46, RHS.

12 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 21-8-45, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.
planning and to submit ‘without delay’ a detailed organisation for the RAAF based on 20,000 personnel.

Following on so quickly from the prestige and glory of the RAAF’s contribution to victory in a world war, this was not what its leaders had expected. Their understandably high hopes for the future of the Air Force had been harshly dispelled. In an environment of crisis and disappointment it was evident that a quite different approach to the future than the one which had been anticipated was needed.

The man who grasped the nettle was the Air Member for Personnel, Air Commodore J.E. Hewitt. Hewitt was one of the more interesting officers of his generation. A small, dark, dapper officer, punctilious and aggressive in his manner, sometimes to the point of abrasiveness, he was capable of generating extremes of loyalty and dislike among his subordinates. In 1943 Hewitt had been sacked by Air Vice-Marshal Jones under controversial circumstances as the commander of the RAAF’s premier force in the Southwest Pacific, No. 9 Operational Group; but since then he had resurrected his career to become one of the Air Force’s most promising younger senior officers.13 Regardless of the reactions to his personality, few questioned his intellect.

By November 1945 Hewitt had concluded that a substantial period would elapse before the final size and composition of the post-war Air Force was decided and approved by the government. He was also concerned by the rate at which people were being discharged and the lack of guidance on the kinds of skills the RAAF needed to retain. There was a danger, he advised Air Vice-Marshal Jones, that the Air Force could end up with an unbalanced work force, and that if quick action were not taken major long-term difficulties would be created.

Hewitt saw three options. First, demobilisation could continue unsystematically at a headlong pace without any consideration for future needs. The likely consequences of that approach were self-evident. Second, demobilisation legally could be stopped in each branch (that is, each skill group) when the minimum numbers for the RAAF’s 31 squadron plan were reached. While that would resolve the problem of work force balance, it would entail extending the engagements of thousands of people who had joined only to serve in the war and would certainly cause considerable discontent. It would also raise administrative difficulties. As Hewitt noted, a state of ‘war service’ was still in force under the Defence Act, the Air Force Act and Air Force Regulations, and as long as that remained the case, every serviceman was technically bound to remain in uniform. However, once a proclamation was issued declaring that a state of war no longer existed, all personnel recruited for the war would immediately be released from their engagements, regardless of any demobilisation plan.

Hewitt’s preference therefore was for the final option which was, in effect, to place the entire Air Force on a ‘care and maintenance’ basis. The RAAF should mark time, he suggested, meeting its immediate demands while preserving essential capabilities

until the government had worked out precisely what it wanted to do. The RAF and
the Royal Canadian Air Force, facing similar difficulties, had already adopted that
approach as the most practical response to uncertain circumstances. Hewitt advised
Air Vice-Marshal Jones to seek Drakeford’s approval to establish and maintain a
20,000-man ‘Interim Force’ for two years, at the expiry of which it should be possible
to determine the final size and composition of the post-war RAAF. In addition to
meeting the immediate priorities set by the government, the Interim Air Force would
protect the RAAF’s future by preserving three key building blocks on which future
capabilities would depend: the maintenance of equipment and retention of techniques
which would be required for the post-war force, regardless of its final shape; a nucleus
organisation to keep abreast of modern developments in aircraft and associated
equipment; and a training organisation to provide both air and ground personnel for
those commitments.

The Air Board accepted the logic of Hewitt’s argument and recast its development
plan. In order to satisfy the government’s immediate objectives while protecting the
RAAF’s future, the Board proposed an operational structure for the Interim Air Force
comprising two fighter wings, with one staffed only to 25 per cent; one mobile fighter
control unit; one attack wing, with the flying units staffed at 25 per cent and the
support units on a care and maintenance basis; one army cooperation wing staffed to
50 per cent; one heavy bomber wing limited to a 50 per cent flying rate; three land
transport squadrons; three air/sea rescue flights; a communications unit; a survey
flight; an Aircraft Performance Unit; a general reconnaissance/bomber squadron; and
the governor-general’s flight. That force structure would need 19,950 personnel, of
whom 2,466 would be officers. Over 110 distinct work categories were identified: in
addition to the obvious ones such as pilots and fitters, some of the more exotic
included shoemakers, sawyers and powder monkeys.

The balancing act the Board was trying to perform was evident in the priorities
assigned to the Interim Air Force’s activities. First place understandably went to
raising, equipping, training and maintaining the forces for the occupation of Japan.
Next came the survey flight and communications unit, each of which had a vital
contribution to make to national development. However, bracketed with survey and
communications was the governor-general’s flight, a priority which upset the logic of
the Board’s plan as it was based on nothing more than a protocol which presumably
could not be avoided. More productive was the weighting then placed on preserving
flying standards and operational techniques by allocating resources to the instrument
flying check flight at the Central Flying School, training units generally, heavy
bomber wings and army cooperation wings. Those units were followed by attack and

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14 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 2-11-45,
CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.

15 ibid., 23-4-46; Air Board Agendum 6795, 28-2-46, RHS.

16 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 23-4-46,
CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.

17 Air Board Agendum 7158, 7-5-46, RHS.
fighter squadrons which were to be staffed at the minimum level. Then came stores units, aircraft depots and care and maintenance units; command headquarters; and finally, the distribution of ‘residual’ or surplus personnel to units in accordance with the precedence listed above.

Meeting those objectives depended squarely on the RAAF’s ability to retain the right people. Here, the conditions approved by the government were not necessarily in the RAAF’s best interests. Policy for service for the Interim Air Force was promulgated by Air Vice-Marshal Jones in February 1946. Officers who had held a permanent commission before the war and who wished to remain in the Interim Force could expect to continue their careers regardless of developments, but would have to relinquish any temporary or acting higher rank they held. All other personnel had to agree to serve for a period of two years, in effect as members of the Citizen Air Force, and when a decision was eventually reached on the RAAF’s roles and size they would have to apply to transfer to the Permanent Air Force, with no guarantee their services would be required.

Officers holding short service commissions who wished to serve with the Interim Force could only do so at a reduced rank. Nor were things much better for airmen and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Airmen with previous service who had reached the rank of leading aircraftman (LAC) were reappointed at that rank, while new recruits had to start at the lowest level of aircraftman 1 (AC1). Deciding how many NCOs and warrant officers should retain their status was a more complex business because of the need to maintain a graduated hierarchy of ranks; that is, it would have been unacceptable if, say, half of the enlisted ranks had been sergeants. Eventually it was decided to reserve 20 per cent of all NCO and warrant officer posts in the approved establishment as an avenue for future promotions and to protect the hierarchy, a decision which meant that 20 per cent of those positions in the Interim Air Force were in the first instance filled by LACs and AC1s.

Those stringent conditions were leavened somewhat by two general provisions: no member of the Permanent Air Force enlisting in the Interim Air Force was to be reduced to a rank below that which he had held in the PAF; and wherever possible, serving members were to be given preference over those who had already been discharged for vacancies at the NCO level. Nevertheless, the government’s proscription on recruiting and offering permanent commissions beyond the RAAF’s pre-war establishment severely circumscribed the Air Board’s ability to keep the people it wanted. Looking back on the decision years later, Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock blamed the government for the loss of many very experienced and talented people.

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18 Interim Air Force, Policy, 1946, CRS A1196, 36/501/613, AA; Air Board Order N7/46; Air Board Agendum 7157, 8-5-46, RHS.

19 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945-46, 21-3-46, CRS A1196, 36/501/589, AA.

20 Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock, Interview, Record No TRC 2841, NLA.
Applications from within the RAAF to join the Interim Force were required by 28 February 1946. Three weeks after the closing date only 7,597 people had applied against a forecast establishment of 19,156. Despite the expenditure of large sums of money on advertising campaigns, the RAAF found it very hard to attract technical airmen. While 2,342 officers and NCO aircrew had applied for 2,164 positions, only 5,255 airmen had expressed interest, compared to the 16,992 the Air Board believed were needed. Competition from other prospective employers was strong because of a widespread shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour, while the community generally was disinterested in military service after a long war. Many seemed to think that armed forces were now redundant. Val Hancock remembered the immediate post-war years as one of the most disappointing periods of his RAAF career as ‘no-one wanted to know about us’, an attitude he believed stemmed from the politicians.

Hancock was right. The services were an easy target for a government determined to divert money to other endeavours. In May 1946 the RAAF’s proposed staff ceiling of 20,000 was referred to the War Establishments Investigating Committee for review; in response, that committee recommended reducing the Interim establishment to 15,000. By now the Air Board was deeply perturbed. An extremely detailed response to the committee’s recommendation argued that insufficient allowance had been made for the dual tasks of demobilisation and retaining a core structure on which the post-war RAAF could eventually be built. The Board also suggested that some of the committee’s conclusions had been based on false premises and could not be accepted. The real issue, though, was not the committee’s competence but money, as Drakeford had already made clear. Taking full advantage of the committee’s report, Drakeford rescinded the ceiling of 20,000 he had set in January and informed the Air Board they could now have an ‘absolute maximum’ of 15,000 people, a total which included the units on duty with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan; additionally, all establishments were to be kept under close scrutiny with the objective of making further reductions whenever possible.

The Air Board was being placed in an increasingly awkward position. On the one hand the prime minister and minister for air seemed interested only in reducing numbers as quickly as possible and were giving firm instructions to that effect; on the other hand, Board members were keenly aware of the need to retain hard-won skills and core capabilities against the near-certainty that the RAAF would one day again have to fight for its country.

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21 Air Board Agendum 7489, 26-2-47, RHS.

22 Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock, Interview, Record No TRC 2841, NLA.

23 Reduction of RAAF in SWPA from 53 Squadrons, Organisation and Planning, 1945046, 22-8-46, CRS A1196, 36501/589, AA.

24 Air Board Agendum 7493, 12-9-46, RHS.
Because of the mass exodus, by April 1946 staffing levels were critical in 35 separate skill categories. Hewitt told Drakeford that unless recruiting prohibitions were eased the RAAF might not be able to meet its authorised tasks of supporting the occupation force in Japan, operating transport services for repatriation, and completing minimum levels of aircraft maintenance. Drakeford remained unmoved, refusing to raise the establishment ceiling and instead directing that should the ‘essential Interim commitments’ be jeopardised, each case was to be referred to him for ‘urgent consideration’. The over-riding issue was money, with the government determined ‘to greatly reduce’ the costs of defence.

In the atmosphere of uncertainty the Air Force’s numbers plummeted. By 31 October 1946 the RAAF’s strength had fallen to 13,238, almost 160,000 fewer than had been wearing the blue uniform only a year before (see Table 3).

Demonstrating praiseworthy conviction and tenacity, the Air Board kept up the fight to preserve the RAAF’s skill base, advising Drakeford in January 1947 that the continuing proscription on long-term engagements had the potential to cause lasting damage. After the uncertainty of the war years, prospective employees wanted more than the offer of two years’ work. The Board believed that if it were allowed to offer six-year enlistments, all former members of the Permanent Air Force would re-engage, all Interim personnel would sign on for the extended period, and additional new volunteers would be attracted. Paying gratuities to selected mustering was also suggested as a short-term remedy. Yet again Drakeford rejected the Board’s proposals ‘pending a final decision on the size and organisation of the permanent post-war forces’. Numbers continued to decline, with the Interim Air Force reduced to just 11,638 people by mid-1947 and 7,897 by the end of 1948. The RAAF’s senior wartime operational commander, retired Air Vice-Marshall Bill Bostock - now a special aviation correspondent for the Melbourne Herald - attacked the government for allowing the Air Force to fall into what he claimed was a ruinous state.

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25 Air Board Agendum 7023, 2-4-46, RHS.

26 Air Board Agendum 7023, 21-3-46, RHS.

27 Air Board Agendum 7530, 21-1-47, RHS.

28 Air Board Agendum 8294, 28-7-47, RHS. The number includes 84 nurses. The slight variation between those numbers and the figures in Appendix B is attributable to when they were collected, the inclusion or exclusion of groups like nurses, and so on.
Bostock's venture into journalism was not his preferred career path. Along with a number of other notable pre-war and wartime senior officers, he had been forced out of the Air Force in 1946 against his wishes. The circumstances surrounding those dismissals warrant examination because of the light they throw on the quality of leadership and the nature of politics in the post-war Air Force. Four men were at the centre of the affair: Bostock; Chief of the Air Staff Air Vice-Marshal George Jones; and the two men who had alternated as CAS in the pre-war Air Force, Air Marshal Richard Williams and Air Vice-Marshal S.J. Goble.

As part of the process of mass demobilisation the officer corps had to be reduced from the wartime establishment of about 20,000 to less than one-tenth of that number. The review of who would stay and who would go was carried out by Air Member for Personnel Air Commodore Joe Hewitt, whose progress was keenly followed by Jones and Drakeford. Although Jones later inferred in his autobiography that he took little interest in the process, it is clear from official documents that the opposite was the case. Since at least September 1944 Jones had been sending Drakeford confidential lists of officers 'recommended for retirement'.29 If Bostock was not worried he should have been. In his position as the RAAF's senior operational commander and

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holding an equivalent rank to the CAS, Bostock had been in a strong position to ignore or even openly oppose Jones’ authority during the war and had not missed the opportunity to do so. Suddenly, however, circumstances had changed. Administration, not war-fighting, was now the currency in the Air Force, which meant Jones held all the cards. Bostock’s vulnerability was aggravated by the fact that he was not on the Air Board, a handicap which also affected Williams and Goble.

Williams, Goble and Bostock had been the dominant figures in the RAAF from 1921 to 1946. At 56, 55 and 54 respectively, they were comfortably below their maximum retiring age of 60, and on the grounds of experience and ability seemed still to have a good deal to offer the post-war Air Force. Instead they were given their marching orders. The reasons presented for their dismissals were riven by inconsistencies, and it seems probable that the minister and the Air Board had simply decided that the three men had outlived their usefulness, that there was no place for them in the new Air Force.

The case used to justify Williams’ dismissal seemed contrived. Williams had been a temporary air marshal since 1940, placing him in the curious position of being senior to Jones when the latter became CAS in 1942. The Board noted that Williams, although holding the senior rank in the RAAF during the war, had ‘been employed in posts other than the most senior which has been occupied by an officer of less seniority’, and argued that it was ‘impossible’ to imagine that Williams could now be employed in posts ‘senior to those under whom he has been employed in wartime’. The implication that officers cannot supersede each other plainly was at odds with standard promotion practices: Jones himself, after all, had been promoted over eight officers when his unexpected elevation to CAS had occurred. A similar reversal of fortune would not have worried the confident Williams, who still considered himself the person most suited to lead the RAAF. Even if he could not again become chief, it is clear Williams did not want to be forced into an early retirement from the service he had done so much to sustain during the difficult early years. He rejected the Board’s reasons for his dismissal as ‘specious’ and years later described the affair as ‘the meanest piece of service administration in my experience’.

The rationale for dispensing with Goble was ostensibly based on seniority and age and was equally as flimsy. After presenting a case against Goble, Board members simply recorded that his retirement was ‘considered to be necessary’.

Because of his acrimonious feud with Air Vice-Marshal Jones and his prominence as the commander of RAAF operations in the Southwest Pacific, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock’s case was the most significant. The retrenchment of a number of other senior officers had been justified by the allegation that they had not gained sufficient operational command experience during the war, an excuse which clearly could not be

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30 Air Board Agendum 6731, 21-9-45, RHS.

used in this instance. Bostock was far and away the RAAF’s most knowledgable operational commander and had attracted generous praise from Generals Douglas MacArthur and George Kenney. However, just as there was no longer any room for Williams and Goble, nor was there for Bostock. In what was an extraordinary accusation to make against an officer who had been left in command of RAAF operations for three years, Bostock was said to have demonstrated a ‘lack of balance and appreciation of responsibility’ which made his continued employment ‘undesirable’. Bostock’s appeal against his dismissal was supported by a personal letter from MacArthur in which the Australian was described as ‘one of the world’s most successful airmen’. Drakeford was unmoved and the appeal was dismissed.

Once those hard decisions had been taken and the strength of the officer corps reduced to about 2,000, Hewitt and his staff were able to turn their attention to the less political but equally sensitive issues of seniority and substantive rank. Because of wartime exigencies, the substantive promotion of Permanent Air Force officers had been allowed to lapse between 1943 and 1947. And not only had all promotions been temporary, but hundreds more than might have been expected had been made to accommodate the RAAF’s expansion. As a consequence, instead of the largely predictable and ordered progress typical of the peacetime Air Force, by 1947 many ‘irregularities’ had arisen in the Air Force List, the RAAF’s traditional chronicle of seniority and status which catalogues all officers by rank, seniority, branch and qualification. It was Hewitt’s thankless task to restore order to the List.

Hewitt selected four criteria which would determine an individual’s status in the post-war Air Force. The first three were age, merit, and the needs of the service, with the element of subjectivity inherent in the latter two a source of some controversy by itself. The final criterion of seniority and rank was, however, even more controversial. The question was, which seniority and rank? Hewitt decided that because of the lapse in substantive promotions, the only practicable course he could follow was to ignore an individual’s substantive seniority and rank and instead to accept his temporary seniority and temporary wartime rank.

When the four criteria were combined to establish a new order of merit, many officers found themselves ‘demoted’ one or two ranks, an outcome which was only to be expected given the enormously reduced size of the Interim Air Force and the very large number of temporary and acting promotions which had been made during the war and which could no longer be retained. The fact that a ‘demotion’ was expected did not, of course, always lessen the disappointment. That disappointment was bitter indeed for some individuals who as temporary group captains found themselves reduced to flight lieutenant rank, while some of their contemporaries - or even juniors

32 That argument was used against Air Commodore F.W. Lukis and Group Captains A.T. Cole and F.H. McNamara: see Stephens, Power Plus Attitude, pp. 92-4.

33 Air Board Agendum 6731, 21-9-45, RHS.

34 Letter, MacArthur to Bostock, 15-2-46, in Personal File on Bostock, RHS.

35 Air Board Agenda 9845, 19-10-49; 10354, 6-6-50, RHS.
were promoted to wing commander rank. Whether Hewitt and his staff could have done any better is questionable, as any formula they adopted was bound to produce winners and losers. At least by emphasising merit, age and temporary rank - which could reasonably be taken as an indicator of success as a wartime commander - they seemed to be acting in the RAAF’s best long-term interests.

The release by the Air Board of an Air Force List in June 1947 - the first since May 1945 - effectively marked the end of the period of mass demobilisation and signified stability in the officers corps. The List also marked the end of an era, as for the first time since 1921 great names from RAAF history like Williams, Goble, Wrigley and McNamara were missing.

Because the Interim regulations were still in force the great majority of the 2,000 or so officers on the List held temporary rank, the only exceptions being the handful of flying officers and pilot officers whose junior status made such measures pointless. Determining how many should be given substantive rank was Hewitt’s final major task as far as shaping the new officer corps was concerned. At the same time as the List was published, the government finally gave in-principle approval to a plan for the RAAF’s post-war development. Known as Plan ‘D’, that blueprint set a staff ceiling of about 15,000.

Hewitt proposed granting substantive rank to 75 per cent of Plan ‘D’ s establishment for squadron leaders and above: if that were not acceptable, he argued that senior officers should at least be allowed to retain the temporary higher rank the List had given them. Under that proposal all ten air officers from the General Duties Branch would have been awarded substantive rank: Air Marshal Jones, Air Vice-Marshal J.E. Hewitt and F.M. Bladin, and Air Commodores J.P.J. McCauley, A.M. Charlesworth, F.R.W. Scherger, U.E. Ewart, E.G. Knox-Knight, A.L. Walters and V.E. Hancock. Drakeford did not agree and only the first six retained their substantive status, with the last four reverting to group captain rank. Other senior officers fared even worse, with only four of 23 temporary group captains and 27 of 54 temporary wing commanders retaining their higher rank. Because of the downwards push those ‘demotions’ created, all 53 of the temporary General Duties squadron leaders had to relinquish their rank.

Concurrent with the decision on substantive rank, a guide to ‘appropriate ranks by age’ was issued, the objective being to ensure that officers with the potential to fill the highest appointments progressed through the system at a satisfactory rate (see Table 4). Lower ages were stipulated for the General Duties branch which, as the fighting arm of the RAAF, was required to remain relatively young.

36 Air Board Agenda, 8525, 15-3-48, RHS.
TABLE 4

APPROPRIATE RANKS BY AGE, 1948

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Source: Air Board Agendum 8525, 15-3-48, RHS.

Retention of temporary rank was much more favourable for airmen, simply because most did not want to stay in the RAAF. When airmen serving on Interim engagements were invited to join the Permanent Air Force in May 1948, only about 4,000 applied, a figure well below the proposed establishment of about 10,000. Consequently, most airmen from the Interim Air Force who joined the PAF were able to retain their rank.

As far as the structure of the Air Force was concerned, Plan ‘D’ defined five fundamental objectives. First and most important, a permanent air force consisting of 16 operational squadrons trained in the techniques of modern warfare and capable of rapid expansion in an emergency was to be established and maintained. That operational force would be supported by training and maintenance organisations, including Citizen Force and Reserve personnel, which would be adequate for peacetime and capable of rapid expansion during mobilisation. The operational force,

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37 Air Board Agendum 8754, 24-5-48, RHS; ABO ‘N’ 300/47. The figure of 10,000 excluded airmen serving with the occupation force in Japan.

38 Air Board Agendum 8886, 5-5-49, RHS.
training organisation and maintenance services would all be dependent to some extent on a modern aircraft industry, which again had to be capable of quick growth. Finally, a system of air bases to enable strategic deployment and tactical operations was essential.

An Air Force comprising four main components would meet those objectives. The main operational organisation was to be a Mobile Task Force consisting of Permanent Air Force fighter, heavy bomber and transport wings; a tactical reconnaissance squadron; and supporting units (see Table 5). The Mobile Task Force was to be capable of rapid deployment to 'any part of the British Commonwealth which may be threatened', while RAAF planners also envisaged supporting the activities of the Security Council of the United Nations Organisation. In the event of a major defence emergency in Australia or its immediate region the Task Force would be rapidly deployed from its home bases on the east coast. Strategically important local areas in which it was thought the Force might be used were identified as New Guinea, Cape York Peninsula, Darwin, Perth/Albany and Sydney/Brisbane.

The concept of the Mobile Task Force was a good one as it exploited the inherent ability of an air force to move rapidly to a trouble spot. Moreover, by giving each component its own wing headquarters and maintenance support, Air Vice-Marshal Jones and his staff had extended that operational flexibility, as by adding or subtracting the amount of support necessary to meet a particular contingency, units could quickly be deployed either independently or as part of a wing or the complete Task Force. The concept of the Mobile Task Force also resolved a sensitive political issue. During the war in Europe the dispersal of RAAF personnel throughout scores of British squadrons had both disguised the magnitude of the overall contribution and denied Australian airmen senior command opportunities. In its endorsement of Plan 'D', the Defence Committee stated that RAAF expeditionary forces should in future be employed as Australian formations and not be dispersed into British or allied forces as smaller formations or units, and noted that the Mobile Task Force provided the framework to achieve that objective.

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39 Air Board Agendum 7314, 5-9-46, RHS.
40 Air Board Agendum 6799, 16-10-45, RHS.
41 The Defence Committee advised the Minister for Defence on higher policy and strategy. It was chaired by the Secretary of the Department, and might include the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the three Service Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretaries of the Treasury, External Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Department.
42 Report on Visit of the RAAF Planning Team to the Air Ministry, Middle East and Far East, January/February 1951, CRS A5954, 1636/3, AA.
Underpinning the mobile force would be a ‘static’ Home Defence Force which would be responsible for the air defence of Australia, and which would comprise Area and Command Headquarters, fighter and reconnaissance squadrons, and airfield construction, telecommunications, photographic and hospital units. Home Defence Force units would be based permanently in one of five geographic Area commands according to role and function, with the fighter aircraft which constituted the main operational element of the air defence system being operated by five Citizen Air Force (CAF) squadrons located near each of the mainland State capital cities. During peacetime the CAF squadrons were to function essentially as training units so their staffing was based on 75 per cent citizen force and 25 per cent permanent personnel, with the latter responsible for supervision and standards. Also allocated to the Home
Defence Force were two General Reconnaissance/Bomber squadrons, one at each of Townsville and Perth.

The Mobile Task Force and the Home Defence Force were to be supported by a Training Organisation - which was to establish ‘the highest possible standards’ - and a Maintenance Organisation. Plan ‘D’ also stressed the RAAF’s responsibilities to the Army and Navy, especially with regard to reconnaissance and air transport; and the need to support the local aircraft industry.

Leadership is an appropriate note on which to end this paper. Air Marshal Jones had become the RAAF’s leader in 1942 and was to remain CAS until 1952, the longest continuous appointment in the RAAF’s history and a tenure which gave him a unique opportunity to influence the development of Australian air power. His appointment as chief had been unexpected and his performance during the war was widely regarded as lacklustre. The point here is that the uncertainty which made the Interim period so difficult also made it a time of great opportunity. While the immediate direction defence forces were going to take may have been unclear, governments were looking for ideas. Jones, however, was neither an inspiring leader nor a notable conceptual thinker, being regarded as mediocre on both accounts by numerous senior RAAF officers, including two of his successors as chief. In other words, for all his admirable personal qualities, Air Marshal Jones was not the man to lead the RAAF into a new era.

The other senior officers who survived the purge of 1946 to become the new hierarchy were at worst sound and in most cases much better than that. Air Vice-Marshal Bladin and Air Commodores McCauley, Walters and Scherger had distinguished themselves as operational commanders and staff officers during the war; and Hewitt, for all the controversy surrounding his tour as AOC No. 9 Operational Group, had demonstrated political acumen and intellectual toughness as Air Member for Personnel. Air Commodores E.C. Wackett and G.J.W. Mackinolty were highly capable and respected as the Air Members for Engineering and Maintenance and Supply and Equipment respectively; and at the more junior level, men like Group Captains A.M. Murdoch, I.D. McLachlan and V.E. Hancock were representative of an encouraging pool of potential.

A final point regarding the nature of the leadership in the ‘new’ Air Force must be made. Of the 116 members of the General Duties Branch - the RAAF’s ruling class - who held the rank of squadron leader or above in March 1948, 55 held at least one

43 Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock, Interview, 3-4-90; Air Marshal Sir James Rowland, Interview, 14-3-90; Air Vice-Marshal I.D. McLachlan, Interview, 13-3-90; Air Vice-Marshal L.S. Compton, Interview, 13-3-90; Air Commodore C.R. Taylor, Interview, 21-2-90.
award for courage or operational command. The possession of an operational award
had been an important consideration during the deliberations on who should and who
should not be offered a place in the post-war RAAF. Yet as CAS Air Marshal I.B.
Gratton observed almost 50 years later, the skills needed to guide an Air Force in war
and those needed in peace are not necessarily the same.

Whether or not the right people had been retained in 1948 would soon become
apparent as the period of the Interim Air Force came to an end and the men of the
RAAF began to develop strategies to guide their service through the complexities of a
world increasingly dominated by the Cold War.

DISCUSSION

Air Commodore Brent Espeland: Alan, could you say a little more about the role
played by Air Vice-Marshals Wackett and Hewitt in laying the foundations of the
post-war Air Force?

Dr Alan Stephens: It’s difficult to overstate the importance of their contribution.
Initiatives like the professional engineering branch, the apprentice training scheme,
the RAAF College and the RAAF Staff College were crucial. Let me elaborate on
Hewitt, because he clearly could be a difficult personality and was someone who often
generated extremes of reaction. Despite that, and despite the fact other people may
have promoted the ideas and raised the issues, at the end of the day Hewitt was the
man who said yes and signed the papers and took them to the Air Board. I think it’s
proper that his contribution to the post-war Air Force, which is still evident today,
should be recognised.

Air Vice-Marshal Bob Richardson: Alan thank you. I found that extremely
interesting and I learnt a great deal, a pretty common experience for most of us I
suppose. My question is, why did George Jones stay for ten years? Could you
comment on the factors that might have led to that, because it was an extraordinarily
long period. Did it mean that the government did not consider any one else suitable?

44 Air Board Agendum 8525, 15-3-48, RHS. The awards used for that figure were the DSO, DFC,
CB, CBE and OBE. Individuals have been counted once in the compilation of those figures; that is,
someone with, say, a DFC and an OBE has been included only in the DFC group.

45 Operational experience was also a key factor in deciding which junior officers would be offered a
permanent commission. Out of a maximum score of 100 points, 35 were allocated for ‘intellectual
capacity’, 30 for ‘personal characteristics, 15 for ‘training’, and 20 for ‘wartime operational
experience’. Air Board Agendum 6623, 6-7-45, RHS.

46 Quoted in Alan Stephens, The RAAF in the Southwest Pacific Area 1942-1945: The Proceedings of
Dr Alan Stephens: It was a curious business, and in my opinion in the long term the RAAF was disadvantaged through having such a limited man as chief. I always feel obliged to qualify that by saying that I have the greatest respect for Air Marshal Jones' personal dignity, courage and early career. His was a remarkable life. However, he was thrust into the top job unexpectedly, and I think that he didn’t really want it. But having got there he clung doggedly to the office. He had close connections with Drakeford, who also was a very dogged personality and, like Jones, was from a humble background. Jones stood for Parliament for the Labor Party after the war.

In the immediate post-war period I think the government simply wasn’t interested in the armed services and so the question of who did or didn’t head the services wasn’t at the top of their priorities. I suspect it suited them to have someone of Air Marshal Jones’ limited capabilities and retiring personality; whereas the much more forceful Bostock or Williams might have caused more problems. It then reached the stage where Jones had been in the job a long time, the government changed in 1949, and it took new Prime Minister Menzies and his ministers a year or so to settle down, by which time Jones had accumulated even more time at the top. It’s very interesting to note that within a year or so of taking office, both Menzies and his Minister for Air, T.W. White (himself one of the first graduates of the Central Flying School at Point Cook), were privately strongly criticising Jones and the Air Force’s leadership. And in the end they went overseas again for a replacement, securing another British officer.

So perhaps the combination of the leadership fiasco of World War II, the general lack of interest in defence at the end of the war, Jones’ good connection to Drakeford and the Labor Party, and the transition period when the Liberal Party took over, worked in Jones’ favour and, almost suddenly, it seems, he had served for ten years. I think it was unfortunate for the RAAF. The post-war years were a time of great opportunity, and I think it was a disgrace that outstanding Australian Air Force officers like McCauley and Scherger, and other very capable men like Bladin and Walters, were overlooked.

Squadron Leader John Lund: Still on George Jones, to promote an essentially non-performer over eight presumably high performers seems like a bizarre thing to do during the war. Was it a case of mistaken identity in his promotion or was it in fact the government carrying out its own agenda?

Group Captain Herb Plenty: On this point of Jones’ promotion to CAS, the Empire Air Training Scheme was in vogue in those days, and Jones was Director of Training. Langslow, the Secretary for Air, who had enormous influence with Drakeford and company, felt that they should make the Director of Training the CAS because the Empire Air Training Scheme was going to be so important. The Japanese war hadn’t started at this stage of course.

Now, with regard to our little man, one Joseph Hewitt, I had a unit at Laverton called No. 1 Communication Unit (VIP) and we flew all sorts of generals to Japan, as well as Chiefs of the Air Staff, Chiefs of Naval Staff around Australia, and so forth. I don’t suppose I could say that I got to know Hewitt and Jones well, but on a number of
occasions while the aircraft was being prepared or they were waiting for another passenger or so on, they came into my office to talk. Based on that, I think that you have rather disparaged Jones. Sure he was a colourless personality, he was not impressive; but he wasn’t as dull as he generally appeared to be. He had an enormously difficult task and I think he handled it probably as well as any of the others could have. This is, of course, just a personal opinion.

As for Joe Hewitt, I was in No. 100 (Beaufort) Squadron on Goodenough Island and then on Kiriwina Island, when the big furore arose between Nicoll and Hewitt. As you know Hewitt skidded Nicoll, who was the Commanding Officer of 8 Squadron, because Nicoll baulked at taking torpedo bombers at dot level into Simpson Harbour, which is the harbour in Rabaul. The Japanese had cruisers, ack-ack guns, flak, you name it, and Nicoll said this is really not on. Hewitt insisted. He was jumping up and down and dancing around and virtually calling Nicoll yellow and so on, and Nicoll stood his ground. The next day Nicoll was relieved of his command. Now I heard Nicoll say to Hewitt, if you’ll come in the aircraft with me we’ll go and Joe Hewitt didn’t go, he didn’t want to go, but he didn’t mind sacrificing Nicoll, so he removed Nicoll from command there and then. My colleague Noel Quinn was appointed temporary CO of the squadron. Later on Quinny did a torpedo attack at Simpson Harbour and he was hacked down and spent the rest of war as a POW. Now that covers Joe Hewitt in my opinion as an operational commander. I don’t have a very high opinion of him.

As for his performance when he was Air Member for Personnel. All right, he rubber-stamped the submissions to the Air Board, but he was extremely fortunate in that he had a number of very sharp people there in the training and personnel branches. They wrote most of the submissions and discussed things. Hewitt was also very friendly with E.C. Wackett who was the Air Member for Engineering and Maintenance and Wackett was fairly sharp; as you know he started the Engineering Branch as it subsequently became known. Joe Hewitt and Wackett normally brought cut lunches and they would walk across St Kilda Road into the park open their cases sit down under a tree somewhere. Now it seemed to me - and this information was proffered by some of Hewitt’s staff - that Hewitt had been sucking, to use a crude word, Wackett’s brains and this is where he got a lot of his ideas from.

I hope I’ve set the balance a little more in favour of George Jones and perhaps I could have gone a little bit further on Joe Hewitt but I will leave it at that.

Dr Alan Stephens: Thanks very much group captain. As a historian I value having those kind of first-hand observations on the record.

As I noted in my presentation, Hewitt was a controversial figure. A couple of comments are warranted. First, in his autobiography, Hewitt states that he flew on operations as an observer in Beauforts on a number of occasions. I am sure that was the case. As far as his performance as Air Member for Personnel was concerned, well, any AMP who didn’t have bright staff working for him and whose talents he could draw on would be pretty silly. Equally, surely it was sensible of him to work closely with E.C. Wackett. On both counts he sounds like a good operator to me.
Concerning Jones’ appointment as CAS, he became chief in May 1942, by which time the Empire Air Training Scheme was well and truly up and running. In other words, I question the connection between his training background and being chosen for the RAAF’s top job. The main challenge in May 1942 was to defend Australia against Japan, not train aircrew for Europe.

**Group Captain Arthur Skimin:** I have a comment on E.C. Wackett and Hewitt. I had the opportunity to talk to Wackett on many occasions, and it seemed to me from what he said that there was a lot of interplay between him, Hewitt and another fellow who was on the scene at the time, Group Captain Winneke, later Sir Henry Winneke. He seemed to be one of the power players in the whole deal. It’s also very interesting to read the papers of Sir Frederick Shedden, who was Secretary of the Department of Defence at the time. At one stage the Air Board set out to kneecap E.C. Wackett by kicking him ‘upstairs’ to a position they had created in the British Air Ministry. Hewitt brought the proposal to Shedden’s notice, and he in turn had it stopped. It seems that the members of the Air Board were having great difficulty dealing with some of E.C. Wackett’s thoughts and initiatives at the time, in the immediate post-war period.

**Warrant Officer Alan Grant:** I was a warrant officer with the Directorate of Training in 1947. Being in the other ranks we were remote from the sorts of issues which have just been discussed. But I would like to say that Air Vice-Marshar Hewitt was a very highly regarded Director of Training. I recall one occasion on a breakup, quite possibly Christmas 1947, Air Vice-Marshar Hewitt went around to every room in the Directorate of Training and spoke to every member. The morale was very high. I would also say that with regard to George Jones, the airmen considered him a bit lacklustre, as has been mentioned.

**Air Commodore Ted Pickerd:** I would like to move away from the hierarchy of the Air Force and come back to January 1946 when I arrived back from the UK, having been encouraged to volunteer, along with many of my contemporaries, for the Interim Air Force. As we got off the ship in Melbourne we were taken to the Exhibition Building and were immediately technically discharged. I’ve still got my discharge papers. About 40 or 50 of us pointed out that we had applied for the Interim Air Force and asked what the circumstances were. Now, you have outlined the confusion and the changes of policy which came from the Minister of Air at the time. If there was confusion at the top, at my level I can tell you it was utter chaos because the people behind the desk demobbing the large number that got off the ship had never heard of the Interim Air Force and had no idea what to do with those who insisted that they wanted to know what their future was. They put us to one side and eventually told us to go on leave.

About three weeks later I was accepted for the Interim Air Force and went through the unit which Herb Plenty mentioned at Laverton on my way up to New Guinea. But only about ten of the 40 or 50 who had applied for the Interim Air Force had persisted, because they were utterly disgusted with the lack of knowledge and the lack of information.
Dr Alan Stephens: Again, an interesting observation. I have heard similar comments from a lot of people who came back in 1945-46 and found the demobilisation very confusing. Trying to find information on the Interim Air Force is extremely difficult because there is very little on the records. There is no doubt that it was a highly confused period.

Wing Commander Mark Toyer: The title ‘The Interim Air Force’, the establishment number you spoke about of 15,000 people, and a few other details raised the thought in my mind that we are still an Interim Air Force today. What are the lessons that we should be learning from the Interim Air Force for today’s environment?

Dr Alan Stephens: I’m just a humble historian. Have a cup of coffee with some of the people in the front row at morning tea and try them.

Air Commodore Brent Espeland: You mentioned that the Interim years are a rather difficult period for research but I think the outcome denies that statement. It was well researched, well crafted and, as Air Vice-Marshal Richardson indicated, most informative.

I’ll chance my arm on a couple of lessons, which I think you highlighted and then Ted Pickerd also touched on. It was a time of massive change, and massive change can be a cause for concern, but it can also offer great opportunity. I think that is something that is very much on the plate for today and the future. At the early stages, which may be indicative of today, we must never overlook the vital role of communication throughout the organisation.

I would like to ask all of you join with me in thanking Al once again for his excellent paper.
THE BERLIN AIRLIFT

Air Marshal S.D. Evans

I am pleased to see the Berlin Airlift included in this RAAF History conference, not because I was involved but for a number of far more important reasons - the main one being the strategic significance of that operation. It also fills in the picture of what was a quite extraordinary effort by a very small air force. In 1948 the RAAF numbered only 8,025 souls. Maximum strength between the end of World War II and 1954 was 15,557 in 1953.

For most of the period the RAAF was well under a strength of 15,000 members and yet it took part in the Berlin Airlift, the Occupation Force in Japan, the war in Korea, the Malayan Emergency and it deployed a fighter wing to Malta. The inclusion of the airlift, Malta and the Occupation Force in this conference completes the canvas. They are activities that have had little exposure over the years.

In presenting the Berlin Airlift I will point out the strategic significance of that operation - the real crux of the matter and yet an aspect that is often not appreciated. I shall also go back a few years to wartime consideration of the eventual peace, to explore just how the victorious allies got themselves into the precarious situation that obtained in Germany in the immediate post-war years. And I will say something on the even more precarious position of the people of Berlin. Finally, I will say something of the operations themselves - Operations Plainfare and Vittles.

The leading democracies, Britain, France and the United States, had exhibited little regard for Bolshevik Russia in the years before World War II - nor for that matter did Germany. Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, created an alliance that was welcome strategically but it was an alliance based entirely on self interest. It was not an alliance with any degree of mutual trust. Nevertheless the defeat of Germany called for cooperation to the greatest possible extent in the prosecution of the war. It was a cooperation that led, finally, to victory. However, notwithstanding the euphoria that came with victory, with peace, tensions between the western allies and the Russians emerged from day one. By the time that the Russians started to make access to Berlin difficult, the Iron Curtain was well and truly down. There was a tenseness abroad in the world - the fear that another terrible war was a distinct possibility.

There are a host of examples of the western allies failing to plan for the peace and I will expand on this later. The geopolitical naivety of the Americans was a factor but, generally, the democracies were almost totally engrossed in fighting the war, in pursuing victory. Scant consideration was given to the post-war world lest it divert attention from the immediate aim.
On the other hand, the Russians, as they advanced through the countries of Eastern Europe, had set up Communist governments and created a distinct Soviet bloc. Post-war Germany, defeated and impoverished by reparations payments and the support of the occupying forces, with no government of its own, was in a parlous state and perceived by the Russians to be vulnerable. Clearly, if they could force a withdrawal of the Western powers from Berlin, the traditional capital and symbol of the German nation, it would have a psychological impact on the whole of Germany and indeed, the whole of Europe. Russia would be seen as the dominant power, the Western allies as weak.

These were the motives that lay behind the Russian intransigence on almost every aspect of the allied control and administration of the German nation. Gradually the Soviet military governor imposed restrictions on rail and road access between Berlin and the western zones. All routes had to pass through the Russian zone and it was here that the Russians sought to seal off access on one pretext or another.

The question was, could the Western powers afford the almost certain eventuality that they would have to withdraw from Berlin and abandon two and a half million Berliners to the Russians? Would they suffer this bloodless, political defeat, or go to war? The situation was put very starkly by General Lucius D. Clay, Military Governor of the American zone and a member of the Allied Control Council, established for the purpose of jointly controlling and administering the German nation. In a signal sent from Berlin on the 31st March 1948 to General Omar Bradley, Chief of Staff of the US Army, Clay said:

Have received a peremptory letter from Soviet Deputy Commander requiring on 24 hours notice that our military and civilian employees proceeding through Soviet Zone to Berlin will submit to individual documentation checks and also will submit their personal belongings for Soviet inspection.

Likewise a permit is required from Soviet Commander for all freight brought into Berlin by military trains for the use of our occupation forces.

Obviously these conditions would make impossible travel between Berlin and our zone by American personnel except by air. Moreover, it is undoubtedly the first of a series of restrictive measures designed to drive us from Berlin...

It is my intent to instruct our guards to open fire if Soviet soldiers attempt to enter our trains. Obviously the full consequences of this action must be understood. Unless we take a strong stand now, our life in Berlin will become impossible. A retreat from Berlin at this moment would, in my opinion, have serious if not disastrous political consequences in Europe. I do not believe that the Soviets mean war now. However, if they do, it seems to me that we might as well find out now as later. We cannot afford to be bluffed.

Clay was absolutely correct. The Russians did indeed take a series of measures to drive the Americans, British and French out of Berlin. By June 1948 Berlin was blockaded - all roads and rail lines closed for maintenance. It seemed that two and a
half million Berliners would starve to death or accept Soviet patronage - actually, Soviet domination. The Western allies faced the grim choice, surrender Berlin and perhaps the whole of Germany to the Russians or prepare for another tragic war. But, there was a third choice: supply Berlin by air. Few entertained any serious thought that a major city of two and a half million people could be sustained by air alone. A city needing to generate its own electrical power, to provide heat for warmth and for cooking. How could an air bridge provide all the needs, food and power? Particularly during the course of a German winter. Certainly the Russians did not consider such a possibility. ‘General Winter’ would be their ally once again.

If you accept, and it seems incontestable, that the alternatives to the successful supply of Berlin by air were political defeat or war, the strategic significance of the airlift cannot be overstated.

Before going on it is worth trying to fathom out how this curious, indeed this critical, situation came about, to look at the apparent delinquency of the Western allies in approving an occupation regime that provided the Soviets with such authority in regard to the occupation of the German capital.

Frankly, although one reads of Churchill’s deep suspicions of Stalin and his motives, I do not believe either of the British or American leaders anticipated the degree of duplicity to which the Russians would go to achieve their aims. They knew the Soviet dictator to be a devious and shrewd negotiator, intransigent, untrustworthy, aggressive. But they seemingly felt that once agreement had been reached it would be adhered to. Roosevelt was naive enough to think that he could handle Stalin and, indeed, said so on several occasions. He thought Churchill’s concerns to be exaggerated and often did not support him. No matter how illustrious the two Western leaders were, they did not think it necessary to bother with the fine print.

Notwithstanding the disinterest of their leaders, officials on both sides of the Atlantic tried to progress planning. In the United Kingdom, Churchill would not entertain any notion that he, himself, had not initiated. In the United States, Roosevelt had put in place a rather curious administrative arrangement for post-war planning. He virtually excluded his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, from policy matters and negotiations with allies. This he kept to himself or delegated to the Department of War within which a special cell, the Civil Affairs Division, was set up.

At the Teheran conference in 1943 the leaders gave some superficial consideration to post-war matters but, after fiddling with various schemes, gave up that diversion and got on with the serious business of winning the war. They did accept however that a few basic arrangements for administration must be made before the end of the war. They decreed that a European Advisory Committee should be set up, that this should be based in London and consist of three members (the French were not included initially).

This was a slow and cumbersome organisation. The British member was a highly professional Foreign Office official, Sir William Strang. With cabinet and ministers on the spot, Strang was able to get relatively quick decisions, but not the other
members, the Russian and American ambassadors. Each had to refer back to their government. The Russians stalled deliberately, expecting that, as time went on, their military gains would put them in a better bargaining position. The hapless Winant, the American member, had to refer to the Department of State, but that Department had to refer to the Civil Affairs Division of the Department of War. The latter, not willing to give up any of its authority would, often peremptorily, retort that this is not a matter to be decided in London by diplomats but to be decided on the spot at the military level at the appropriate time.

In the end, Strang drew up and submitted a proposed zonal profile. It met the prime British requirement that the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, be in the British zone. The Americans, after delaying several months and after having an alternative plan rejected in which the American zone contained 46 per cent of territory and 51 per cent of the population, agreed to Strang’s plan. This was on condition that they have free access to the ports of Bremen and Bremerhaven. The Russians agreed with it from the start.

The surrender document was vague but based on the principle that the Germans had no negotiating power - there was to be no German government. The country would be governed by an Allied Control Council comprising the Military Governor of each of the occupied zones. Although there was no German government, Berlin would still be the capital and the location for the Allied Control Council. Berlin was to be divided into sectors, each with a commandant. The commandants were to form a Kommandatura for the administration of Berlin. The idea was that policies for the administration and government of both the German nation and Berlin should be common to all Zones and Sectors, hence the creation of these two central organisational bodies. The great mistake was the decree that in both the Allied Control Council and the Kommandatura all decisions had to be unanimous. The power of veto that we know has plagued the Security Council of the United Nations since its inception, made the administration of Germany and its capital city impossible in the face of Russian intransigence. There was endless trouble starting with considerable difficulties imposed on the initial movement of the Western contingents into Berlin; the immediate insistence by the Russians that the British, American and French sectors could not get food or coal from the Russian zone were typical. The allied commandants and military governors were extraordinarily patient. They still hoped for Russian goodwill and a sorting out of the differences once the Allied Control Council and the Kommandatura got to work. They had not anticipated the abuse of the veto that blocked their every move - there was no Russian goodwill. The final outcome was the total blockade of all land access to Berlin.

Once again, this came about because of the extraordinary naivety of the British and American politicians, senior military commanders and bureaucrats. One particular American State Department official tried repeatedly at the highest level he could access to demand formal, written agreement from the Russians for specific routes across their zone into and out of Berlin. His concerns were brushed aside; the agreed presence of the Western allies in Berlin was, in itself, tacit agreement of the need for
transit across the Russian Zone, he was told. Curiously, a written agreement was negotiated for the air corridors.

However, on the 24th June 1948 this was water under the bridge - the crunch point had arrived. Fortunately, some weeks before this, anticipating a worst case, the British and American military governors had asked their respective air forces to develop plans to supply their garrisons in Berlin by air. The British had, at that time, two Dakotas and an Anson in Germany and the Americans 30 C-47’s. The RAF planned to deploy two squadrons of Dakota aircraft and to deliver 65 tons a day into Berlin. The codename for this operation was Knicker.

This plan was of little use when the crisis struck. Clearly, nothing would be served by feeding the garrison and watching the Germans starve, or become dependent on the Russians. The operation had to meet the needs of the whole of the allied sectors. Knicker was discarded and a new plan, codenamed Carter Paterson was formulated. Unfortunately Carter Paterson was the name of a well known English removalist and the Russians were quick to seize on this and claim that the British were about to pull out of Berlin. The name was quickly changed to Operation Plainfare. The corresponding American operation was named Vittles.

Looking at the 12,000 tons brought in daily by surface transport, for what was a low level of economic life and a life of little comfort, the task seemed impossible. General Clay still wanted to send an armed convoy through the Russian zone but this was deemed to be impracticable - and dangerous. The fact was that the German population had been rationed for years - there was still rationing in England. Berliners were receiving food for only 1,600 calories per day against a United Nations estimate that 2,600 was the minimum for an adult person.

Fortunately, because the Russians had insisted that food for the Western sectors come from the Western zones, the exact amount of food needed per day was known. Fifteen hundred tons of food a day would meet this minimum requirement but, of course, food alone would not sustain a large city. There was power. The Russians had cut off the supply of electrical power to the Western sectors; the major power station was in their sector. Consequently, coal had to be brought in for power houses in the Western sectors. Coal was required to provide power for water to be pumped from underground wells and sewage had to be treated and pumped into rivers and lakes. In the event, to save power, sewage treatment was stopped and raw sewage was pumped into lakes and rivers. There was the need for power for cooking and the need to provide warmth. In all, about 3,000 tons of coal were needed each day. Then there were all the other needs of a big city, medical supplies, raw materials for industry, petrol and diesel fuel. The estimate was that about 4,600 tons daily would provide a minimum sustenance in summer and that 5,500 tons would be the minimum in winter.

On the 26th June the Americans flew in 80 tons and the British 13 tons. Raising their effort to the maximum possible at the time, on the 28th the Americans achieved 384 tons and the British 44 tons.
Clay went to Washington for talks with President Truman and the chiefs of staff. Whilst refusing to authorise the armed convoy, the President directed the reluctant chiefs to give the airlift their full support. They immediately allocated Clay an additional 75 C-54’s and provided the resources to construct a third allied airfield in Berlin, in the French Sector. This was named Tegel.

By mid-July, even without the additional aircraft the daily supply was meeting the food requirement but reserves of other commodities held within the city were falling. At that time the absolute minimum was seen to be 4,374 tons per day.

The influx of additional aircraft, technical personnel, air traffic controllers, administrative and other support personnel working around the clock, necessitated additional hardstanding, living accommodation, messing facilities, transport and a host of other requirements. The result was an urgent need to open new bases and this was done in quick time.

More quickly than most anticipated, the Americans and to a lesser extent the British, were able to build up a force to meet the barest needs of the city. It was a maximum effort all around. The British were restricted by having the Dakota as the main workhorse, supplemented by the Avro York and later the new Hastings. This smallish force was further supplemented by a rather curious collection of civil operators with an even more curious collection of aircraft. However, everything helped and in particular those civil aircraft carrying petrol and diesel fuel - known as wet loads. The greatest contributor to the success of the airlift operation was the Douglas C-54 which carried ten tons against the three tons of the Dakotas.

The pinch was on for aircrews as well as aircraft. Crews were becoming fatigued and flying discipline suffered noticeably. Medical officers and supervisory officers expressed concern for flying safety but there was no immediate solution. Australia had offered to send ten Dakota aircraft and ten crews and after weeks of indecision the British government declined the offer of the aircraft but accepted the offer of aircrew. The offer of 11 crews from South Africa and three from New Zealand were also accepted.

Why not the aircraft? The reason for not accepting the aircraft was, in part, uncertainty as to the legality of using other than British aircraft. The agreement on the use of the corridors referred to the aircraft of the nations governing Germany. Could Commonwealth aircraft be put on the British charter? It seemed doubtful.

The tonnage of supplies being delivered into the beleaguered city built up steadily as more aircraft and crews became available and as loading and unloading and, in particular, air traffic control procedures improved. All crews quickly had their navigational skills and their instrument flying skills honed to a sharp edge. Actual instrument flying was the norm and almost half the sorties were flown at night in the 24 hour-a-day operation.

However, the improved delivery schedules did not come about by chance. The first essential, as in all military operations, was to sort out the command and control
arrangements. At the start the RAF and USAF rushed into their separate and uncoordinated operations—*Plainfare* and *Vittles*. The RAF under the command of the Air Officer Commanding 46 Group who, for *Plainfare* operations, was responsible to the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief British Air Forces of Occupation (BAFO). Transport Command fought against this arrangement strenuously. The American side was little better with General Curtis Le May, the Commander US Air Forces Europe, clashing with Major General Tunner, who commanded the USAF airlift forces. In the end common sense prevailed and a combined Airlift Task Force Headquarters was set up under the command of General Tunner. Air Commodore Merer, the Air Officer Commanding 46 Group, RAF, was deputy commander.

The second major improvement came about when General Tunner, flying a C-54 into Berlin in August struck extremely bad weather. Torrential rain had put radar out; one C-54 had overshot the runway and caught fire; a second had braked heavily to avoid the crashed aircraft and blew its tyres thereby blocking more of the runway; a third could not identify the runway and touched down on a construction site. As a result of this chaos on the ground, aircraft were stacked up to 12,000 feet. These were the days before pressurisation. The air was packed with aircraft milling around in dense cloud. Tunner was furious. He went on the radio to Air Traffic Control: ‘This is Tunner. Now you listen. Send every airplane in the stack back to its home base’. There was a pause and an aghast ‘Please repeat’. Tunner repeated his instruction in very strong terms. All other aircraft were sent home, and Tunner landed. He then told his two pilots: ‘Stay in Berlin until you have figured out a way to eliminate any possibility of this mess ever happening again - ever.’ Given a navigator, an artist and office space, they were directed to devise workable traffic patterns.

The result was a system where stacking was out. If for any reason a pilot missed the approach he simply overshot and returned to base with his load. Inbound aircraft were to report over Frohnau beacon, located at the Berlin end of the Northern corridor, within 30 seconds of the allocated time. The airlift bases were allocated blocks of beacon times and operated their aircraft in waves to cover the allocated period. Aircraft in the wave were separated at three minute intervals. Each aircraft type had an assigned height to fly with vertical separation of 500 feet in the Northern and Central corridors and 1,000 feet in the Southern corridor. It was a one way traffic pattern. Aircraft operating from the British zone flew into Berlin via the Northern corridor and those from the American zone via the Southern corridor. Both flew home via the Central corridor.

The system was good but did not suit all those involved. Nevertheless it was a vast improvement on the uncoordinated fly-in at will that marked the early days. That system, if it could be called a system, could not possibly have worked as the number of aircraft built up and the winter weather descended across Germany.

Completion of the third airfield, Tegel, in the French sector, coincided with the enlarged fleet of aircraft available toward the end of 1948. The construction of Tegel, 5,500 feet of runway, 120,000 square feet of hardstanding and 6,000 feet of
taxiway plus the vertical structure, took just three months. The Americans provided most of the money and all of the construction expertise. They also conducted the flight operations. The French contribution was small but greatly appreciated. The Russians had refused to remove two transmitting masts - one almost 400 feet high - belonging to Radio Berlin. They were close to the approach path and a safety hazard. The French commander gave the order and they were blown up. General Ganeval simply said that he had advised the Russians that the towers would not be available after the 15th December.

The three airfields in the Western sectors were so close, all within a six mile radius, that the landing direction had to be the same for each. If a change of wind necessitated it, the three had to change runway at the same time. In bad weather this often meant overshooting several aircraft back to their home bases.

In spite of winter with its low cloud, ice, fog and snow, the daily tonnages into Berlin built up. In February it averaged 5,437 tons per day and by April it was 7,845 tons per day. As an Easter present and a morale booster to the Berliners, General Tunner put 1,398 flights into Berlin carrying 12,941 tons, between noon on Easter Saturday and noon on Easter Sunday. Allied authorities - the service chiefs, politicians and bureaucrats - were now convinced that it was within the capacity of the Western allies to increase the supply to 9,000 tons per day and to sustain that rate for as long as it was necessary. Allocate additional C-54’s and 11,000 tons was certainly achievable.

The Russians also could appreciate that the tactic of blockade had failed. Some lifting of the blockade occurred in May but there were still pinpricking delays and on top of this there was a strike by railway workers. The airlift continued at full pace. It was not until the Paris conference in June 1949 that a full lifting of the blockade was agreed to by the Soviets. The Western foreign ministers were able to stand firm on their negotiations, confident in the knowledge that Berlin could not be held hostage to the blockade threat and confident that the Russians knew this also.

Nevertheless the Western powers were not taking any chances. They decided to continue the airlift at a reduced pace to build up reserve stocks for five months in Berlin. They calculated that they could return to a full airlift within three months should it become necessary.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the Berlin airlift had a profound effect strategically. The stark alternatives of abandoning Berlin or embarking on another disastrous war were avoided. But, more than this, it brought the Western nations together in a mood of confidence and with the will to stand firmly against Russian intransigence and threats. Certainly it facilitated the formation of the NATO Alliance in a far more cooperative atmosphere and more expeditiously than would normally be expected. Perhaps most importantly, it convinced the American
administration and the American people of the essential need for an American commitment to European security.

Finally, I feel I should make some brief comment on the operations of the small RAAF contingent in this significant operation - described in the RAF report on Operation Plainfare as the greatest air operation of any type to be undertaken in times of peace.

Two RAAF crews on exchange with the RAF took part for short periods as part of their duties in No. 24 Squadron RAF. However I will speak of the ten crews sent from Australia, from Nos. 36 and 38 Squadrons specifically for airlift duties.

All crews were well experienced on transport operations. I think all had flown a good deal around Papua New Guinea and participated in the long courier service from Schofield to Japan. That flying had been demanding and had involved flying in a good deal of bad weather; through the intertropic front, around, and often through, intense build-ups of towering cumulonimbus cloud, and in Japan, carburettor, propeller, engine intake, and wing icing. But we were not accustomed to the fog, snow, sleet and - almost constant in winter - very low cloud and very poor visibility and iced runways. Nor were we used to being confined to a corridor, to have no freedom to change height or speed to counter these conditions.

Our working schedule was again a new experience. We worked to a 20-hour day, not a 24-hour day. That is to say we carried out two trips to Berlin and back - that took eight hours elapsed time; we then had 12 hours off. Three cycles of that schedule and then we had a break of 36 hours. After four of those cycles we had four days off. On the four-day break we often flew an aircraft returning to the United Kingdom and from the United Kingdom to Lubeck.

Put simply it went: Day one - take off 0800 hours; to Berlin, unload and return to Lubeck at 1130; a quick snack in the flight line kitchen and airborne again at 1230; to Berlin, unload and back to Lubeck by 1600; then off for 12 hours and start again at 0400 to repeat the two-trip cycle. On the third day take off would be at midnight and finish at 0800; then the welcome 36 hour break which meant we started our second cycle at 2000. I should also mention that if Lubeck was closed to landing then we would be diverted to another airlift field where the aircraft would be loaded and off again to Berlin.

A curious schedule that we kept up for 12 months. I am often amused when I hear people talk of the stress of shift work, even on penalty rates! We also got used to extended periods of bad weather and I realised that everything is relative. I recall walking out to my aircraft one dark, wet, cold and sleety night, snow underfoot, and I said to a crew just landed: 'What's the weather like in Berlin?' The response: 'Oh good, cloud base is 400 feet.' I was relieved at that good news.

As far as I know, no RAAF crew ever had to overshoot because of an error of judgment on the approach into Berlin; no one scratched an aircraft. This in an operation where the USAF had 70 major and 56 minor accidents and 30 killed in
aircraft accidents. I have not got exact figures for the RAF and civil operators. Total accidents were about 98 with 18 RAF and ten civilian aircrew killed.

On the lighter side, I remember that a pint of beer was fourpence and if one had a Benedictine chaser the total cost was sixpence. This was occupation money and sixpence was the smallest sum in paper money. Pence were a cumbersome bit of bakelite. Clearly it was better to have a beer and Benedictine than to get two of those horrible coins as change.

I remember staying in the plush Four Seasons Hotel in Hamburg, then an officers’ hotel, for 15 cents a night. And I remember that, when shown to my room by a distinguished looking man in black striped trousers, waistcoat and black bow tie, I was asked what time I should like my bath prepared in the morning. Looking into the large ensuite I wondered why it needed to be prepared. But I decided there must be some reason and, rather than appear that I was not used to such service, I said: ‘Oh, about 9’; and he said: ‘And what temperature, sir?’

So that was the airlift. I think that we acquitted ourselves well - as RAAF people usually do. We were left there far longer than others and I believe this reflected badly on RAAF personnel administration. When we left Australia for service in Germany, at short notice, most thought it would be a matter of weeks or, at most, a few months. In the event it was 14 months before we got home. In the interval we were given absolutely no idea whether we would be replaced, withdrawn, or left there for good. It was the way of the times. I’m pleased to observe that personnel administration has improved markedly.

DISCUSSION

Alex Freeleagus: Sir, Pathfinder Bennett’s name was associated with the airlift. What part did he play?

Air Marshal David Evans: Well, he was flying a Tudor and flew it himself. He had two Tudors belonging to his company, flying fuel in, and they did exceptionally well of course. The fuel was a valuable help to the airlift and it was the British civil fleet that did it. Bennett was one of the first in doing that. In fact Bennett took off with his elevator chocks in one day as is well known, I think, and managed to get around and land the thing. When questioned he said that he didn’t think Don Bennett could make a mistake until then, but he was a very lucky Bennett.

Dr Alan Stephens: Air Marshal, when I spoke about the Interim Air Force this morning I didn’t have time to comment on the flying training in the RAAF and maintenance of standards after the war, but it was the case that in Australia the RAAF was in dire straits and standards deteriorated extraordinarily quickly after the intense flying of the war. How important were episodes like the Berlin Airlift in maintaining some kind of efficiency, indeed perhaps building a base that didn’t exist in Australia and was rapidly being lost?
Air Marshal David Evans: I suppose that's right, Alan, but I must say, and Dave Hitchins would probably support me, that in all this time the one part of the Air Force that did get plenty of flying and plenty of training was the transport force. For example, we had the Japan courier runs to and around New Guinea, where conditions were pretty miserable at times and we also had instrument rating procedures put in place. We didn’t have green cards because we used a different system, which was called limited/unlimited ratings, but people were tested by people from Central Flying School to do that and the standards within the transport squadron were very good. Anyhow, I had a squadron commander who would have eaten anyone who did anything wrong. He was a fearful bloke but a very good bloke, John Balfe. He ensured that people were tested by flight commanders or himself fairly regularly and kept up to speed. I can’t really talk for the rest of the Air Force, though.

Major Darren Kerr: I’m interested in what instances of Soviet harassment of air operations there may have been during this period and what contingency planning there was should a more escalated Soviet response have been involved?

Air Marshal David Evans: Well, it is an interesting question. Aircraft were buzzed from time to time but this was simply the exuberance of Russian pilots and I don’t think that there was anything sinister in it at all. But from time to time the Russians would say we are going to carry out exercises and the corridor will be invaded by our air traffic between these hours, or there would be live firing across the corridors. General Tunner decided that they should be ignored. It wasn’t a bad tactic in fact because nothing ever eventuated except that a lot of searchlights would flash around when they said these things would happen. You may wonder why they didn’t do more than that. In July, one month after the airlift had started, President Truman deployed two squadrons of B-29s to Great Britain and another squadron of B-29s in August. The authorities didn’t say anything, but the press made a great deal of it. The officials just said that they were there for exercises. However, the Russians knew what the B-29s had been used for in Japan - without a word being said. So I think that they must have done a bit of deep thinking about what might happen if they started an incident. General Tunner had said, we are flying through it and if you cause an incident it will be on your head. They only bluffed. Searchlights didn’t hurt anyone.

Air Vice-Marshal Bill Collins: In relation to accidents, how many might be attributed to malfunction of the aircraft, given that they were relatively rudimentary aircraft in those days and presumably being operated pretty hard. Did they perform well, did you find engine failures were a common occurrence, or did those sort of results indicate that people were pressing the limits a bit too far?

Air Marshal David Evans: Bill, I really can’t answer your question. I know the weather was certainly the major cause of accidents. I had an engine failure on take off and it was found to be a rag in the fuel tank. In fact there was some thought it might be have been sabotage. At one stage it was investigated. But I think the aircraft performed pretty well, really. Weather was the main factor.
Air Commodore Brent Espeland: Sir, I think you set the scene very well with the description of where the arrangements between the allied powers were heading towards the end of the Second World War. In filling out the picture at the time of the Berlin Airlift you certainly have given us a lot of very interesting insights, particularly at the personal level. Yet, at the same time, your strategic overview illustrated the role that the Berlin Airlift played in the policy of containment of Russian communism, being an important step towards the formation of NATO.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like you to join with me in thanking Air Marshal Evans for a most interesting and informative presentation.
The tour in Malta 1952-54 by 78 Fighter Wing was remarkable through being the only time that the RAAF has been engaged in garrison duty - 'garrison' defined as a defensive force manning a fort or area. The political discussions between the Australian and British governments late in 1951 and early in 1952 which led to the deployment of 78 Wing to the Mediterranean are covered in detail in Dr Alan Stephens’ book Going Solo - which I am sure most of my listeners have read.

However, to summarise the main factors:

- During that Cold War era in the 1950s the Suez Canal was regarded as a vulnerable sector along the strategic shipping route from Britain to Australasia and the Far East.

- It was a matter of political expediency that Commonwealth nations be seen to contribute to the security of the Canal Zone.

- This concept of 'being seen to contribute' would be satisfied by the presence of a force, even if only a token force.

- This concession must have been a relief to the RAAF which at that time was stretched to provide resources to Korea and Malaya.

The destination for the Australian force - a fighter wing of two flying squadrons plus support - was a matter of debate. We understood that the Australian government ruled out the Canal Zone itself. Nicosia airfield in Cyprus was announced as the destination but a month before departure of the Wing it was changed to Malta. We were told that Nicosia had insufficient accommodation but that there was ample space at Malta. The RNZAF sent a fighter squadron to Nicosia.

I speak to you not as an historian or researcher but as a pilot in 78 Wing for the entire tour of two and a half years. So I can give you first-hand information on the nature of our training and operational exercises, and our frequent involvement with NATO forces, as well as making general comments on living conditions and daily life in the garrison environment.

Perhaps I should emphasise that I started as a very junior sergeant pilot and during the tour became a very junior pilot officer. Although I participated in every aspect of our training, every exercise and every special event, I was never, by virtue of my junior status as a ‘boggy’, enlightened on policy matters at command level which dictated
the terms and timing of our training exercises. For example, I presume that 78 Wing had an annual program which identified such needs as allocation of armament ranges, training sessions with air defence radar units, exercises with Royal Navy ships, and provision of transport aircraft for our groundstaff when we were on deployments away from Malta. For my part, I went where and when I was told, and was usually ‘tail-end Charlie’, doing the menial tasks such as monthly flying hour returns.

Composition of Wing

You would first need to know how 78 Wing was composed for the tour in Malta. First there was a Wing Headquarters, led by Wing Commander Brian Eaton (promoted to group captain January 1953). Then there were two flying squadrons with only seven pilots each, 75 Squadron commanded by Squadron Leader Ken Andrews, 76 Squadron commanded by Squadron Leader ‘Bay’ Adams. (Theoretically the squadrons could be brought up to full strength if need be by the dispatch of more pilots from Australia.) Base services were provided by 378 Squadron commanded by Squadron Leader Geoff Newstead, and aircraft maintenance and engineering support by 478 Squadron commanded by Squadron Leader Jack Kane.

The Wing numbered approximately 300 - about 40 officers and 260 senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and airmen. The numbers varied slightly from time to time as some were posted home to Australia and replacements arrived.

Bearing in mind that the Wing might be called into combat in the Mediterranean theatre, the RAAF was careful in its selection of personnel. Many airmen were young fellows on their first major posting but they were led by a very experienced cadre of warrant officers and flight sergeants as the standard setters and mentors.

Amongst the pilots Brian Eaton and a handful of others had World War II experience, mainly on Kittyhawks and Mustangs in the Southwest Pacific theatre and in the Occupation Force in Japan. The majority of the pilots were Korean veterans, having flown Mustangs and/or Meteors in that conflict. Three of us, the juniors fresh off pilot training course at Point Cook, had only 50 or 60 hours on Vampires at Williamtown.

During the tour five pilots returned to Australia on posting. Their replacements were all Korean veterans (and included a young fellow named Pilot Officer Jake Newham).

In the process of building up the Wing, selected officers and airmen were posted into RAAF Williamtown during May and June 1952. A small advance party flew to Malta by civil air to prepare for the main arrival, and the bulk of the Wing travelled by ship, departing Sydney on 4 July 1952 on SS Asturias, a migrant vessel which would have otherwise returned empty to England.
Wing Aircraft

The British government was keen to sell us new aircraft but I understand that Australia resisted that proposal in favour of building our own Sabres. Instead, 78 Wing flew 18 Vampire Mk 9 aircraft and two Meteor Mk 7 aircraft leased from the RAF.

The Mk 9 version with its Goblin engine of 3,500 lbs static thrust lacked the power of our Australian-built Vampires which carried the Nene engine of 5,000 lbs static thrust. However, the Mk 9 was easy to handle and very agile, yet stable in weapons delivery - in short, a delight to fly - even though it was known affectionately as the ‘Kiddy Cart’. Forty years on, we realise that we were operating a very primitive jet aircraft. We had no ejection seats, a very basic VHF radio, a wartime gunsight and no navigation aids, not even a radio compass. We navigated solely by dead reckoning and map reading, culminating in a homing at our destination (that is a heading to steer), given to the pilot by an operator at the destination airfield who watched a blip on his cathode ray screen caused by the pilot’s voice transmission. Even map reading was of little use to us as we operated over the sea for 90 per cent of our flying.

The Meteors were for target-towing in air-to-air gunnery practice, and for instrument flying practice. We lost one Meteor in a crash early in 1954, and received a Vampire T11 (the two-seat side-by-side trainer version) which was preferable as an instrument flying trainer.

Command and Control

On arrival in Malta by ship in July 1952, 78 Wing immediately became an element of the Middle East Air Force. Command and control were tidied up early in the tour when we came directly under the Air Officer Commanding Malta Command. We were tasked as though we were an RAF unit but always maintained our Australian identity.

You should realise that Malta is a small sandstone island covering an area 17 miles long and nine miles wide (27 kilometres by 16 kilometres), which is located 80 miles south of Sicily and 200 miles north of Libya. To relate this to our current location in Canberra, I suggest that you picture an area from Gungahlin south to Tuggeranong, and from Fairbairn west to Weston Creek. At that time Malta was the headquarters of the Royal Navy’s Mediterranean fleet, commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten. It had three operational airfields - the Royal Naval Air Station at Halfar, the RAF station at Takali, and the main airfield at Luqa which was the civil airport and the RAF transport stop on the route to the Middle East, the Far East and Australia.

Phases of the Tour

Our two and a half years tour is readily represented in three phases:

- Initially 78 Wing was a tenant at RNAS Halfar (known to the Royal Navy as HMS *Falcon*), where spare accommodation, technical facilities and hardstand area were
available. We were there from July 1952 until June 1953. Our groundstaff showed great resourcefulness in setting up repair workshops, equipment stores, crew rooms, etc, but there was little that could be done about the pathetic domestic arrangements and poor quality rationing; our move to Takali in 1953 was a welcome relief from rather trying living conditions.

- The second phase was the detachment to England from mid-May to mid-July 1953 with 18 aircraft and about 100 groundstaff. Our formation of 12 Vampires was the Australian component in the massive flypast in the Queen’s Review of Commonwealth Air Forces at RAF Odiham on 15 July, shortly after the coronation. Based at RAF Station Horsham St Faith in East Anglia, we flew formation practices and eight rehearsals for the review, plus numerous intruder sorties in cooperation with RAF air defence systems. During this detachment we were introduced for the first time to ground controlled approaches, so necessary in Britain’s weather. On leaving England the Wing spent a week in Germany participating in a huge NATO air defence exercise.

(During that detachment we fortunately had enough free time to visit many of Britain’s interesting tourist sights and also spent numerous weekends in London. Australia House was able to obtain grandstand tickets to the coronation so many of us watched the glittering coronation procession from our seats opposite St James Palace under the dripping trees of the Mall.)

- Phase 3 was the 18 months spent at Takali airfield after the RAF vacated that station. Those members of 78 Wing not on the detachment to the United Kingdom for the coronation made the move from Halfar in June 1953. Though remaining an RAF station, it was then run like an RAAF base in Australia.

Training and Exercises

You will of course be interested in how the Wing used its allocation of flying hours.

As the Wing was primarily an air defence force, approximately 50 per cent of the flying hours were devoted to air defence training, most of that being practice intercepts under control of the RAF radar unit at Dingli. As a variation from intercepting another Vampire, our target aircraft were occasionally RAF Shackletons, US Navy Savages and Neptunes, and RN Skyraiders. Of special interest were the combat air patrols over RN ships (such as the cruiser HMS Glasgow) which provided their own radar control and directions for intercepting intruders.

The RN also flew the Guppy version of the Skyraider as an airborne early warning aircraft; we had frequent exercises doing low level intercepts out over the blue Mediterranean under direction of a controller in a Skyraider.

As well, many hours were spent in air-to-air attacks, either using cine film to assess our proficiency, or live firing on banner targets towed by the Meteor over the sea south of Sicily.
In the ground attack role 20 per cent of our hours were absorbed in dive-bombing a moored target on a sea range at Malta, or gunnery and rocketry practice on a land range near RAF Station Idris, near Tripoli in Libya. To improve our proficiency, the Wing twice spent six weeks at the Armament Practice School at Nicosia in Cyprus.

The remaining 30 per cent was taken up by general flying, formation practice, occasional instrument practice, and defence exercises. Notable formation flights included flypasts for the Duke of Edinburgh, Emperor Haile Selassie, Air Marshal Hardman (returning to the United Kingdom after his term as Chief of the Air Staff of the RAAF), the annual Battle of Britain commemoration, ANZAC Day at Tobruk, and the arrival of Her Majesty in the Britannia in 1954.

By far the highlights of the tour were the frequent opportunities for defence exercises with air forces of other nations. Although Australia was not a member of NATO, 78 Wing was tasked as an element of the RAF Malta Command, being included in every exercise. In most instances the Wing defended Malta against attacks by RAF and RN intruders, as well as by Cougars and Banshees of the US 6th Fleet. We especially appreciated the exchanges with the French Air Force at Bizerte in Tunisia, and with the Italian Air Force in a NATO exercise defending Rome.

French and Italian Vampires visited 78 Wing at Takali for defence exercises, as did the RNZAF Vampires from Cyprus. We often mixed it with Meteors of RAF Auxiliary Squadrons visiting Takali for their summer camps.

In the ground attack arena 78 Wing Vampires on deployment to Libya were frequently tasked in army cooperation exercises against British cavalry units in the desert. These could be frustrating sorties as it was very difficult to locate the camouflaged tanks ‘dug in’ below the stony terrain.

In all the training and exercises the two squadrons retained their separate identities, executing such functions as the authorisation of flights and the recording of flying hours. In most instances Malta Command tasked the Wing and left it to internal arrangements how we detailed the flights. The squadrons remained fairly stable in manning for the entire tour, allowing for a few postings in and out. Late in 1954 Brian Eaton was posted to London, Geoff Newstead became Officer Commanding Wing and ‘Bay’ Adams (grounded for medical reasons) took over Base Squadron. By this time Bill Horsman was Commanding Officer 75 Squadron and Brick Bradford Commanding Officer 76 Squadron.

**Personnel Aspects**

Of course not all of our time was working so I will make brief comments on domestic aspects. Approximately 30 wives and a few children joined us in Malta three months after our arrival. During the tour approximately 60 members married Australian, English or Maltese lasses, and about 30 children were born.

Our senior officers occupied married quarters at Luqa but the majority of married men found flats within the Maltese community. Life was always interesting in historic
Malta, a little island with a colourful history going back to neolithic man. St Paul was shipwrecked there, and evidence of the Roman occupation remains. As the headquarters of the Knights of St John in medieval times it withstood the siege by the Ottoman Empire in 1565, later becoming history’s greatest fortified stronghold in defence of Christianity. Despite the intensive bombing by the Axis powers during World War II, the massive walls and bastions still remain as symbols of the courageous resistance which earned the people of Malta the award of the George Cross.

The weather in Malta is glorious for nine months of the year, permitting all sorts of outdoor activities, particularly swimming. The island also has ready access to Europe, so many of the Wing fellows enjoyed their leave in the United Kingdom or European countries. Several bought cars in England then drove them back to Malta on a touring holiday through Europe.

Those among the British forces (RAF, RN and Army units) who knew little of the Wing’s prowess in the air were certainly aware of our presence through our sporting achievements. The Australian cricket team won the Governor’s Cup in three successive years, and Wing sportsmen achieved outstanding successes in rugby, tennis, swimming and rifle shooting.

Finale

The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954 spelled the end of the 78 Wing tour as British forces were withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone. This suited the Australian government which was then planning for participation in the Far East Strategic Reserve in Singapore/Malaya. At the end of 1954 we handed back aircraft and stores to the RAF and all personnel returned to Australia by ship in January 1955.

I can suggest nothing but benefits from the 78 Wing tour in Malta. As a unique opportunity to show the flag it was an outstanding success. The RAF was most impressed by our record of achievements - aircraft serviceability of around 70 per cent was the highest within the Command, and our conduct of all training and defence exercises earned nothing but compliments. Every person became more proficient through this posting, from the Commanding Officers to the most junior airmen.

On the flying side, the opportunities for cooperation with the forces of so many other nations, the types of challenging training on offer, and the introduction to new techniques were beyond anything available in Australia at that time. The esprit de corps which developed in our close-knit group lasts to this day in the form of 78 Wing reunions, even with sadly-depleted numbers.

I finish with a question. In 1952, 78 Wing was sent to the Mediterranean to help Britain defend the Suez Canal should a threat emerge through escalation of the Cold War situation. In 1956 Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal and Britain and France retaliated with attacks on Egyptian forces, this action sparking the condemnation of the United Nations. If this or similar situations had rapidly developed before we left...
Malta, would 78 Wing have been tasked to attack the Canal Zone, or would the Australian government have refused to let us become involved?

**DISCUSSION**

Air Commodore Brent Espeland: I had a question and in a way you have answered it, but perhaps you could provide a bit more detail. It picks up on the theme of Air Vice-Marshal Collins in the previous session. You talked of high serviceability rates of the Vampire and, of course, you mentioned the one fatal accident, but beyond that it seems like an excellent safety record. What are your thoughts on the Vampire?

Air Commodore John Jacobs: On what, the handling?

Air Commodore Brent Espeland: On both in terms of its handling but, particularly, its serviceability.

Air Commodore John Jacobs: Serviceability was wonderful and once again I believe that our senior NCOs were primarily responsible. We had good officers in the maintenance squadron. We had good officers all through for that matter. Admittedly we had RAF aircraft so we didn’t have a long supply chain all the way to Australia for spares as did the Butterworth situation where everything had to be brought up from Australia. But I think that there is no doubt about it that the credit must go to the maintenance people for the way they kept the aircraft flying. There were always problems, but there was no thought of unionism. The boys just stayed there until the problem was fixed and we were always able to fulfil all the necessary programming details. One area of special note was when we went all the way over to Cyprus and did our air-to-air and air-to-ground gunnery, bombing and rocketry details with our aircraft. I think we had a great bunch of fellows in the air and on the ground.

I don’t think too many of us were keen on the T-11. After all de Havilland just took an ordinary single seat Vampire, and that was narrow enough. How people like ‘Bay’ Adams and ‘Stormy’ Fairweather used to jam themselves in I’m not too sure. Skinny people like me had enough room, but then when they brought out the trainer version they just widened it a bit but not enough and jammed in two seats. You used to sit up in it. It was very cosy and at least it was a little better for instrument flying. I never felt much point in flying the Meteor for instrument practice when we were flying Vampires. The Meteor had totally different handling characteristics but we all were delighted to fly that little Vampire, even though it was a kiddy kart.

I think that all of us got about 600 hours while we were over there, but Les Reading probably got about 900 hours. He did all the air tests and used to put himself down on the program first anyway, but the rest of us had a really good time with amazing experiences.
Group Captain Arthur Skimin: John, this is a comment rather than a question. There are some interesting exchanges on the point you raised at the end. The question you left us with between the prime minister of Australia and the prime minister of the United Kingdom during the Suez blockade, those exchanges are recorded in Sir Fredrick Shedden’s papers and the answer was no.

Air Commodore John Jacobs: I’m not sure what you want me to say about that one. Remember, I was a boggy at that time and I just went there and went home as told. I have often wondered about that situation though. I seem to recall Alan Stephens might have brought that matter up in his book Going Solo. At the time I think we were realigning ourselves with the Americans to concentrate our resources in Australia and Southeast Asia and it might have been very difficult if we had to hop in with the RAF and the French at the Suez Canal, particularly as the Americans didn’t like the idea anyway.

Group Captain Arthur Skimin: There were formal approaches from the British prime minister and the Australian prime minister. Those exchanges are contained in the Shedden papers and the answer in response to the request for assistance from the Australian government was no.

Air Commodore Brent Espeland: Well John, as you mentioned, Alan Stephens in Going Solo scoped out the 78 Wing deployment but today you have really filled in with a great deal of very illustrative detail and in that way you have added immeasurably to the record.

Before I close I would just like to say that I think that what you had to say in terms of success, of leadership, esprit de corps, sense of purpose and strong support in the logistics area are very important lessons for future deployments, but for now please join with me in thanking John Jacobs for his presentation.
RAAF MUSEUM

Warrant Officer David Gardner

Introduction

Throughout this year we have been celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Royal Australian Air Force. There have been a number of commemorative activities, especially the production of several publications relating to the history of the RAAF. Additionally, since 1988, the RAAF has sponsored an Annual Heritage Award for literature, art and photography. The results of these promotions have enhanced existing records of RAAF units, personnel and operations. In concert with these activities, the RAAF’s annual history conferences over the past four years have produced papers and proceedings which have been published, creating even more historical records for further research and education. However, since 1952 the RAAF has been collecting much more than the written word.

Background

Following a proposal in 1949 by the then Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir George Jones, the RAAF Museum was established at Point Cook in 1952 and formalised in 1955. At the time of inauguration no consideration was given to a formal display open to public viewing, nor to formal museum operations such as conservation, preservation and research. Rather, the museum was a collection agency and repository for items of historical significance such as records, log books, uniforms, technical equipment, aircraft and other memorabilia. Things have come a long way since then and in October this year the museum opened a world class facility displaying the rich heritage of the Australian Flying Corps and the Royal Australian Air Force.

Development of the collection between 1952 and 1966 with the consequent need for organisation and custody, warranted the establishment of a full-time curator in 1966. The post was supported by a full-time assistant in 1971, particularly as the collection was opened for public display. In 1986 a full-time officer-in-charge was appointed to coordinate and manage RAAF Museum activity and development. The establishment of this post reflected the growing public and service expectation of the museum, and the need to exercise professional management skills across a broad range of curatorial, administrative, restoration and operational activities.

The RAAF Museum was formed as an independent but integral unit of the RAAF in March 1988, acquiring the role ‘to preserve and promote RAAF Heritage’ including the coordination of RAAF aircraft restoration projects. It should be noted the Australian military aviation was only 40 years from inception (and the RAAF 31 years old) at the time the museum was founded.
Staffing and Funding

The museum has a permanent staff of nine full-time personnel. However, over past years, it has relied heavily on RAAF personnel held surplus from other units, volunteers, and a small number of reservists. The museum’s exposure has been enhanced considerably during 1996, the RAAF’s 75th anniversary. The museum has been tasked with numerous flying commitments, other external display activities and an expected heavy visitor program throughout the anniversary year. DPA has provided the museum with additional technical personnel to cover the increased anniversary flying and display commitment.

RAAF Museum activities and recurrent spending are funded primarily from the Training Command Sub Program. The museum receives an allocation each year based on budget bids for operations and other museum related activities. The museum also makes bids for capital works and minor new works in competition with other units at RAAF Williams. The Friends of the Museum organisation is another avenue for minor funding to assist in display construction and maintenance and selected acquisitions.

The Collection

The RAAF Museum possesses a collection of approximately 400,000 individual items relating to all periods of military aviation from 1914 to the present time. The museum research facility and archives house a photograph collection of over one million items, spanning a similar period as well as containing documents, maps and posters relating to the history and operations of the Australian Flying Corps and Royal Australian Air Force. Additionally the facility holds in excess of 10,000 general and technical publications of which many are unique in Australia. Within the collection, the museum’s aircraft inventory currently totals 70 aircraft in either storage, restoration, static display, ground operating or airworthy condition.

The development of military aviation has significantly influenced Australia’s aviation heritage, both military and general. It commenced in 1914 with the formation of the Australian Flying Corps and has since played distinguished and important roles in both peace and war. The exploits of the Australian Flying Corps and Royal Australian Air Force are a source of considerable pride for most Australians. The civilian development stemming from its military roots has produced many legendary individuals and organisations that are an important part of Australian history such as Kingsford-Smith, Brearley, P.G. Taylor and Qantas.

The RAAF Museum is relatively young in terms of other national museums, and until recently, in spite of an outstanding record in aviation, Australia was one of the few developed nations which did not have a policy to preserve its aviation history. However, the importance placed on the development of the RAAF Museum collection has been reinforced by the Piggott Enquiry. This enquiry into national collections identified the continued and unacceptable loss of aviation heritage through export overseas, destruction and deterioration through individual owner’s inability to maintain preservation standards. The prime cause of the loss in both military and civil
aviation theatres was the lack of a single responsible authority and a coordinated effort to preserve the nation’s aviation heritage. *The Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act* of 1986 has had a positive effect in recent times. As many valuable exhibits have already been lost to other countries, the need to preserve those exhibits which remain becomes more important.

So what is the role of the RAAF Museum today? It is the Air Force’s record and standing in the community, preserved and displayed for all to see. It is a treasure house of priceless objects, a store of historic artefacts, a testament to past deeds and to those who performed them, an archive of words and pictures. RAAF Museum’s role is the preservation and display of military aviation heritage. No other authority exists in Australia with this task.

The emphasis at the museum is primarily on the conservation, preservation and research with display as an adjunct to these activities. The ephemeral nature of the unit dictates its existence, particularly in the past four years with the downsizing of the service resulting in the closing of units. The service has been subjected not simply to wars, conflicts, peace-keeping operations and civil aid activities but also to the administrative revolutions, particularly the current downsizing. Those units disbanding do so with the knowledge that their trophies and historic artefacts, icons of their existence, will be secure with the RAAF Museum.

**Conservation**

The lack of manpower and attention to maintenance in the past has resulted in significant and identifiable deterioration of valuable assets at the museum. This problem, supported by the Piggott Enquiry, provided the basis for the museum to consider the establishment of a conservation and restoration policy in recent years, to ensure the preservation of our heritage. Every year that passes means greater and possibly irreversible deterioration. If this material is to be of educational benefit and enjoyment to future generations, conservation must invariably be the museum’s first consideration. Over the past decade this deterioration had been identified and the introduction of formal museum management practices and provision of trained staff has heralded a new era. Formal procedures were introduced for the conservation, preservation, restoration and storage of the museum’s sprawling collection. Much of the decay of the previous 60 years has been arrested and in many areas reversed or at least stabilised. This process is demonstrated with an artefact currently on display in the Pacific area of the new heritage gallery. It is a list of RAAF prisoners of war who were detained or died at Pudu Gaol, Kuala Lumpur, during World War II. This list was secretly compiled before being folded to the size of a razor blade and smuggled out of the prison. The list was written in iron gall ink on rice paper and until recently was displayed by being adhered to a cardboard base. Conservation treatment to preserve this item has entailed removal from the cardboard and placing of the paper on Japanese tissue encapsulated in mylar. This treatment will ensure the preservation of the item for many years to come. Other items have been assessed and prioritised to receive conservation treatment, either in house or with the engagement of external agencies. This will be an ongoing process.
Research

As already mentioned, formed only 31 years after the formation of the RAAF, the museum maintains a historically detailed and comprehensive resource invaluable for training and research purposes. The heritage display and research facility are in constant demand by service training courses conducted at Point Cook and Canberra. In addition to this direct training, the RAAF Museum is tasked by the service, and on other occasions other government departments, with research on aspects of early RAAF operations. The museum accommodates a considerable number of private inquiries for historical research. Whilst most are straightforward requiring minimal effort, some require extensive research over a protracted period.

The documentation at the museum is accessible, professionally maintained and in most instances unavailable from any other source in Australia. With increased recognition of the originality, accessibility and comprehensiveness of the pure historical resource held at the RAAF Museum, access has been provided to tertiary students at postgraduate level. The information gleaned from museum resources by these students submitting theses is returned to the service through provision of a copy of the material written for their degree purposes. In addition to casual visitors, the museum receives and caters for a wide range of school visits including secondary schools now involved in courses related to aviation. Visits by junior schools engender a sense of service appreciation and acceptance of the role in today's community at a younger age.

Restoration

It must be accepted that most aircraft and their engines have by their very nature undergone considerable stress during their service. In fact, of all classes of museum objects, aircraft and their engines will probably have had the most hazardous pre-collection treatment. It is a rare privilege for an aircraft curator to acquire a specimen which can go straight on display, or even without evidence of progressive corrosion or decay present in some or all of its components. Therefore restoration has become a major activity of the museum. Restored objects, however, only indicate the nature and appearance of their former state. They are less complete, less original and less honest. With each restoration the object is taken a step further from its original state. Yet restoration may be essential to prevent further deterioration, or may be necessary to allow the object to be displayed. We must accept that the loss of originality which restoration entails is usually preferable to the total loss of the object itself. Commencing as a piecemeal operation by volunteers, this aspect of museum operations has completed three restorations completed since November 1979 and another four in varying degrees of completion. The most recent accomplishment was the completion of the two Boston aircraft under museum management at No. 23 Squadron, Amberley. The museum has several other airframes in storage awaiting restoration. These airframes will be assessed for significance to the service and restored accordingly. For instance, the museum holds the fuselage of one of the Iroquois which took part in the Battle of Long Tan. Also in the collection in a dilapidated condition, after languishing on external display, is the Meteor jet trainer.
used in Korea for the conversion of RAAF pilots from Mustangs to Meteors. These two airframes will be among the top priorities for restoration work.

Display

An extension to the museum’s training resource is the public relations benefit flowing to the service from RAAF Museum operations. Apart from the permanent display at Point Cook, the museum also has annexes at Townsville and Wagga; and has developed a professional and highly informative mobile display for use at shows, conventions and exhibitions. As mentioned previously, the museum opened a new heritage gallery in October this year. This new display is probably the most significant advance in the development of the museum since Sir George Jones’ 1952 proposal directed the formation of an organisation to collect and preserve RAAF heritage. It offers the visitor an exciting range of exhibits complemented by a mixture of modern display technology. The RAAF Museum has always been the Cinderella in the grand plan of redevelopment throughout the Air Force. It has been tucked away at Point Cook in patently unsuitable buildings with gloomy rooms crowded with memorabilia and often incomprehensible interpretations epitomising museums of the 18th and 19th centuries. Those who knew the crowded and cluttered displays in the old building will find that everything in this new venue has changed. As well, the museum is aware of the competition with other organisations with their currently fashionable experiences of interactivity and theme park aura, but will endeavour to set new standards for accuracy. Inevitably, only a fraction of the collection can be shown at any one time and this enables the museum to rotate its displays thus conservationally resting those sensitive objects from time to time and preventing boredom for the visitors who make return visits. It will mean a visit to the museum is no longer a wet afternoon’s chore, or trailing round after the rest of the fourth form. It will be a treat; a proper outing which can be exciting and an informative experience. However, the reverential attitude to the objects on display will prevail throughout, as those objects are the fabric which cultured the history being portrayed at the RAAF Museum.

Together with these activities, the museum operates a limited number of historic aircraft at a variety of selected displays and air shows throughout the country. Commencing in 1988, and each year since, the museum undertakes a ‘Heritage Tour’ accessing remote towns in every state in Australia: a community and service public relations benefit which, without the museum, could not have been supported.

The importance of the visitor to the museum is fundamental. Primarily, it gives the museum a sense of purpose, not only as a centre of learning and understanding, but as a public relations medium for the service. The patrons also provide revenue, generated from the sales of souvenirs, calendars, and books, as well as donations, to assist in the operation of the museum, construction of displays, upkeep of galleries and maintenance of aircraft.

A by-product to the museum attracting visitors is the service to tourism in the local area. Over the past decade, the number of visitors to the museum has increased from 12,000 to 40,000-45,000 per annum which indicates that display development and
advertising have been successful. Until a few years ago, most of the museum’s visitors were ‘old and bolds’ making a return and telling the grandchildren, ‘I was there. I flew in that. I fired one of those.’ Now the museum has visitors who show great new interest in what happened to their parents or grandparents and what they did in the service. The museum is seeking to respond to that: as fewer ‘old and bolds’ come to the museum to be reminded, the museum wants more of the younger generations to come to it, to be told.

Future

But what of the future? The museum’s collection will continue to grow as the RAAF ages, as aircraft are retired and as further units close. Each year additional material becomes historically significant yet the existing material retains its importance. That is, the nature of the museum is such that its period of interest continues to increase and its collection can be expected to increase accordingly. The result of the Chief of Air Staff Advisory Committee Agendum earlier this year confirmed the continuing operation of the museum with its primary role ‘to preserve and promote RAAF heritage’ but with a theme of ‘an aviation museum at work’. Further development of the museum will be based on the provision of a range of improvements including large aircraft storage which will be accomplished by the formulation of a partnering arrangement with the National Air and Space Museum of Australia, or NASMA, currently collocated with the RAAF Museum at Point Cook. In mid-1997, construction of NASMA’s exhibition centre will commence with completion planned towards the end of 1998. The two collocated establishments will present to the public, the development of military and civil aviation in Australia. Whilst this may be comforting, we must not lose sight of the problems of ongoing conservation and storage, which has haunted the museum since its inception. These problems will only get worse particularly in the case of an aviation museum. The growing assortment of aircraft in the collection present special problems. Aircraft are often large and awkward in size, composed of materials designed for their light weight/high strength ratio but not for an infinitely rehabilitated life. They are designed and constructed to serve most of their lives outdoors, however with constant, consistent and high levels of maintenance whilst in service. The RAAF Museum, like other museums, is in the process of eternity and will require to savagely examine its ability to collect and preserve.

Conclusion

In closing, I will add there can be no substitute for 82 years of history, and that to display that history, the museum uses two resources - men and their machines. It projects living history by maintaining, and operating several types of aircraft as examples of bygone technology. People are as important to the Air Force as are aeroplanes and technology which are only a percentage of the service. The museum’s approach to its displays include a large percentage of that human factor, but does not display the futility of conflict, the courage of fighting man and the devilish ingenuity of weaponry as a memorial. It, however, endeavours to portray admiration by a sense of amazement, that such things could have been accomplished at times of incredible stress, not by some master race of men, but by perfectly ordinary people.
DISCUSSION

**John Hutchinson:** I would just like to ask Warrant Officer Gardner what policy or interest does the RAAF Museum have in the individual collections held by the current units of the day?

**Warrant Officer Dave Gardner:** Well, I did tell the CO that I wasn’t going to answer any history questions. We do hold a fair bit of the history that covers the units and in consultation with the RAAF historical section in Canberra we work on most of that. Whatever they are disposing of we hold, but we are going to have to examine our holdings in the future because of the room.

**Air Commodore Brent Espeland:** Thank you for a comprehensive overview of the role and functions of the museum. I thought you made an excellent case for conservation, particularly as it extends beyond aircraft restoration and includes other important artefacts such as the example of the list of prisoners of war in Pudu Gaol. As it has been mentioned, the museum is on a business plan footing and this is something that Warrant Officer Gardner and the Commanding Officer and the rest of the staff at RAAF Museum will be working towards in the future. Dave, as I have mentioned, has been an excellent curator. We look to his continued involvement with the museum for a considerable time in the future. I would like you to show your appreciation of his efforts so far as curator and also of coming along this morning to talk to us.
BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OCCUPATION FORCE IN JAPAN - THE RAAF CONTRIBUTION

Group Captain J.P. Harvey

Introduction

On the second of September 1945 the Japanese formally surrendered to allied forces on the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. The RAAF was represented at the surrender by Air Vice-Marshals Jones and Bostock. At the surrender:

Japanese warriors were told they were neither honourable nor gallant foes, but would rather be remembered for their treachery and atrocities, sentiments which would have been shared by the great majority of servicemen who fought against them.¹

Regional Political Context

While there was little sympathy for the Japanese nation, as Stephens put it: ‘Sentiments ... counted for little in the pragmatic world of post-war power politics’.² Real world politics meant that, while Japan was to be demilitarised, it was not to be destroyed as a nation. Even before the surrender ceremony, American and British politicians agreed that it was essential to have a strong and democratic Japan to balance the power of the Soviet Union and China in the North Pacific. The terms of the Potsdam Declaration placed responsibility on the Japanese government to remove obstacles to the revival of democratic tendencies of the Japanese people and this was to be pursued under the supervision of an allied occupation force. The majority of the occupation force was to be provided by the United States with General Douglas MacArthur appointed as the Supreme Commander Allied Powers.

Australian Context

From an Australian perspective, the government was determined to ‘influence the conditions of the eventual peace treaty with Japan’³ and to ‘promote [Australia’s] diplomatic, military and economic ambitions in the Pacific’.⁴ To strengthen its hand


² Stephens, Going Solo, p. 208.


in future negotiations, in September 1945\textsuperscript{5} the War Cabinet decided to contribute substantial forces to the Allied Occupation, operating as part of the collective British Commonwealth Force known as BCOF.

Initially, however, there were fears that Britain would try to dominate any such collective effort. As Jeffrey Grey put it:

> The Australian Government felt that it had not been afforded sufficient recognition for the part it had played as a significant co-belligerent against the Japanese, and was not inclined to participate in a Commonwealth force which would be commanded and run by the British.\textsuperscript{6}

This was of particular concern because the British had not played a significant role in the war against Japan, with the exception of the Burma theatre.\textsuperscript{7} As a result, Australia initially proposed sending its own force, independent of other Commonwealth forces, and answerable only to General MacArthur. The British considered that this would reduce overall Commonwealth influence and eventually a single Commonwealth force was formed, but under an Australian commander.\textsuperscript{8}

In more general considerations of post-war security, the Australian Defence Committee gave little importance to the maintenance of post-war defence forces - the size of the defence forces to be determined by financial rather than strategic considerations.\textsuperscript{9} As Robert O’Neill put it:

> After the Japanese surrender, the armed services were involved principally in implementing the Government’s policy of rapid demobilisation and organising Australia’s contribution to occupation forces in Japan.\textsuperscript{10}

There were, however, some concerns for the long term security of Australia because of the reduced size of forces and questions were raised about the value of forces in Japan. When considering the overall defence of Australia and the contribution made by BCOF forces, H.B. Gullet, Liberal Member for Henty, proposed:

\textsuperscript{5} George Odgers, \textit{Air War Against Japan}, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1967, p. 495.


\textsuperscript{7} ibid., p. 196.

\textsuperscript{8} ibid., p. 196.


\textsuperscript{10} ibid., p. 23.
that the Australian force in Japan would be as much use in the defence of Australia as a battalion on the Khyber pass was to the British authorities during the Battle of Britain.\footnote{Grey, \textit{A Military History of Australia}, p. 197.}

**Establishment of BCOF**

In October 1945, in preparation for the deployment of forces, Lieutenant General John Northcott, Chief of the Australian General Staff for much of the war, visited Japan and discussed with General MacArthur the possibility of involvement of British Forces. The discussions led to the \textit{Northcott-MacArthur Agreement} in Tokyo in December that year.\footnote{Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 193, pp. 270-5 in O'Neill, \textit{Australia in the Korean War 1950-53}, Volume I, ‘Strategy and Diplomacy’.} The agreement confirmed that any Commonwealth forces would not be broken up and distributed throughout Japan, but would operate as a single unit, responsible for a specific area - the Hiroshima prefecture. Subsequently a formal proposal was made to the United States by Australia and it was agreed in December that forces from Australia, Britain, New Zealand and India would take part in the occupation.

**Size of Commitment**

The total BCOF force was to be approximately 40,000 personnel, under the command of Lieutenant General Northcott.\footnote{By August 1946 the total BCOF force consisted of some 40,236 personnel, of which 11,500 were Australian. See O'Neill, \textit{Australia in the Korean War 1950-53}, Volume I, ‘Strategy and Diplomacy’, p. 32.} The total number peaked in early 1947 at 45,000 personnel, with almost 12,000 Australians.\footnote{Ibid., p. 32.} The initial Australian contribution was to consist of: two cruisers and two destroyers; one brigade group;\footnote{The 34th Infantry Brigade, comprising the 65th, 66th and 67th infantry battalions which were concentrated on Moratai at the end of the war. Note: All battalions were made up of volunteers from the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions of the AIF respectively - all of whom enlisted in the interim Army, specifically for duty in Japan. See Grey, \textit{A Military History of Australia}, p. 197.} and three RAAF Mustang fighter squadrons.\footnote{Odgers, \textit{Air War Against Japan}, p. 496.}
The air component of BCOF, the British Commonwealth Air Group known as BCAIR, was organised into a tactical group under an integrated headquarters. BCAIR was made up of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>No. 81 Fighter Wing: Nos. 76, 77 and 82 Mustang Squadrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. 481 Maintenance Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. 381 Base Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>No. 4 Corsair Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>No. 4 Spitfire Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Nos. 11 and 17 Spitfire Squadrons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. 96 Dakota Medium Transport Squadron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Squadron RAF Regiment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Composition of BCAIR

Note:
(1) No. 111 Mobile Fighter Control Unit was made up of a number of RAAF early warning and ground control intercept radar units, sent to Japan some months later than the original force, primarily for training purposes.

The RAAF contribution consisted primarily of No. 81 Wing, at the time based in Labuan, North Borneo. The Wing was made up of Nos. 76, 77 and 82 Squadrons - a total strength of 1,750 personnel. In preparation for the occupation task, the squadrons were re-equipped with Mustang aircraft. Volunteers for the occupation force were called for in August 1945. The response was good and conversion training for aircrew and maintenance personnel was virtually completed by the end of November 1945.

Overall personnel numbers for BCAIR are shown in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>December 1946</th>
<th>April 1948</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAAF</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>1,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>2,478</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNZAF</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIAF</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Personnel Strengths for BCOF in Dec 96 and Apr 98.

\[17\] *ibid.*, p. 496.
The Deployment

The deployment of forces for BCOF was a challenging task in its own right, and required considerable predeployment planning and preparation.

_Predeployment Inspection_

In October 1945, anticipating the December formal agreement to commit forces to Japan, a survey party headed by Air Commodore Scherger was sent to Japan. The survey showed that all airfields that could be used would require considerable work and, because all American works units would be required to support US forces, Air Commodore Scherger decided that No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron (SACS) should also be deployed. In November 1945 No. 5 ACS was placed under the control of No. 81 Fighter Wing Headquarters, bringing the total size of the RAAF contingent to approximately 2,000.

The airfield selected as the base for the RAAF contingent was Bofu in the Yamaguchi prefecture. The airfield at Iwakuni was preferred because of its better facilities and proximity to BCAIR headquarters, but it required considerable work before it would be available for sustained operations.

Miho, on the northern coast of Shimane prefecture, became BCAIR’s third major airfield. (Later a landing strip was also established on Shikoku island when that became part of BCAIR’s area of responsibility.) Interestingly all three airfields were outside the Hiroshima prefecture, which meant that BCOF’s air and land components were separated.

_Advance Party_

In December 1945 an advance party, mostly from No. 5 ACS, arrived at the port of Kure which had been devastated by USAAF bombers and was described as being ‘an absolute shambles ... smashed to smithereens’. Even before No. 5 ACS could start work on the three main airfields, domestic facilities had to be repaired or built. The advance party arrived in the middle of winter to find most of the accommodation in the form of wooden huts without windows, no heating and often without roofs. But by mid-February 1946, Bofu had been sufficiently restored for the remainder of the Australian contingent to move in.

No. 81 Wing Deployment

Support Deployment - The support elements of 81 Wing deployed from Labuan on the HMS Glenly on 11 February 1946, arriving at Kure on 1 April. Even though

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18 Stephens, Going Solo, p. 212.
19 Odgers, Air War Against Japan, p. 497.
considerable rebuilding had been done by No. 5 ACS, much of their initial work had to be conducted in the open until workshops could be constructed.

**Aircraft Deployment** - The deployment of the three squadrons of Mustangs was a major undertaking. On 28 February 1946 two flights of eight Mustangs of No. 76 Squadron (commanded by Squadron Leader D. Wilson), led by Wing Commander Cooper, departed Labuan with the first stop at Clark Field in the Philippines, a total distance of 1,600 kilometres. In support was a Catalina search and rescue flying boat from No. 113 ASR Flight which took off two hours before the Mustangs departed, planning to be halfway to Clark when overtaken by the fighters. Also preceding the Mustangs were two Beaufighters, sent ahead to relay weather information. Navigation assistance was provided by another Beaufighter which accompanied the Mustangs, and bringing up the rear was a Mosquito to support any stragglers.\(^{20}\)

The second leg was to Okinawa, a total distance of 1,200 kilometres, including the longest overwater leg of the deployment - 550 kilometres from Bataan to Okinawa. The final leg of 1,140 kilometres was from Okinawa to Iwakuni. Flying conditions were far from ideal. Alan Stephens describes the last leg to Iwakuni, being:

> ... flown partly at low level, with the formation wedged between a blanket of cloud and the cold choppy seas of the North Pacific Ocean. Severe icing conditions persisted in cloud down to three hundred metres above sea level and temperature gauges fell to zero.\(^{21}\)

Wing Commander Cooper’s flight of eight aircraft arrived at Iwakuni on 9 March, the first of BCAIR’s fighter aircraft to arrive. Two days later they flew the 70 kilometres on to Bofu, where they were joined by the second flight which had flown direct from Okinawa.

Between 13 and 18 March, 25 more Mustangs arrived from No. 82 Squadron (commanded by Squadron Leader F. Schaaf). Tragically, three Mustangs from No. 82 Squadron and a Mosquito were lost in the deployment, crashing on Shikoku Island, 110 kilometres from Bofu, in extremely poor weather.

No. 77 Squadron (commanded by Squadron Leader R. Curtiss) arrived at Bofu on 21 March, completing the deployment.

Air Vice-Marshal Bouchier, the RAF commander of BCAIR, described the deployment as ‘one of the epic feats in the history of aviation’.\(^{22}\) While this may have been something of an overstatement, the deployment of so many single-engined aircraft over more than 3,700 kilometres was a considerable achievement. This is

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21 ibid., p. 213.

22 ibid., p. 214.
particularly so given the adverse weather conditions, as the loss of four aircraft showed.

**Personnel Deployment**

Transport for RAAF personnel from Australia was provided by the Dakotas of No. 86 Air Transport Wing. The then Sergeant Ray Trebilco, who is here today, was posted as a linguist to 381 Base Squadron Bofu from RAAF Laverton in July 1946. He travelled to Bofu from Laverton via Parafield, Alice Springs, Darwin and Moratai. In Moratai he waited for almost a month while a higher priority cargo was rushed through to Japan. (They were told later that the higher priority cargo was condoms!) The trip then proceeded via Samar and Laoag (in the Philippines) to Kai Tak in Hong Kong, thence to Okinawa and finally to Iwakuni. The normal time for the C-47 courier was four days.

**Role of BCOF**

The role of the occupation force in Japan can be looked at from many levels and a number of national perspectives.

*Political Strategic Level*

At the political strategic level, the role of the occupation force could be seen as ‘what amounted to a benevolent missionary undertaking as it sought to achieve nothing less than the re-education and rebuilding of the Japanese nation’. But it was also to build up the country to act as a bulwark against the Russians and Chinese.

From the British Commonwealth perspective, the aims were to represent the British Commonwealth in the occupation of Japan and to maintain and enhance British Commonwealth prestige and influence in the eyes of the Japanese. From a purely Australian perspective, as well as recognising these broader aims, the government was determined to have a say in the post-war peace settlement with Japan.

*Military Strategic*

At the military strategic level the objective of BCOF was ensuring implementation of the terms of surrender.

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23 Personal correspondence from AVM Trebilco to the author, dated 28 September 1996.


25 *ibid.*, p. 209.
Operational Level

At the operational level the roles were to enforce military control, safeguard allied installations and supervise the demilitarisation and disposal of Japanese installations and armaments. Specific objectives for BCOF were: disarming and demilitarising Japanese forces within its area of responsibility; repatriating through its ports area 750,000 Japanese ‘surrendered personnel’ from overseas theatres of war, such as China, Formosa, Korea and the Ryuku Islands; patrol by sea, land and air to uncover smuggling and black marketing; and to provide advice on engineering, town-planning and assistance in reconstruction.

Tactical Level

At the tactical level, BCAIR’s primary mission was to provide security and surveillance in the area occupied by BCOF’s ground forces. In practice this consisted primarily of aerial reconnaissance missions, seeking hidden dumps of war materiel and ships which were smuggling Koreans into Japan.

Area of Responsibility

The initial area of responsibility was the Hiroshima prefecture which was largely rural in nature but included the cities of Kure, Fukuyama and Hiroshima itself - devastated only months earlier by the first atomic blast. The area was small and insignificant, ‘a consequence of the American’s wish to exert as much authority themselves to block any claim from the Soviets and the Chinese to participate in the occupation’.

By 1946 the occupation was proceeding smoothly and the likelihood of such external pressure appeared remote so BCOF’s area of responsibility was increased significantly to include the five western prefectures of the main island Honshu, and the whole of the neighbouring island of Shikoku. At its peak BCOF controlled 20 million Japanese in an area of 22,000 square miles.

Command & Control

Command and control of forces also needs to be looked at from the four levels of war and from individual national perspectives.

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26 Ibid., p. 209.
Political Strategic Level

There is no doubt that the United States government dominated command and control at the political strategic level. The individual governments of BCOF did have a say, however, with the right of withdrawal of national forces upon giving six months notice to the United States, as specified in the Northcott-MacArthur Agreement.

Military Strategic Level

At the military strategic level, General MacArthur, as Supreme Commander Allied Powers, was clearly in command of occupation force activities in Japan. For policy and administrative matters, however, the BCOF commander was responsible to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia (JCOSA). The JCOSA, which was based in Melbourne, comprised: the three Australian service chiefs, and representatives of Britain, India and New Zealand.31

Jeffrey Grey has described the JCOSA as an attempt to replicate the Joint Chiefs of Staff organisation that was used during the war to run the Anglo-American war effort. Grey concluded that the JCOSA arrangement was never successful, firstly because the functions of its members had not been spelt out, and, secondly, because it operated through the Australian Department of Defence ‘an arrangement the British Chiefs of Staff refused to accept’.32

The situation was not resolved until 1947 when a formal directive had been ratified. By this time, however, the British had withdrawn their brigade to the conflict in Malaya. The Indians had also withdrawn their forces as a result of independence and the partitioning of the country. Because of these reductions, the JCOSA committee was dissolved in October 1947, with the New Zealand force, the only remaining British force, being represented on the Australian Defence Committee when ‘matters relating to BCOF were discussed’.33

Operational Level

At the operational level, BCOF was commanded by Lieutenant General Northcott34 through his headquarters in Iwakuni. In theory Northcott was only responsible for the

31 Representatives were from the chief of the imperial general staff, the chief of the air staff (UK), the commander-in-chief India, and the chiefs of staff New Zealand.


33 ibid., p. 197.

34 BCOF was commanded by Australians for its entire duration, Lieutenant General J. Northcott until June 1946, next was Lieutenant General H.C.H. Robertson and finally Lieutenant General W. Bridgeford who held the command until the end.
maintenance and administration of BCOF, but with direct access to General MacArthur for matters of policy and operational capabilities. In practice Northcott had full responsibility for his allotted area,\textsuperscript{35} whilst operating within MacArthur’s Allied Powers’ directives.\textsuperscript{36}

Based on MacArthur’s directive, United States’ agencies were responsible for all military government activities in Japan and BCOF would therefore have to operate under the overall command of the US Eighth Army and the US Fifth Air Force.\textsuperscript{37} As Jeffrey Grey put it:

This raised questions of sovereignty and national command of forces, and did not please the British or Indian representatives on the Joint Chiefs of Staff Australia (JCOSA).\textsuperscript{38}

Northcott’s headquarters was fully integrated, comprising representatives from each service and each Commonwealth country.

The first chief of staff was an RAAF officer, Air Commodore F.M. Bladin, chosen not only for his experience in higher command and staff appointments during the war, but also ‘because of his background as a graduate of the Royal Military College Duntroon, as opposed to a purely Air Force upbringing’\textsuperscript{39} - as Alan Stephens puts it ‘an interesting commentary on the Army’s opinion of the Air Force’.\textsuperscript{40} Interestingly Bladin was replaced Air Vice-Marshal J.P.J McCauley and later by Air Commodore A.M. Charlesworth, both Duntroon graduates.

\textit{BCAIR}

The air component of BCOF, BCAIR,\textsuperscript{41} also had its headquarters in Iwakuni, and was commanded by an RAF officer, Air Vice-Marshal Bouchier, through an Air Priorities Board.\textsuperscript{42} The Board was responsible for administration of the group and included

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Stephens, \textit{Going Solo}, p. 209.
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{ibid.}, p. 209.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Grey, \textit{A Military History of Australia}, p. 197.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{ibid.}, p. 197.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Stephens, \textit{Going Solo}, p. 209.
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{ibid.}, p. 209.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Air Vice-Marshal Sir Cecil Bouchier, RAF, was appointed as the first commander of BCAIR.
\item \textsuperscript{42} The first chief of BCAIR was an RAF officer, Air Vice-Marshal C.A. Bouchier.
\end{itemize}
representatives from each participating air force. Command and control arrangements at this level were somewhat complex. While the board was nominally directly responsible to the commander of BCOF, each board member remained responsive to their own air boards; overall operational control of air activities was exercised by the commanding general of the Fifth United States Army Air Force (of which BCAIR formed a separate air group); occupation forces’ air operations were under the control of General MacArthur’s air chief for occupation assignments, who tended to exercise his control through Lieutenant General Northcott.

Interestingly, No. 5 ACS, which provided a major contribution to the RAAF’s contribution to BCOF, was never under the command of commander BCOF. It operated direct to RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne.⁴³

Tactical Level

As discussed above, command of air units was exercised through the Air Priorities Board. The RAAF component of BCAIR, No. 81 Wing was initially led by Wing Commander G.A. Cooper. Wing Commander Cooper worked to AVM Bouchier for ‘operations, training and administration affecting BCAIR, but dealt direct with Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne on matters of domestic administration such as pay, permanent promotions, and the repatriation of RAAF personnel’.⁴⁴

Operations

No. 5 ACS

I will start my description of BCAIR operations with a brief account of the activities of No. 5 ACS. As the official history puts it:

Wing Commander Cooper’s Mustang Squadron’s may have been the centrepiece of the RAAF contingent, but there should be no doubt that Wing Commander Harrison’s construction workers made the major contribution to BCOF.⁴⁵

The activities of No. 5 ACS included: construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of airfields and forward airstrips; repair of hangars and other technical buildings, reconstruction of roads; rehabilitation of water supply and sewerage systems; and the design and oversight of the construction of barrack and family accommodation - by General MacArthur’s directive, such construction was to be by Japanese workers.


⁴⁴ ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁵ ibid., p. 215.
The original plan was for No. 5 ACS to be in Japan for only a few months, sufficient time to bring the three BCAIR airfields up to an operational condition. However, almost constant work was required to keep the airfields serviceable and the range of construction tasks that needed to be carried out was far greater than originally planned. Based on BCOF commander’s conclusion that the contribution of No. 5 ACS was essential, the Australian government agreed to leave the squadron in Japan until the end of 1947 but to gradually reduce its size.46

RAAF Linguists

The next group I want to discuss in terms of operations are the RAAF linguists, who, towards the end of the war, were being trained in substantial numbers at the RAAF School of Languages at Laverton.

On arrival in Japan all were attached to the Intelligence Section of No. 81 Wing, and, apart from a small number who remained at the Wing, were then posted to the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) for further in-country interpreter training before being attached to field units.

The interpreters were in constant contact with the full spectrum of the Japanese community, including police personnel, emerging political parties, education authorities, and military police. They provided the link between the occupying forces and the Japanese. The interpreters carried a card signed by General MacArthur which authorised access to any location whilst on duty, including normally ‘Out of Bounds’ areas.47

I will again use Sergeant Ray Trebilco’s experience as an example of the range of units and duties involved. These included: attachments to the British special investigation branch units in Kure; the Indian 7th Light Infantry Cavalry at Kurashki; No. 2 New Zealand Division Cavalry at Mizuba and Hikari; and finally to British 29 Field Security on Shikoku. Duties with these units included: participation in investigations and courts martial, for example in relation to black market operations; running the Japanese labour exchange; debriefing returning POWs; and general community liaison duties to ensure that the local situation was peaceful and that the terms of the surrender were being carried out.

Two specific, if somewhat unusual, directives from General MacArthur’s Supreme Allied Command in which interpreters became involved were the checking of girls in local brothels to ensure they were not there under duress and checking and destroying reading materials in schools which referred to the deification of the Emperor. As the list of activities shows, it is perhaps the interpreters’ tasks which were the closest to pursuing the direct strategic goals in Japan.

46 Note 5 ACS was disbanded in Feb 1950 in Iwakuni, Japan.

47 Personal correspondence from AVM Trebilco to the author, dated 28 September 1996.
Flying Operations

For the flying units, the envisaged role of support of ground forces did not eventuate. This was because the surrender of the Japanese military and the people was so total. Operational flying was conducted, however, and consisted of: surveillance patrols over Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Tottori, and Shimane prefectures and Shikoku Island; and monitoring the movement of vessels in the Inland Sea and Tsushima Strait, to check on the smuggling of aliens, particularly Koreans. No shots were fired in anger, but some shots were fired 'across the bows' of smugglers.48

Apart from these specific tasks, the RAAF squadrons adopted what was essentially a peace-time training schedule. While back in Australia the uncertainties and funding restrictions of the Interim period meant that training resources were limited, No. 81 Wing 'received sufficient resources for at least some of the Air Force's pilots and technicians to enjoy a relatively intensive and coherent training regime'.49 After initial difficulties, the training schedule provided each pilot about 21 flying hours per month, allowing maintenance of reasonable proficiency in air-to-air, and air-to-ground operations.

Flying Standards

While considerable flying training was conducted, questions have been raised about flying standards. As the RAAF Historian put it:

Notwithstanding the expertise demonstrated in air-to-ground weapons work, there were too many instances of senior pilots taking a casual approach to airmanship, in the course of which people and aircraft were unnecessarily placed at risk.

To support his statement, Stephens cites the case of a mass flypast of 36 Mustangs led into a substantial cloud mass by Group Captain Brian Eaton. While this was questionable enough in itself, the poor airmanship was compounded by the fact that the formation leader had failed to identify that his artificial horizon had toppled, preventing him from maintaining smooth, predictable control of his aircraft. As Stephens put it: 'The formation fell apart in cloud as many aircraft entered unusual attitudes'.50

Group Captain Eaton was without doubt 'one of the outstanding pilots of his era ... who had excelled during the war and was a also a dashing and respected leader'.51

48 Personal interview with AVM Jim Flemming.

49 Stephens, Going Solo, p. 216.

50 Ibid., p. 216.

51 Stephens, Going Solo, p. 218.
The potential catastrophe, however, was a symptom of the attitude of the World War II pilots who had ‘done it all’ during the war, with flying in Japan seen as being part of a big ‘flying club’, perhaps understandable because ‘It was ... the aftermath of the war and the whole atmosphere was one of relaxation and having fun’. Overall, however, the unit was considered, to be ‘a very professional ground attack squadron but with some lack of discipline’.

RAAF standards were no worse than those of most other air forces. In fact they were generally better, as demonstrated in large-scale combined exercises with the other occupation forces, where, almost without exception, the RAAF performed well. During the Far East Air Forces Gunnery Meet at Yokota Air Base in December 1949, No. 77 Squadron’s Flight Lieutenant ‘Bay’ Adams defeated all comers, with the Commander of Far East Air Forces describing No. 77 Squadron as the best fighter unit in Japan - a recommendation which subsequently played a part in America’s request for RAAF support in Korea.

When the Minister for the Army visited Japan he was disturbed to be told by the then commander of BCOF, Lieutenant General Robertson, that about 60 per cent of the Army officers ‘could not be regarded as efficient and were not up to their jobs’. In contrast to this, the minister later reported on the ‘RAAF at Bofu, where good leadership and an active program of self-help had ‘considerably improved’ living and working conditions’.

**Transport Support**

The other major operational contribution by the RAAF was from the Dakotas of No. 86 (Transport) Wing. BCOF represented the first overseas peace-time garrison in Australian history. The Wing provided a supply line stretching over 6,000 miles from November 1945 to December 1947 when it was taken over by Qantas. At the time it was the longest scheduled air route in the world serviced by twin-engined aircraft and involved the fitting of fuel tanks in the fuselage of the aircraft.

**Living Conditions**

In the early stages of the occupation Australian serviceman were posted unaccompanied to Japan but as ‘order emerged from chaos’ and adequate housing was made available, families were allowed to join them. As Jeffrey Grey put it:

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52 Personal correspondence from AVM Trebilco to the author, dated 28 September 1996.

53 Personal correspondence from AVM Trebilco to the author, dated 28 September 1996.


After the initial period of consolidation, conditions were anything but rigorous, and one of the biggest problems in later years was to combat the inevitable boredom experienced by troops in long-term occupation duties.56

In many ways life was quite enjoyable, with an exchange rate of 1,000 yen to the pound and a beer costing one yen. Drinking at the Officers’ Mess was virtually free - a pound across the bar would last a long time!57 The nominal posting length was nine months for aircrew and 15 months for ground crew. There was significant variation to this, for example, Air Vice-Marshal Flemming spent five years in Japan before going direct to Korea.

Unlike the governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand, the Australian government decided there would be no special commendation for service with the occupation force, based on the determination that duty in Japan was not hazardous. Even now, nearly 50 years after the conclusion of BCOF, there are discussions regarding entitlements.

Non-fraternisation Rules

Unlike the Americans, who were encouraged to mix with the Japanese to help instil democratic ways, the Australian Forces were expressly forbidden to fraternise - and the rules were strictly enforced. As a result, the contact between the Australians and the Japanese was very limited. For most it was limited to brief contact with those Japanese who worked on or near the bases. The exception was the interpreters who worked closely with the Japanese on a daily basis.

Force Reductions

Towards the end of 1947 Britain and New Zealand considerably reduced their contribution due to the demand for British troops in military operations in Malaya, and, in the case of New Zealand, a general manpower shortage in industry. The granting of independence to India, also in 1947, resulted in the withdrawal of all 10,700 personnel.58

By 1948, as Robert O’Neill put it, ‘the aims of the occupation had been so thoroughly achieved that the reduced force was able to devote more time to military training and


57 Personal interview with AVM Jim Flemming: ‘Even cheaper was “lollywater” - pink, yellow, white or green. Cost was 2 sen/bottle - 100 sen to the yen. Bottled in Kirin beer bottles which were dark brown - didn’t know what you were getting until it was poured. Drinks were gin & lollywater, scotch &, rum &, brandy &, or beer.’

exercises'. As a result, in July 1949 General MacArthur issued an instruction changing the future role of the occupation forces:

He claimed that Japan had been completely demilitarised, that social and political reforms had reached a stage at which the Japanese Government could be permitted greater responsibilities, that the need for extensive surveillance no longer existed, and that the character of the occupation had changed from stern rigidity to the friendly guidance of a protective force.

By mid-1949 the remaining elements of British and New Zealand forces were withdrawn leaving only the Australians. The Australian Minister for External Affairs at the time, Dr Evatt, argued ‘that while their presence was serving a political purpose, they ought to stay in Japan’. Australian forces were significantly reduced, however, from a brigade group to a battalion (67th Battalion), from three fighter squadrons to one (77 Squadron), and from two warships to one - a total Australian commitment of 2,630 personnel. No. 77 Squadron, however, was at the time the RAAF’s largest flying unit, comprising:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>299 personnel</th>
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<tr>
<td>No. 77 Squadron</td>
<td>40 Mustangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1948</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Wirraways</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 Austers</td>
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<td>2 Dakotas</td>
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Table 3 - Composition of No. 77 Squadron Dec 1948

Commensurate with the force reductions, BCOF’s area of responsibility was also reduced, to the original Hiroshima Prefecture plus one district of the Yamaguchi Prefecture.

59 ibid., p. 33.
60 ibid., p. 35.
61 ibid., p. 32.
62 ibid., p. 35.
63 ibid., p. 32.
64 Stephens, Going Solo, p. 222.
The Redeployment

Complete Withdrawal

In May 1950 the Australian government decided to fully withdraw its occupation forces and, under the terms of the Northcott-MacArthur agreement, the government gave six months notice to the Americans.65 There were two prime reasons for the withdrawal: firstly it was felt there was nothing to be gained by keeping forces in Japan any longer, and secondly because of the anticipated demands of the national service scheme which would come into effect the following year.66 The actual withdrawal of the forces, however, commenced considerably earlier, with the first to return being soldiers of the Interim Army.

No. 77 Squadron’s last flight took place on 23 June 1950, after which packing and disbandment action began.67 The weekend was planned as one of serious partying with guests invited from all over Japan. But at 1100 hours on the Sunday morning:

SGT Ray Trebilco received a call in his orderly sergeant’s room from the headquarters of the Fifth Air Force. South Korea had been invaded by the North, and No. 77 Squadron had been placed on standby.68

Engineering personnel worked around the clock to return to flying condition aircraft that had just been inhibited and packed for the sea journey back to Australia.

Korean War

When Australian forces were requested to support the Americans in Korea,69 Spender advised Makin that ‘we have a fighter squadron of Mustangs in Japan which represents practically the whole of our effective fighter strength in Australia or elsewhere’.70 This limited RAAF capability was reflected in the Army as well. As Robert O’Neill pointed out:


69 It is interesting to note that Spender told Makin that the Mustangs could not operate against targets in Korea from a base in Korea. Robert O’Neill assessed that this assumption was not correct. See O’Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, Volume I, ‘Strategy and Diplomacy’, p. 51.

Not five years previously the Australian Army had been able to provide over five divisions for active operations. In 1950 it experienced difficulty in providing a single battalion ... 71

On the 29th of June 1950 General MacArthur began to press for the commitment of No. 77 Squadron for operations over Korea. MacArthur’s request was based on his senior air commander’s72 advice that:

No. 77 Squadron was the best fighter squadron in Japan and one of its pilots ['Bay' Adams] was the best shot in the Far East Air Force.73

After some political manoeuvrings, on 30 June the Prime Minister agreed to commit No. 77 Squadron to the war in Korea.74 On the following morning Menzies announced that the withdrawal of forces from Japan would be deferred. Because of the worsening situation in Korea, the commander-in-chief of BCOF, General Robertson, ordered air defence measures in Japan in case the Koreans made air raids against BCOF installations.75 No. 77 Squadron entered the Korean War on Sunday 2 July flying three separate escort missions.

As the official history of BCOF puts it:

In an ironic ending to the RAAF’s involvement in BCOF - a force which had succeeded splendidly in its objective of bringing peace and stability to one country - just a week later, instead of being on the high seas headed for home, No. 77 Squadron was fighting a war in another country.76

BCOF formally concluded at the end of 1951 with the signing of the San Francisco Treaty.

Lessons Learnt

I said at the start I wanted to draw some specific lessons for today and the future from the RAAF’s experience as an occupying force in Japan. Specific lessons include:

71 ibid., p. 74.

72 Lieutenant General George E. Stratemeyer, Commander of the Far East Air Forces.


74 ibid., p. 53.

75 ibid., p. 55.

76 Stephens, *Going Solo*, p. 223.
• The RAAF has had experience in a constabulary role, or what would now be called peace support operations. This includes dealing with the complexity of command and control arrangements of combined and coalition operations.

• Although we tend to concentrate on the overriding importance of flying, particularly offensive flying operations, less glamorous support activities can be as, or perhaps even more, important in achieving strategic aims.

• But it must also be remembered that although no shots were fired in anger, the ‘presence’ of the air units reminded the Japanese of the force available to the occupying force and provided the necessary insurance if things turned bad.

• The response to the call for forces for Korea highlights again the responsiveness of air power. No. 77 Squadron - and some naval units - were ready to go into operations almost immediately, while it was expected to take three to four months to bring 3 RAR up to battleworthy standard.77 (It is reasonable to speculate how we would fare today, if, for example, the United States requested support in a worsening situation between China and Taiwan.)

• Equally importantly was that the early operations in Korea were conducted from relatively secure bases outside the area of operations, an option not available to ground forces.

• The importance of exercising with allies, particularly from larger air forces, to maintain professional mastery.

• Finally, while not wanting to delve too far into Dr Mordike’s presentation on Korea, it is interesting to note that the expertise of a few at the tactical level can have a major impact at the highest, political-strategic level. It has been suggested that the support provided by Australia in terms of No. 77 Squadron had a considerable impact on the negotiation of the ANZUS treaty. (Almost a case of ‘for want of a nail the shoe was lost’ in reverse - 77 Squadron being the nail that was found at the right place at the right time.) Even a relatively small force with a high level of tactical capability - perhaps filling a capability niche - can have considerable strategic impact.

**DISCUSSION**

**Squadron Leader Tony McCormack:** I refer to your comments regarding the military strategic and national strategic levels. During the late 1940s and early 1950s Australian foreign policy under Percy Spender was increasingly turning away from the United Kingdom towards the United States in the realisation that the United

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Kingdom could no longer provide defence for Australia. In the situation in the BCOF where the British forces were under the control of the Australian forces did the shift in foreign policy alignment cause any problems, especially when British forces were not used to being under Australian command and control?

**Group Captain John Harvey:** As I described in the paper, I think there was a clear tension at the time. The Australians did at one stage plan to go into Japan by themselves working directly for the Americans because they were worried about the British trying to have too much control. The appointment of an Australian as the commander of BCOF was a sop to the Australians to keep them in the Commonwealth group. There always was a tension there and, as I said, the British never accepted that they would be subordinate to the joint chiefs in Australia. The arrangements never worked. I also said that there was no formal arrangement of responsibilities until 1947. That came into force just as the British left, so there was never any real chance for the Australians to command in that situation. There certainly was some unhappiness about working to an Australian commander.

**Air Commodore Brent Espeland:** John, you mentioned in part that the role of BCOF and the other occupation forces was to rebuild, but, in addition, the occupation forces were to act as a shield to China and Russia. Is there any evidence of activity in that area during the period of BCOF’s involvement?

**Group Captain John Harvey:** During the occupation the fear at the very start was that certainly the Russians and perhaps the Chinese might try and influence the future peace settlement and would actually try to become a part of the occupying force. That is why the Americans were keen to take the dominating role. But there is no other evidence that China or Russia actually managed to exert influence in Japan. The occupation of Japan was a preventative action rather than a response to any overt action by the Russians or Chinese.

**Air Commodore Brent Espeland:** Well John, thank you very much for your paper. You have drawn together a number of disparate threads and provided a very good picture of the circumstances of the BCOF deployment, in particular the BCAIR operations and the RAAF contribution in all its forms. In doing so you have also led us very well into the final part of our program today which is the Korean War. So thank you very much.
THE WAR IN KOREA 1950 - 1953 : AN OVERVIEW

John Mordike

Introduction

The claim that Australia became a nation at Gallipoli in 1915 is a cliché of Australian popular culture. Even the most casual examination reveals that it was nationhood without substance. National maturity was still far off. A number of Australian historians point to the dramatic collapse of the Singapore strategy in late 1941 and early 1942 as the sudden shock that promoted a more assertive approach by Australians to establish and protect the nation, its sovereignty and its interests.

One important development was emphasised by Professor Partridge when he observed that the experience of World War II ‘permanently affected the character of Australian foreign policy’. ‘The most striking characteristic [of Australian foreign policy] after Pearl Harbour [sic],’ he wrote, ‘was the determination, expressed repeatedly by the Australian government, to assume an independent and original role in international councils and in the affairs of the British Commonwealth.’\(^1\) As a small nation, Australia was learning that it needed to work assiduously to promote its own interests in the international arena.

Although the search for national maturity received new impetus in 1942, former connections were not easily disregarded. For example, Minister for External Affairs Herbert Evatt asserted that the foreign policy he was promoting involved ‘an entirely new concept of British Commonwealth relations’. He then explained that he intended ‘to reconcile full dominion autonomy with full British Commonwealth cooperation’.\(^2\) Arguably, it was difficult to reconcile the two seemingly inconsistent positions of ‘full autonomy’ and ‘full cooperation’, but it was in this context that Australia’s international affairs developed in the post-war years. It helps explain why Australia played a key role in the post-war occupation force in Japan - a role of vital national interest to Australia but a role that was exercised as a part of a British Commonwealth occupation force.

Australia’s determination to play a more assertive role in international affairs was also demonstrated by the Australian government’s, and specifically Evatt’s, strong support for the establishment and development of the United Nations. In the first instance, the United Nations, which was established in June 1945, was perceived as an organisation which promised small and middling powers a chance to exert their influence independently of the great powers. As Professor Partridge explained: ‘it was Evatt’s

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2 Menzies and Evatt quoted by Partridge in ibid., pp. 397-8.
conviction that the United Nations could be used ... to increase Australia’s influence in the councils of the world. Evatt was an active participant in the proceedings leading up to the establishment of the United Nations, also playing a prominent role at the San Francisco conference, which was called in April 1945 to establish the United Nations. Indeed the Australian Minister for External Affairs received international acclaim by initiating several amendments of the draft United Nations charter with the aim of promoting the interests of small powers. In recognition of the Australian government’s interest in the United Nations, Evatt also served a term as president of the General Assembly for a period in 1948-49.

One area which attracted United Nations’ attention during the immediate post-war years was the situation in Korea where doubts and tensions existed about its rightful government. The stability of the Korean peninsula was also a subject in which Australia held a particular interest. While giving general support to United Nations’ work, Australia believed that developments in Korea had the potential to influence the Japanese peace settlement and, therefore, deserved its full attention. Furthermore, the Chifley government (and subsequently the Menzies government) was keen to promote American involvement in the Pacific and East Asia. Australia’s leaders perceived that one way to do this was to support American interests in Korea. Therefore, when the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea was created in November 1947 to help resolve the Korean situation, Australia joined as a participant. Within three years Australia was also to commit defence personnel to the war which broke out on the Korean peninsula.

Background to the Korean War

Australia’s official historian on the Korean War, Robert O’Neill, observed that: ‘almost from the commencement of written history in Korea, there is evidence of deep division and intertribal war’. The Chinese conquered the Korean tribes in 108 BC and divided the country into a number of separate administrative regions. Over the next four centuries, Chinese control eroded and three separate kingdoms were established on the peninsula. After a series of inter-regional wars, in 935 AD Korea achieved a semblance of unity under the control of the Yi dynasty which presided over the peninsula from its seat of power in Seoul. But the unity which had been achieved was fragile. The kingdom remained internally divided between two political factions, the Puk-in or men of the north and the Nam-in or men of the south. The struggle between these two groups continued throughout many centuries, deeply entrenching a pattern of antagonism between northern and southern regions which set the scene for modern-day Korea. Explaining the nature of this schism, O’Neill recorded that: ‘by the late

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nineteenth century, the politics of these two groups were recognisable as being conservative in the south and as progressive or revolutionary in the north.\(^6\)

The Korean peninsula has strategic significance in relation to three leading powers:

- Japan in the east;
- Russia to the north-east; and
- China to the north and west.

Over the last 100 years all of these powers have had designs on the peninsula, each competing at various times to exert its influence and control. Korea has been fought over by China and Japan in 1894 and Russia and Japan in 1904-5. Significantly, in 1910, Japan took control of Korea by formally annexing the peninsula.\(^7\) This was to have profound implications for future developments.

In the first decade of the Japanese occupation of Korea, several nationalist groups developed with the object of harassing the Japanese on the peninsula and rallying international support for their cause. While comprised of a number of groups, the nationalist movement could be broadly divided into two major groups:

- Members of conservative factions who supported the Korean provisional government which had been established in China in 1919; and
- Left wing factions which drew support from the Soviet Union.

The provisional government was led for some time by Syngman Rhee who was particularly active in seeking the support of the United States. One of the leaders of the left wing guerrilla factions was Kim II-sung who, after training in the Soviet Union, joined the Red Army. He returned to Korea with the rank of major in the Soviet occupation force after Japan’s defeat in 1945.\(^8\)

During World War II, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese nationalist leader, met in Cairo to discuss progress in the war and to begin planning for the post-war settlement. Issuing a declaration on completion of the meeting in November 1943, these world leaders stated that the war with Japan would continue until Japan surrendered unconditionally, that Japan would lose all of its possessions in the Pacific and that Korea would become independent. At the subsequent Yalta conference in early 1945, it was agreed that post-war Korea should be a multi-power trusteeship but this plan could not be implemented until the Japanese had been disarmed after their surrender. To achieve this disarmament objective, the

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6 ibid., p. 1.
7 ibid., pp. 2-4.
8 ibid., pp. 5-6.
United States and the Soviet Union divided the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel. Soviet troops would disarm Japanese forces north of the parallel while United States forces would deal with the Japanese forces in the south.9

The Russians entered Korea first, conquering the Japanese forces north of the 38th parallel and installing a well-organised Korean communist group to replace the Japanese administration. Before the United States forces and Syngman Rhee arrived in the south, Soviet-sponsored Koreans proclaimed a people’s republic at a conference in Seoul. The stage was therefore set for a confrontation between the communist group and a group aligned with Syngman Rhee, who was now a prominent aspirant for the office of national leader. Neither of these two groups were able to tolerate each other. The major powers were also enmeshed in the dilemma. The Soviet Union, the United States and Britain agreed in December 1945 to establish a provisional government for a united Korea, but the issue of achieving due recognition from all parties for such an authority defied resolution. Furthermore, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union were prepared to relinquish their interests in Korea.10

In an attempt to resolve the political impasse on the Korean peninsula, the United Nations established the Temporary Commission on Korea in late 1947 with the object of organising the holding of elections for a Korean government by mid-1948 and arranging the transfer of power to that national body. However, the work of the Temporary Commission was impeded by both the Soviet Union and North Korea with the result that the elections, which were held in May 1948, only produced a government for South Korea.11

The opening session of this newly-elected national assembly was held on 31 May 1948 and the Republic of Korea was inaugurated on 15 August with Syngman Rhee as president. Yet it needs to be emphasised that this elected body was national in name only. In effect, it was the government of South Korea. Responding to these developments in South Korea, the communists in the north proclaimed the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea under Premier Kim Il-sung one month later.12

As 1948 came to an end, the General Assembly of the United Nations accorded diplomatic recognition to the Republic of Korea - that is South Korea - and established the United Nations Commission on Korea. Its aim was:

9 ibid., p. 6.
10 ibid., p. 7.
11 ibid., p. 8.
12 ibid., p. 8.
To work towards Korean unification;

To facilitate the removal of social and economic barriers between the north and the south;

To observe developments and provide advice; and

To oversee the withdrawal of Soviet and American occupation forces.

Despite this interest from the United Nations, the situation deteriorated over the next 18 months with both North and South Korea pursuing mutually antagonistic policies. During late 1949 and early 1950, the governments on both sides of the 38th parallel became less tolerant and more aggressive towards each other. Clashes between small groups of armed forces began to occur with increasing frequency along the border and some North Korean groups of battalion size began to infiltrate into South Korea. In light of the deteriorating situation, the United Nations Commission on Korea recommended the appointment of trained military observers to undertake inspections along the 38th parallel. The Australian government decided that it would provide one observer from the RAAF and one from the Army.\(^\text{13}\)

Squadron Leader R.J. Rankin and Major F.S.B. Peach were the first foreign military observers to reach Korea, arriving in May 1950. In mid-June the two Australian officers were given the task of examining the situation along the 38th parallel. Completing their inspection on 23 June, they submitted a report which emphasised that the ‘principal impression’ they had gained ‘after the field tour along the parallel was that the South Korean army was organised entirely for defence’. They emphasised that the force was ‘in no condition to carry out an attack on a large scale against the forces of the north’. By contrast, Rankin and Peach noted that at ‘several points the North Korean forces [were] in effective possession of salients on the south side of the parallel, [with] occupation in at least one case being fairly recent’. As far as activity on the northern side of the parallel was concerned, the two Australian officers established that in some sectors civilians had ‘recently been removed from areas adjoining the parallel to the north’. They also noted that there had been reports of increased military activity in certain areas north of the parallel but they concluded that no reports had been received ‘of any unusual activity on the part of North Korean forces that would indicate any imminent change in the general situation on the parallel’.\(^\text{14}\) One day after this report was written, the army of Kim II-sung’s Democratic People’s Republic launched a full scale offensive across the 38th parallel.

\(^{13}\text{ibid.}, \text{pp. 8-12.}\)

\(^{14}\text{ibid.}, \text{pp. 13-4.}\)
Rankin report not existed, or had it been written in a more equivocal manner, the security council might well have been prevented from acting in the conflict'. But the report served another purpose. It revealed the dishonesty of the North Korean claim that their invasion had been launched in response to an attack from South Korea. O'Neill concluded that 'the journey of Peach and Rankin ranks as one of the most consequential reconnaissances ever conducted by Australian service officers'.

Two days after the invasion of South Korea, the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, announced that: ‘although the invading forces are those of the North Korean government, they represent communist expansion’. Furthermore, he advised that the ‘Korea incident cannot be looked at in isolation, nor can we in Australia regard it as remote from our own interests and safety’. He reminded Australians that, at that time, there was a communist led campaign underway in Indo-China as well as communist guerrillas operating in Malaya. The Prime Minister concluded that ‘cabinet regards all these matters as not only grave individually but as adding up to evidence of communist aggression in Asia, an aggression which is full of menace for us’ in Australia.

On the 30 June 1950, the Australian government considered that the commitment of No. 77 Squadron to the war in Korea was not only an expression of support for the United Nations but also a positive step towards the achievement of a Pacific pact with the United States. It decided to act accordingly.

However, the decision to commit Australian Army forces could not be made so easily because they were unprepared for active service at short notice. Although plans had been made in 1947-48 for the development of the Australian forces, O'Neill noted that these plans ‘had made no allowance for the provision of small contingents at short notice for commitment with allies or at the behest of the United Nations’. In O'Neill’s opinion, neither post-war Labor nor Liberal-Country Party governments ‘can escape criticism for Australia’s inability to provide more substantial assistance to the United States [for the war in Korea] in July 1950’.

In addition to the deployment of No. 77 Squadron, the Australian Army was to send three infantry battalions to the war. The Royal Australian Navy also deployed nine ships which were used at various times in blockading enemy ports as well as the aircraft carrier HMAS Sydney and its Firefly and Sea Fury aircraft.

A brief outline of the war

The North Koreans gained the element of surprise. They had organised and assembled their forces for a sudden, all-out attack across the 38th parallel with the aim of subjugating the Republic of Korea. At 0400 hours on 25 June 1950, to use General Douglas MacArthur’s words, some ten divisions of the North Korean People’s Army ‘struck like a cobra’. Columns of invading infantry, spear-headed by Soviet-made

15 *ibid.*, pp. 14-5.
16 *ibid.*, p. 74.
T-34 tanks, stabbed deep into the southern republic.\textsuperscript{17} An underarmed Republic of Korea army was hard-pressed to hold the well-armed invaders.

The RAAF’s No. 77 Squadron, which had just come to the end of its operations with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, was one of the first air units to engage in the fighting as a component of the United Nations force. Making a remarkable transformation from peacetime operations to active service, the squadron flew its first operational missions over Korea on 2 July 1950, just seven days after the invasion commenced and just two days after the Australian government decided to commit the squadron.

The North Koreans had the advantage of extensive preparation and surprise and the defending forces, now nominally under United Nations’ command, found themselves in a desperate position just managing to hold a perimeter around the South Korean port of Pusan. Some reinforcements came immediately from ill-prepared American Army forces, originally part of the occupation force in Japan. In early September more substantial reinforcements arrived, including the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment. The Australian infantry battalion entered the battle as a component of the 27th British Commonwealth Brigade.

While the situation at the southern end of the Korean peninsula was critical, these reinforcements began to help tip the balance in favour of the defenders of the Pusan Perimeter, who had been organised as a United Nations force called the Eighth Army. At this stage, General Douglas MacArthur, operating out of a headquarters in Tokyo as commander-in-chief of United Nations Command, took a daring step. On 15 September, MacArthur landed X Corps, comprised predominantly of the First Marine Division and the Seventh Infantry Division, at Inchon midway up the west coast of Korea, effectively outflanking the North Korean invaders. One week later, the Eighth Army broke through at the Pusan Perimeter, scattering the North Korean army before it.\textsuperscript{18}

Encouraged by these developments, President Truman decided upon the objective of the reunification of Korea. MacArthur went on the offensive. As the Eighth Army pushed its way north along the western side of the Korean peninsula, X Corps was withdrawn from Inchon to be landed at the North Korean port of Wonsan on the east coast of the peninsula. The commander-in-chief’s aim was the complete destruction of the communist forces in Korea, a task which would take United Nations Command troops across the 38th parallel into North Korea and up to the Yalu River, the northern border with Manchuria.


By mid-October the North Korean capital of Pyongyang was taken. It appeared that MacArthur was well on the way to achieving his objective. As encouraging as progress was, however, from 25 October to 6 November there were ominous signs that the war could assume disturbing proportions. Elements of the Eighth Army and X Corps were suddenly attacked by Chinese troops - a new force on the battlefield. But, not pressing on with these initial attacks, the Chinese withdrew.

Pausing briefly to take stock, the United Nations Command force resumed its northward advance, but on the night of 26 November the Eighth Army and X Corps were subjected to intense attack by Chinese forces of considerable strength. This time the Chinese offensive was sustained, putting the United Nations Command force under a severe test.

The entry of Chinese forces changed the character of the war dramatically. In the west, the United States Second Division, an element of the Eighth Army, was surrounded by Chinese forces in the Chongchon Valley, and, in the east, the X Corps’ First Marine Division and parts of the Seventh Infantry Division were also surrounded at the Chosin Reservoir. The marines would manage their subsequent withdrawal with a degree of competence, but the Second Infantry Division suffered a casualty rate of some 30 per cent and lost virtually all of its equipment.

In a recent analysis of the war, Eliot Cohen and John Gooch referred to this episode and its immediate outcome as a series of ‘costly and humiliating defeats’. Such was the debacle that in the period leading up to Christmas 1950 the United Nations Command forces ‘tumbled south, and the joint chiefs of staff authorised MacArthur to begin planning for the liquidation of the Korean commitment’. It was a complete turnaround of military fortunes.

When the Clausewitzian fog descended over the United Nations Command operations, it produced confusion and despair. But chance added a bizarre twist. As the United Nations Command forces streamed south to escape the enemy, heavy traffic choked the roads and one impatient South Korean driver pulled out of the line of traffic to overtake. Unfortunately, as he did so, the truck he was driving collided head-on with a vehicle travelling in the opposite direction, killing its occupant, General Walton Walker, commander of the Eighth Army.

At short notice, General Matthew Ridgway was appointed to replace Walker as commander of the Eighth Army, bringing a new phase in the war as 1950 came to an end. Ridgway, who had been serving in a staff job in Washington, was an inspiring leader. He arrived in Korea dressed for battle with a field dressing and hand grenades strapped to the front of his webbing, giving his soldiers the unmistakable signal that they had a commander who intended to fight. Revitalised by Ridgway’s leadership and his insistence on applying the fundamentals of sound tactical procedures, Eighth Army took stock of itself and, in a few months, completed a successful advance north regaining Seoul in March 1951 and occupying a position close to the 38th parallel.

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19 ibid., p. 168, 172.
From about mid-1951 a seesaw war of stalemate followed until the armistice of July 1953.

A brief look at the nature of air operations

In this section I will make only brief reference to No. 77 Squadron because its operations will be the subject of the next presentation by RAAF veterans of the Korean war.

The air component of United Nations Command was comprised of three separate organisations: the United States Air Force’s Far East Air Forces (FEAF) which included the Fifth Air Force (the RAAF’s No. 77 Squadron was a component); a Marine Air Wing; and the United States Navy’s carrier air groups.

FEAF was the principal component. Being formerly responsible for the air defence of Japan against a possible Soviet attack, FEAF was not well prepared for the war in Korea. Commanded by Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer, FEAF’s training had concentrated on air defence and air superiority roles. It was taken by surprise when, on the very day that the invasion commenced, President Truman authorised MacArthur to use its aircraft to supply the South Koreans with ammunition and equipment and to assist in the evacuation of non-combatants. Four days later, on 29 June, MacArthur was authorised to extend air operations of all types into North Korea.20

Like FEAF, the first ground force component to be thrust into the battle - the United States’ 24th Infantry Division - was ill-prepared for active service. Furthermore, each of its regiments had had one infantry battalion removed from its strength, and the divisional allocation of artillery, armour and automatic weapons had been slashed to accommodate reductions in appropriations.21 Significantly, it was this initial shortage of organic fire support within the land force that was to make air support critical during the first six months of the war. Emphasising its importance, commander of the Eighth Army, General Walker, asserted that, if it had not been for tactical air support, then United Nations Command would have been unable to remain in Korea in the hectic first few months of the war and then to advance north towards the Yalu River.22

An analysis of this period of the war by Eliot Cohen and John Gooch supports this view. Let me quote from their report: in the few weeks before China entered the war, ‘intelligence confirmed what American commanders had long believed: American air


power had paralysed the North Korean People’s Army’. Unfortunately, the Australian contribution has sunk from view in the Eliot-Gooch analysis, but at this conference special recognition is warranted. Despite the general unpreparedness for this war, No. 77 Squadron was one element of FEAF which was especially proficient in the ground attack role. Indeed, we recall from Group Captain Harvey’s earlier presentation on the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan that Lieutenant General Stratemeyer, commander of FEAF, had specifically lobbied MacArthur to request Australia to make No. 77 Squadron available for the war. Stratemeyer had described No. 77 Squadron as the best under his command and Flight Lieutenant ‘Bay’ Adams as his best shot. Confirming Stratemeyer’s assessment, Robert O’Neill commented that, in the early stages of the war, the squadron was to play a part ‘far out of proportion to its modest size’. No. 77 Squadron was also equipped with P-51 Mustangs which were considered to be better armed and more durable for ground attack than the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star then in service with American squadrons.23

Air power played a critical role in the first few months of the war. The North Korean force was particularly vulnerable to air attack. It was a conventional mechanised army, organised and equipped on Soviet lines, dependent upon fuel, ammunition and stores in large quantities. Resupplied by truck convoy and railways, its logistical tail provided many targets. It was also apparent that their troops were not trained to deal with air attacks.24

North Korea possessed a limited air power capability - they had fewer than 200 propeller-driven Russian aircraft of World War II vintage - and this force was no match for the 650 aircraft that came to South Korea’s assistance in the first month of the war. Air superiority was achieved quickly. The primary task was then to inflict as much damage as possible on the invaders. And the results were devastating.

Subsequent interrogation of some 2,000 North Korean prisoners indicated that over half of the enemy’s equipment losses and one-third of its casualties were the result of damage inflicted by aircraft. A Far East Command intelligence assessment concluded that ‘tactical air support was the greatest single factor contributing to the successful conduct of United Nations’ ground operations against the ... invader’. In their study of the war, Cohen and Gooch supported this observation but they reached another significant conclusion. They stated that ‘[a]ir power, not the Inchon landing, ... blocked the success and weakened the grip of the North Koreans investing the Pusan Perimeter’. Eighth Army thought very highly of its air support, they observed, ‘and analysis proved it right to do so’.25


During the battle to hold United Nations Command’s tenuous position within the Pusan Perimeter, No. 77 Squadron flew operations each day from its base in Iwakuni, Japan.

The impact of air power on the North Koreans made MacArthur and his staff extremely optimistic as the United Nations Command forces broke out of the Pusan Perimeter and headed for North Korea. As the advance north gathered momentum, No. 77 Squadron was moved from its base in Iwakuni and relocated on the Korean peninsula at Pohang. It was at this stage that all RAAF units supporting the United Nations in Korea were regrouped into No. 91 (Composite) Wing, which in addition to No. 77 Squadron included No. 30 Communication Flight with two C-47s and two Austers, No. 491 (Maintenance) Squadron and No. 391 (Base) Squadron. With the exception of the Mustangs, No. 91 Wing remained in Iwakuni. No. 30 Flight later became No. 36 (Transport) Squadron after it had acquired six more C-47s. The Dakotas supported all Australian forces in Korea, including medevacs, and air transport needs.26

No. 77 Squadron supported the advance into North Korea and, on 1 November 1950, they attacked Chinese troops for the first time. On the same day the first Chinese Air Force MiG-15 jet fighters were seen flying over the Yalu River Valley. Clearly, the Mustangs would be no match for this new force in the battle and this development set in train the negotiations which resulted in No. 77 Squadron being equipped with the twin-engined Meteor jet fighter. In the interim, the Australian Mustangs were used to strike ground targets, concentrating in particular on trucks and supply dumps.27

The Chinese land force was not the same as the North Korean land force. Where Kim Il-sung’s army was a conventionally armed and organised force, the Chinese were a lightly armed and equipped peasant army, able to infiltrate through the countryside and to survive on provisions requisitioned from local farmers. In the short term, they were not dependent on convoys of trucks for resupply. Their tactics were also different. They attacked mainly by night, probing, enveloping and intimidating the opposing force, using large quantities of hand grenades, light machine guns and mortar fire. They were also masters of camouflage. In general, the Chinese land forces were not as vulnerable as the North Koreans to air warfare, although at times they too suffered grievous casualties.28

The Chinese also came into the battle with their MiG-15 fighter aircraft in strength. This changed the balance on air assets. But the Chinese also operated with a significant advantage. United Nations Command air assets had to operate with the politically applied stricture of being unable to operate north of the Yalu River - that is they were denied the ability to operate over Manchuria. As a result the Chinese MiGs could operate with the certain knowledge that they would not be pursued across the

26 Stephens, Going Solo, pp. 228-9.

27 ibid., pp. 229-31.

Yalu River nor would their bases in Manchuria ever be attacked. The north-western pocket of the Korean peninsula - the area in North Korea between the Yalu River and the Chongchon Valley - became known as MiG Alley.

Ridgway took command after the Chinese had entered the war and had pushed the Eighth Army out of North Korea. The new commander determined that he would employ tactics that would make full use of his available combat power, especially air support and armour, thus attempting to compensate for the large numbers of men that the Chinese could put into battle. This proved to be successful in halting the southward movement of the Chinese.

When Ridgway commenced his northward advance against the Chinese in early 1951, he adopted similar tactics, calling for a high degree of air-ground cooperation. He did not seek to take and hold ground as an end in itself, but to inflict the maximum amount of damage on the enemy with his superior fire power. By this stage he had developed a high regard for the ability of air power to support his ground force. After the war he would record that ‘there was no question that without [air power] many of our advances would not have been possible’.

As the advance continued, the impact of air power could have on the Chinese was well illustrated in mid-February when aerial observers detected two Chinese divisions moving in columns along the Som River. Caught in the open in broad daylight, the Chinese force was subjected to a relentless pounding from air strikes and artillery over a period of some hours. Further fighting continued that night and into the next day, but the enemy force was broken and demoralised. It is estimated that this encounter cost the Chinese over 5,000 men, an unacceptable loss even for a profligate enemy.

The Eighth Army advance continued and Seoul was regained in March 1951. The position close to the 38th parallel was occupied soon after. During the next month the Chinese mounted a counter-offensive but they took heavy casualties from air strikes and artillery. It was a period of determined fighting and Far East Air Forces’ fighter bombers flew almost 400 close air support sorties each day, the heaviest effort of the war. The Chinese and North Korean forces sustained serious casualties in this period, making them ponder whether it was worthwhile proceeding with another offensive. It has been estimated that the enemy sustained 200,000 casualties at this time. The communists agreed to commence truce talks in June 1951.

Although the communists had agreed to begin negotiations, Ridgway, who had replaced MacArthur as commander-in-chief in April 1951, intended to keep pressure applied to the enemy. He believed that the enemy hoped for an early cease-fire to relieve their forces from air attack. But he reasoned that once a cease-fire had been granted, there would have been no incentive for the communists to negotiate on other issues. Therefore, he determined to maintain pressure by using United Nations


Command air power to operate far and wide over North Korea maintaining air superiority and cutting supply lines, as well as hitting the communist forces on the ground.31

In April 1951, FEAF’s emphasis on air operations shifted from close air support to interdiction missions. Yet Ridgway had worrying doubts about its effectiveness. He noted that the enemy’s defensive strength ‘obviously improved during the summer’ of 1951 and he recorded that:

despite our constant and consistently successful effort to knock out railroads and bridges, to demolish marshaling [sic] yards and deny the highways to enemy traffic, supplies continued to flow down from Manchuria.32

The Chinese logistics system had virtually limitless numbers of personnel and proved itself to be eminently flexible in opening new supply routes at will, many resupply missions being undertaken on foot. Faced with the impossible goal of stopping the enemy resupply system, the United States Air Force Historical Survey was to report that the communists had perfected the process of logistic osmosis.33

While the interdiction program was underway, Ridgeway noted that fire from Chinese artillery ‘greatly increased’, while ‘more and more’ anti-aircraft fire was evident. As an indication of the increasing risks for airmen, 81 FEAF aircraft were destroyed in the three month-period from April to June 1951.34

The impossible task confronting interdiction programs was compounded by the inability to attack the supply dumps and base camps in Manchuria. Commenting on this problem United States Air Force historian Richard Hallion said that the existence of the Manchurian sanctuary meant that air power could not function in the same way as it had in World War II. Without the ability to attack the source of supply, countless interdiction missions were conducted against roads, railways and bridges on the Korean peninsula with apparently little effect on the Chinese capacity to fight.35

Yet there can be no doubt that the interdiction program did cause a degree of disruption to the communist system of supply. The communists had to divert thousands of men to repair the continual damage to the railways and the roads. However, the full impact of the interdiction program is not known. Perhaps it was preventing the communists from stockpiling sufficient stores in its forward areas to mount a damaging offensive.

34 Ridgway, The Korean War, p. 186.
Critics have pointed to the failure of the interdiction programs in Korea to emphasise the obvious reality that air power, like other forms of combat power, has its limitations. Yet air power did make a significant - indeed critical - contribution to the Korean war. Without it the war would have been lost in the first few months. Furthermore, Ridgway himself understood that it was a critical part of his combat power, making his northward advance to win back lost ground a success. Yet there is another conclusion that airmen understand only too well and that is that, without control of the air, the Korean War would have had a different outcome.

In an earlier part of this talk I mentioned that Australian post-war governments - both Chifley’s and Menzies’ - were intent on establishing a Pacific pact with the United States. Its realisation, as RAAF historian Alan Stephens has observed, was to be a positive outcome from the Korean war, an outcome which in large part was a direct result of No. 77 Squadron’s early sound performance in the conflict. Stephens wrote that Dean Rusk, United States Assistant Secretary of State, expressed his warmest thanks and admiration to Australian officials for the work of the RAAF over Korea. In addition to official recognition, No. 77 Squadron had made a major impact on American public opinion. This favourable response from the Americans prepared the way for the ratification of the ANZUS Treaty in 1951.36

I will conclude by quickly acknowledging No. 77 Squadron’s contribution to the war. The squadron flew over 15,000 operational sorties and destroyed 3,700 enemy buildings, over 1,400 vehicles, 98 railway trains and carriages, 16 bridges and five MiGs. But we should not forget that the cost was high. Sadly, the squadron was to lose 40 of its members during the war: 30 were killed in action, eight in flying accidents and two in ground accidents. The loss of one life is too high but the consolation is that No. 77 Squadron served with distinction in a dangerous and difficult war and, in doing so, made a significant contribution to Australian security.37

36 Stephens, Going Solo, pp. 243-4.

37 Ibid., pp. 241-2.
The Comments of a Commanding Officer of No. 77 Squadron in the Korean War

So I am again commanding 77 Squadron, but this time in the Korean War after having had it for over two years with wing leadership of Kittyhawk Wing during World War II. I wasn’t new to operational command nor to the ground attack role except this war in Korea was a very different, and a very ugly, war.

In the 11 months of my command we had major moves as the war developed from our original base in Iwakuni, Japan, to bases on the Korean peninsula at Pohang, Hamhung and the retreat to Pusan. We also changed aircraft from Mustangs to the British Meteor. In April 1951, I took the squadron back to Iwakuni for the conversion period to the Meteor jet aircraft. The return to Korea was delayed because of the installation of a navigational aid, the radio compass.

The many moves kept all members very busy but they always accepted their responsibilities and here I must repeat that you couldn’t wish for a more positive attitude from squadron personnel.

We endeavoured to keep the squadron informed about what was happening. This was essential during the retreat phase from Hamhung.

We normally debriefed each night. ‘We’ being myself, the doctor, the padre, the flight commanders and the engineering, intelligence and operations officers. We discussed the day’s event and the future. So each night we briefed all members of the squadron, no matter where they were. Many other United Nations troops from other United Nations units were included in the briefings. We did the briefing by actually visiting the troops wherever they may be. It could have been midnight or 1 a.m. in the morning, at least they were told what was happening. I considered that it was absolutely essential to ensure that all members were fully briefed. When we were in Hamhung I was asked not to include other United Nations members in our briefings. This I disregarded.

I thought communications were very important. There is no doubt that we needed excellent communication, otherwise we couldn’t operate. We didn’t get much help from 91 Composite Wing, from McKearny. In fact I short-circuited the system by direct liaison with Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, who was then Air Vice-Marshal Scherger. Scherger and I carried on a demi-official letter correspondence about once a fortnight, about all sorts of factors affecting 77 Squadron in Korea. The result was that early decisions were made at Department of Air on many aspects that affected squadron policy.
Please remember we were in what was a ‘forgotten war’ in those early days of 1950/51; no one knew much about what was happening in Korea. The press were not sending a very good image to Australia, if at all in some cases, so we needed this communication system.

I also liaised very closely with FEAF and 5th Air Force whenever I could, especially with 5th Air Force, who were our operational commanders. I believed this to be very important, not only because we were RAAF but also the third fighter-bomber squadron of a United States Air Force (USAF) Mustang wing and under their operational control.

Communication and liaison with the 5th Air Force paid off very well. When in December 1950 Gordon Harvey was shot down by the enemy, the 5th Air Force laid on an aircraft carrier with helicopters to support a rescue attempt. The ‘frag’ order - that is the operational order - had an extra codeword which, if the situation arose, I could use to call up 60 other aircraft to support and cover us while the helicopters picked him up. Unfortunately the rescue attempt was not possible and Harvey was taken as a prisoner of war, remaining a guest of the Chinese for 32 months.

On a couple of occasions the squadron refused to carry out an operational order. I did so on one occasion when I was over a target about 140 miles north of the bombline. The order was to destroy all troops and civilians in that area, because the civilians were supposed to be carrying the odd grenade, the odd rocket. But we just didn’t do that. The 5th Air Force subsequently agreed with me.

We had some aircrew problems. Initially all pilots were highly trained and very capable in operations and individual leadership. In many cases I had flight sergeants and sergeants leading flights, remembering of course that most of our operations were flown by two, four, and sometimes eight, aircraft. Most of the older and wiser pilots were sent home after about 50 or so missions and were replaced by new pilots who were very poorly trained; some had no instrument ratings; some didn’t know what war was about. We occasionally had to send pilots back to Australia. My senior team in our night briefings discussed each pilot’s problems and this sometimes resulted in our sending some pilots back to Iwakuni on rest and recreation leave. They took a week off and did some test work at Iwakuni and came back to Korea. It is hard to believe that I actually sent 11 pilots home to Australia as they were not capable of doing the job properly. I don’t blame the pilots, but I do blame the Air Force system. We had no operational training units, no operational training system and, as a result, the pilots came to Korea poorly trained and without instrument ratings. They just couldn’t operate in the area.

But in general morale was good, especially with the airmen. The airmen were fortunate in being attached to the squadron for about three or four months and returning to Iwakuni for a long break. They were replaced by additional personnel from the maintenance squadron. Some airmen stayed the full time, especially the senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs)(Remembering that the senior NCOs really run the squadron). They knew their jobs, they accepted additional responsibilities and they were the backbone of the squadron in many operations. I and my senior
members maintained a very close liaison with the NCOs. We had to - they knew what was going on.

Because we were the only United Nations squadron with Mustangs operating with the Americans (this was before the South Africans arrived), I found it necessary to maintain a very high operational standard. This was easy because we had some very good pilots who knew their jobs and were good at passing on their knowledge to junior pilots. I think that the results of our missions proved this. In fact 77 Squadron’s call-sign was ‘dropkick’ and this became a by-word with United Nations ground forces. If they heard that call-sign, they knew immediately that 77 Squadron was providing support.

Australian camp equipment was outdated - old tentage and inappropriate electrical equipment. This changed after the Hamhung retreat and we relied entirely on United States sources even for rationing. It was easy for me simply to sign receipts for goods which improved our living standard. I was sure most receipts were lost by the USAF, although a few turned up in Melbourne in 1953. The Chief of the Air Staff passed these receipts to me and asked me to explain them. He asked me exactly why I had signed them. I replied that no one else was going to sign them, so I suppose I had to.

When we transferred the squadron back to Iwakuni on the Cherry Blossom Day - 7 April 1951 - we had four RAF instructors attached to us for Meteor conversion. They were exceptional and because of their attitude and drive to experience operations all did about 50 missions on Mustangs. During the conversion phase Max Scammel, the leading RAF instructor, and I had talks about RAF pilots joining the squadron. It was his idea, and I said a very good idea, as we were short of trained pilots. Those talks resulted in the squadron receiving six RAF pilots at a time. This came about in late 1951. At least one of those RAF pilots went on to become the Chief of the Air Staff of the RAF.

Intelligence was good and it was bad, sometimes it was exceptionally good. Most of the intelligence was from pilots coming back over target areas and in their debriefing they were able to report frontline movements. We were fortunate to have a very good photo-reconnaissance wing, the 67th American wing, that occasionally took some excellent photographs, especially of flak positions.

Both flight commanders and other senior members of the squadron were quite capable of taking over squadron command if required. I had two excellent flight commanders in Ian Olorenshaw and D.C. Murphy. Quite often a flight sergeant, a sergeant, a pilot officer or a flying officer stepped in and handled a flight, because, as time went on, they acquired enough experience to do it. I applied this idea to all senior levels and it worked. We had men doing things which were not in their particular trade.

We didn’t have any radio communication. We relied on the daily courier Dakota service from Iwakuni for mail and administration information. This service was
essential to our existence. AOG items,\(^1\) good food, liquor, some ammunition, personnel and visitors, all came via the courier service.

I had a good public relations man, George Odgers. He did his best to get the message back to Australia. We also allowed foreign correspondents and ours to live with us. In Pusan we once had more correspondents than aircrew. It was a way of keeping our name to the fore in the public arena.

My command period was not without problems, mostly solved but not always to the satisfaction of higher command, I suspect. But if you have command then command to the best of your ability.

\(^1\) AOG (aircraft on ground) items were repair parts for aircraft which were required to get the aircraft to an operational status.
MUSTANG OPERATIONS - KOREA

Air Vice-Marshal R. Trebilco

The Comments of a Mustang Pilot in the Korean War

IWAKUNI - JAPAN (2 July - 10 October 1950)

77 Squadron was authorised to commence operations against the North Korean Army on 1 July 1950. Initially, strikes, escorts and armed reconnaissances were flown from Iwakuni in Japan with aircraft returning directly to base. As the North Korean Army advanced to what became known as the Pusan Perimeter, our flights would arrive at the Korean coast at dawn and carry out a preassigned mission prior to landing at K2, Taegu. There they would join a line of other Mustangs in the heat and dust for rearming and refuelling, and fly a further two or three missions on that day before returning to Japan. The air effort was intense, with aircraft often rolling in on targets during the climb out from Taegu, and it consisted almost entirely of close support missions.

‘Frag’ orders, which were operational orders issued from 5th Air Force, arrived each evening at Iwakuni detailing the next day’s operations and aircraft were loaded accordingly. All flights checked in with Joint Operations Centre (JOC) at Taegu on arrival in Korea, were given a controller to contact, and passed mission results to JOC on completion of each mission. Subsequent missions from Taegu were tasked by JOC as the ground situation dictated and were debriefed after landing.

Our basic Mustang weapon loads were 2 x 500 lb general purpose bombs, 6 x 60 lb rocket projectiles and a full load of .5 calibre ammunition, but loads were regulated according to the requirement. Missions from the 2,700 ft pierced steel planking (PSP) runway at Taegu also used 2 x 100 gallon napalm tanks, 2 x 260 lb fragmentation bombs (some with a gun barrel welded to the nose to create an anti-personnel effect), and armour piercing rocket projectiles. Drop tanks were used as required and fuselage tanks were either full or had 25 gallons depending on the mission. During the early hectic days when we were fighting to defend the Pusan Perimeter, we flew in light cotton flying suits with a bulky Mae West and .38 calibre revolver, wore a light weight helmet and throat mike and sat on dinghies which were highly uncomfortable over four or five-hour missions. Later, we were grateful for the issue of American winter clothing.

Our biggest problems were weather, visibility and terrain during the critical Perimeter days. The padi fields were flooded, the rivers swollen from the summer rains and navigation with inadequate maps was difficult. Low cloud seemed to be everywhere. North Korean Army attacks were usually initiated under cover of this weather and that meant severe limitations on bomb and rocket deliveries as well as hot-gun deliveries.
on some occasions. Our training regime held at Iwakuni for divebombing saw a roll in from 7,000 ft, a 60 degree dive and a release at 3,000 ft using a fixed cross on a reflector sight. Techniques in Korea therefore needed major adjustment not only for bomb deliveries but also for rocket projectiles and, at times, even guns. All navigation in the target area was by dead reckoning, as were recoveries to Taegu. We carried a thick folder of maps: 1:1,000,000, 1:500,000 and 1:50,000 and all of these were used as we flew from one grid reference to another or diverted from one airborne or ground forward air controller (FAC) to another depending on the need for immediate close air support. The North Korean Army had armour and numerical superiority over the United Nations forces, and often our armament loads would be required within 100 yards of friendly troops.

Other limiting factors during the Mustang phase were our four channel VHF sets, a glycol cooled engine and no real delivery assurance with our napalm tanks. We only had two operational frequencies and there was constant radio chatter; one hit in the glycol line and we had a seized engine; and napalm was dropped by ‘guesstimate’, either singly or as a pair from 100 ft. We had done none of that training prior to going to war. Skip bombing 500 lb or 260 lb bombs, or firing rocket projectiles into railway tunnel mouths was also trial and error and made more difficult when faced with a steep mountain wall at the end of delivery. Our release heights and reduced speeds made us more vulnerable to small arms fire, while operating under reduced ceilings for other weapon deliveries kept us continually within the range of light anti-aircraft artillery. The confused ground situation made accurate target identification difficult as coloured panels denoting the bombline or friendly troops were frequently copied or mis-identified. The first two months were indeed chaotic.

We then moved to Pohang on the south-east coast of Korea and were there for about six weeks.

POHANG (10 October - 18 November 1950)

77 Squadron covered the United Nations advance into North Korea, but extended ranges eventually led to our being relocated to K3, Pohang, on the south-east coast. We were attached to the US 35th Fighter Bomber Group at Pohang and stayed with that outfit until we redeployed to Iwakuni in April 1951. From our tent lines at Pohang we were averaging three to four-hour missions, but until the Chicom [Chinese communist forces] crossed the Yalu River in great numbers, most of the missions were strikes and armed reconnaissances, although we did cover a large United Nations air drop north of Pyongyang. As the Chicom threat developed, however, so did targets become numerous, but despite their heavy losses, the Chinese continued to stream into North Korea. To provide more effective support in the worsening situation, the 35th and 77 Squadrons redeployed to K27, Yonpo airfield, more colloquially referred to as Hamhung.

HAMHUNG (19 November- 5 December 1950)

Hamhung, on the 40th parallel, was snowbound and crowded with Marine and United States Air Force (USAF) aircraft. The Chinese launched massive attacks across the
entire front on 24 November and once more all of our missions were devoted to close air support in an effort to redress the imbalance of numbers on the ground. Although it proved impossible to halt the offensive, the intensity of the United Nations air attacks did slow it somewhat and allow both the 8th Army and United States Marine 10th Corps to retreat to below the 38th parallel in the west and from Wonsan Harbour in the east, albeit with huge personnel and equipment losses. In fact, we flew missions to destroy abandoned United States equipment on the road south of Pyongyang, when the American 2nd Division came down, so rapid was the retreat. From Chicom prisoner reports, however, air attacks with napalm and bombs were greatly feared and shattering on morale and our Mustangs certainly were major contributors to the success of those attacks. The Chinese had the numbers, however, to absorb huge losses, at least in the early weeks, and to maintain their offensive.

Aircraft maintenance and operations under the extreme snow and ice conditions at Hamhung continued daily as maximum air effort was applied in support of the UN forces. Finally, however, 77 Squadron was forced to withdraw to K9, Pusan, when a general evacuation of 10th United States Marine Corps became imminent.

PUSAN (5 December 1950 - 6 April 1951)

As with all our moves, aircraft were rearmed and refuelled with no loss of operational time after arriving at Pusan, which is a tremendous credit to both our maintenance crews and our transport support. By 24 December 1950, all United Nations forces were south of the 38th parallel and we were flying mainly armed reconnaissance trips, seeking to interdict Chicom main supply routes, a very difficult task given the Chicom resort to haystacks and the sides of buildings for vehicle camouflage, the ability to resupply continuously from their Manchurian sanctuary, the use of the night for initial movement and subsequent concealment, and the mass mobilisation of labour for repairs.

A major offensive by the Chinese on 1 January 1951 saw them advance to around Osan, south of Suwon. We continued to provide close air support and carry out interdiction missions on the now long lines of communications until finally the losses became too much even for the Chinese and they withdrew on 28 February. By 31 March 1951, United Nations forces were back to the 38th Parallel.

The provision of close air support was extremely difficult during the winter months, due to the cover of snow and heavily reduced visibility. The battlefield haze reduced forward visibility to zero and made even keeping airborne contact hazardous, quite apart from limiting target acquisition to vertical viewing only. Interdiction of route packages, the occasional strike and close air support mission and a special task of cratering roads with 500 lb bombs took us through to 7 April when we returned to Iwakuni to re-equip with Meteors.
SUMMARY

Initially 77 Squadron operated United States Packard Merlin Mustangs, augmented later by Rolls Royce Merlin Mustangs from Australia. The squadron operated continuously and effectively for nine months and four days over the length and breadth of Korea, navigating on dead reckoning in all weather conditions and in all terrains. Altogether 3,800 sorties were flown, a monthly average of around 450, but 812 sorties were flown in the critical month of August. Nine pilots were lost and one taken prisoner of war and the squadron operated from five separate airfields without losing a day except for weather. Without the weight of effective and flexible air power, basically that of Mustangs, during the Pusan Perimeter days, a North Korean victory would have been certain and any future United Nation’s presence in Korea would have been very difficult to establish. There is also little doubt that air power finally produced unacceptable losses even for the Chinese, despite their numbers and initial successes, as they were forced to the first armistice talks on 10 July 1951, two years before the eventual ceasefire. The nature of our Mustang missions was dictated solely by an ever-changing ground situation, but their contribution to United Nations operations, as well as that of our transport and Wing support, is one of which all participating members, both ground and air, can feel justly proud.
METEOR OPERATIONS - KOREAN WAR

Air Vice-Marshal W.H. SIMMONDS

The Comments of a Meteor Pilot in the Korean War

RAAF air operations in Korea comprised two phases.

Mustang operations commenced July 1950, just five days after the UN intervention in the war between North and South Korea and continued for ten months when 77 Squadron was withdrawn to Iwakuni to enable the pilots to undergo a three month conversion to the newly acquired Meteor 8s.

The second phase began in July 1951 when Wing Commander Dick Cresswell led the first operational Meteor sorties into North Korea - a 16 aircraft mission to the Yalu River region.

My tour commenced in April 1952 when I joined the squadron with five others from my course, also two sergeant pilots from No. 6 Flying Training School Course. Six RAF pilots were also posted to 77 Squadron at the RAAF's request to help overcome a critical pilot shortage. All of these British pilots had a good deal of Meteor experience.

Not surprisingly, as a group of fighter pilots in our early twenties, we weren't too concerned with the political considerations which led to our being in Korea. Our one priority was to take on the North Koreans.

In retrospect we all agreed that our limited Meteor experience hardly qualified us for the serious business of air-to-air combat.

Admittedly, by April 1952 the squadron had been relegated to the air-to-ground role. Notwithstanding Chinese MiGs were always a constant threat whenever we flew in the Pyongyang area, which was mainly where we operated. The Mustang pilots who returned to Japan for their three-month conversion were mostly experienced and all had flown about 50 hours during their conversion training. On the other hand, my group's average conversion hours was something less than 16, and they were all flown in a 12 day period. We flew only four live air-to-ground and gunnery sorties. There was no air-to-air gunnery and there was very little instrument flying and no night flying. Furthermore, when we joined the squadron, there were no pilot attack instructors to brief us on any form of air combat tactics which would have been useful knowledge in the event of being confronted by MiGs. To be fair, air combat tactics as practised today were very much in their infancy; successful fighter pilots in World War II by and large developed their own tactics to meet particular circumstances. There was fierce rivalry between fighter pilots and the idea of first class pilots...
cooperating or flying together as an integrated team was an anathema to most of them. Our tactics were virtually hit and miss affairs, and I remember talking to one of the flight commanders when I asked what we were expected to do if we are bounced by MiGs. He replied that you go into a maximum rate turn to the left or right and hope that he doesn’t shoot you down. Air combat tactics, in fact, weren’t developed to any reasonable standards in the RAAF until the early to late 1960s.

History records, unfairly in my view, that the Meteor was no match for the MiG 15. Admittedly at high altitude it was a no contest situation, but at lower altitudes it was a very different situation. I suspect that the MiGs shot down or damaged by 77 Squadron were all below 25,000 ft, where our aircraft had either superior acceleration or superior rates of turn than the MiG 15. Contrary to popular belief, the MiG 15 was not a supersonic aircraft, although it had very effective weapons in the form of two 23 mm guns and a very effective 37 mm cannon. United States Air Force (USAF) evaluation after the war proved quite conclusively that the MiG 15 was overrated. What I am getting around to saying is that, had we been able to develop the appropriate tactics as we would have today to confront an aeroplane with superior height advantages, we would have fared a lot better than we did.

Officially 77 Squadron was employed in the ground attack role from early 1952 onwards, but according to my log book we actually flew as many fighter patrols and bomber escort missions as ground attack sorties, albeit at lower altitudes. Our best results were achieved in the ground attack roles particularly in the interdiction of the main supply routes. These routes were along the narrow valleys of the North Korean peninsula and as we have seen, called for some pretty tricking flying from time to time. Targets in the main were trucks loaded with ammunition and other supplies. Our technique was to try and hit the first and last in the convoy and then the others in between to prevent any further movement. The Meteor’s four 20 mm cannons, each firing up to 600 rounds per minute, were particularly effective for this task. Some sections of the main supply routes were very heavily defended by medium calibre guns and most of them were positioned well above the air routes so they actually fired down on us. We also immobilised tanks from time to time by attacking them from the rear where they were the most vulnerable.

Our napalm rockets attracted some initial interest by our American allies. They were essentially air-to-ground five inch rockets with the warhead removed and replaced with a pointed metal cylinder containing about five gallons of napalm. Judging by their aerodynamics, they needed a lot more development. Arming vanes behaved very erratically and had to be modified by the squadron armourers to prevent them striking the aircraft. Occasionally a rocket motor would shed a fin - possibly removed by an arming vane. And when this happened the rocket lost its directional stability. On one occasion I had to take evasive action to avoid being hit head-on by one of these rogue missiles. They weren’t very accurate and they didn’t have enough napalm. These weapons which had been hastily designed and not properly tested were of limited value.
The Mustang's two 100 gallon tanks were far more effective than our rockets. Furthermore, the 60 lb high explosive rockets carried by the Mustangs throughout the war, I believe, were a very effective weapon. The Meteor was not designed for the ground attack role. It was a fighter aircraft built at the end of World War II to intercept high flying bombers and was used very successfully at low level to intercept German V-1 flying bombs. It had neither the endurance nor weapon carrying capacity to be used really effectively in the ground attack role. It was able to sustain quite a lot of airframe damage and the two engines were most reassuring. Despite these positive attributes, ground attack was a pretty hazardous occupation with the majority of losses attributed to small arms fire. During the Meteor phase of operations the attrition rate was high. Roughly 30 per cent of the squadron every six months. Just one of the reasons why most of us were grateful for a six month tour. Overall 77 Squadron lost 52 Meteors, and 32 pilots from all causes during the Korean conflict. But to put these losses into some sort of perspective, we need to recall what was happening in other air forces during the 1950s.

I was lucky enough to be flying F86s in Germany from 1953 to 1955 and in one six-day exercise alone (an exercise that 78 Wing took part in), we lost 22 aircraft and suffered 18 fatalities. In one Sabre squadron accidents alone accounted for 19 of the 22 aircraft of the squadron's strength. Of the 22 aircraft handed over to the squadron when the squadron re-equipped in Korea, only three of them survived the first two years. It was a period when aircraft losses in tactical fighter operations were enormous in any air force. Fortunately the RAAF learnt some very valuable lessons during the Korean War and I believe it really changed direction as a result. These lessons were not to be forgotten in the years to come. In particular the need for state-of-the-art aircraft, and the highest possible training standards. The RAAF's operational training units are now I believe world class and have been for many years. Thanks in part to the determination of many of those who flew in Korea and later exercised influential roles in the RAAF. If Australia ever commits its tactical fighter force in some future conflict, I am convinced that the RAAF will be far better trained and equipped than we were during the jet phase of 77 Squadron's Korean operations. Whether the RAAF will have sufficient pilots is another question.
When the Korean War began on 25 June 1950, RAAF air transport in Japan and Korea was provided by the communications flight of No. 77 Squadron. It had a fairly experienced flight lieutenant in charge of it and one crew, one freighter aircraft, one VIP C-47 and two Austers which had been left behind by the RAF. In September 1950 two further aircraft and crews arrived from Australia, one of them captained by Noel Eliot and in November-December four further crews and aircraft came from No. 38 Squadron in Malaya. They arrived in the northern winter with only tropical gear and we had considerable trouble getting winter clothing for them.

The unit was redesignated No. 30 Communications Unit. Later it became No. 30 Transport unit and later - in 1953 - it became No. 36 Squadron, which had been disbanded after World War II. The unit was part of No. 91 Wing and was operationally controlled by BCOF headquarters in Kure, Japan, with the designated task of supporting the Commonwealth Brigade. At that stage, the Commonwealth Brigade had not moved into Korea.

A principal difficulty arose initially because no commanding officer was appointed for the newly-designated unit and none was appointed until late in January 1951, when Squadron Leader John Gerber assumed command. Having commanded the communications flight in No. 77 Squadron, I assumed control but had no formal authority to do so, but nobody told me to stop. This was the source of the only trouble we experienced. Having no command authority, I had to do things, and get newly-arrived crews into business, using the 'Old Boy' net. Fortunately we had a good group of people and I knew most of them. But it was a very poor arrangement which could very easily have been corrected.

When we began, with only one aircraft, we made almost daily sorties into Taegu or Pohang carrying No. 77 Squadron maintenance people, rockets and other ordnance which the Mustangs would use during their daily deployment from Japan. Finally we were established with seven crews and eight aircraft. Each crew flew about 80 - 100 hours per month. Sorties varied from 20 minutes duration to about three hours. There was no formally stated tour of duty up to the time I left, but it was loosely stated as 100 round trips, which would probably mean about 400 sorties, and possibly 1,000 hours. Some individuals did many more. Ivan Pretty did over 350 round trips. Noel Eliot did something similar. There would have been several others who did likewise.
As the Commonwealth Brigade took shape our task became mainly routine transport operations between Japan and Korea, and also up and down the peninsula following the fluctuating fortunes of the ground forces. We flew only a few tactical missions in direct support of ground forces, supply dropping directly to units in the field. Medical evacuation (medevac) was a constant task. During the whole campaign we took over 12,000 wounded and sick people out of the area. In October 1951 alone there were over 700 medevac cases. Our task was not spectacular, but work was hard and there was a lot of it. Weather was always a worry and so was heavy icing, turbulence and crowded air space. We worked long hours. Fortunately we operated in an atmosphere of air superiority and we didn’t have to contend with enemy aircraft.

In December 1950, when No. 77 Squadron left Hamhung, we operated directly with the squadron, and I believe that ours was the last aircraft, on 5th December, out of there before the Chinese and North Koreans moved in.

We were short of technicians in Japan. With the aid of a Japanese engineer, our engineer (Chas Butcher) trained up a group of young Japanese to help with our servicing. They learned quickly and were very good lads.

We lost two C-47s. One in a collision on the runway at Suwon. The aircraft was cleared to line up on the runway and to hold there, while an American Mustang taking off in the opposite direction hit him right on the top of the cockpit. The two pilots saw what was going to happen and threw themselves backwards and out of the way. The cockpit roof was crushed down almost onto the pilots seat level. The crew were exonerated and were very lucky to survive.

We were fortunate in having the help of an Army captain, Bruce Fletcher, as ground liaison officer (GLO). He was first class and helped considerably in running things.

In conclusion, we re-learned in Korea a lot of things that had been done in New Guinea and elsewhere during World War II, but largely forgotten. I do not think we learned any new tricks - except perhaps the people doing medevac. I believe that our unit did all that was expected of it. Morale and maintenance were good. As far as possible we conducted regular continuation training sessions in emergency procedures, and maintained good operating standards. I have always been proud of my association with that episode. The unit eventually returned to Australia in March 1955.

DISCUSSION

Wing Commander Despina Tramoundanis: I have got a question for John Mordike. Unless I’m wrong, John, I was reading somewhere that at least part of the problem which caused failure of interdiction campaigns in Korea was that the tempo of land warfare was fairly low at the time that the air forces were trying to interdict supplies. It was suggested that the interdiction programs would have been more successful if the enemy had been using stores at a more rapid rate. I also understand
that the operation of air forces, including naval air forces in Korea, was hampered by a
command and control system that was a shambles and that we saw the origins of the
route packaging system which was put in place later on in the Vietnam war. Have you
got any more information on that, please?

Dr John Mordike: Certainly, that comment on the interdiction programs is valid. It
is one that has been made in some studies which point out that where the enemy is not
dependent on abundant supplies - if the opposing ground force is not forcing the
enemy to consume supplies at a high rate - then any interdiction program is likely to
have minimal impact. But, in a joint environment, it is very hard to explain to the
ground forces that they have to make the enemy fight harder so that the interdiction
program will be successful. You could see the difficulty there. But that is certainly a
valid observation and, if you look at the static phase of the war, I think that comment
is particularly pertinent. When an army is not moving it doesn’t need fuel in large
amounts and it doesn’t need repair parts to keep transport moving and so on. Where it
is not engaged in intensive fighting it doesn’t need ammunition in large amounts. In
these circumstances, an interdiction program is, of course, likely to have less impact.
That was one of the difficulties in the Korean War, especially during the static phase.

On the command and control question, I think the most pertinent comment is that,
when the war started, initially there was no effective joint headquarters to control the
various components of the United Nations Command. MacArthur had been directed
by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I think as early as 1947, to develop a joint headquarters in
Japan but he had resisted doing so. Certainly, when the war started, his headquarters
was in no position to coordinate and control efficiently the assets that were being
deployed in the war. That was clearly a criticism of MacArthur and certainly it did
adversely affect operations during those early months of the war. Perhaps the veterans
here today could make some comments on this issue. I do know that one of the
American generals commented adversely on the situation. I think he used the words
‘a bloody shambles’ or ‘a bloody shame’ that troops should have to go into the war
without the proper steps having been made to develop an effective joint headquarters.

Wing Commander Dick Cresswell: We were okay because we had 5th Air Force
and Far East Air Force looking after us. They planned their operations very well
indeed. 5th Air Force did liaise very closely with all major army commands and
through that we were able to get a pretty good idea of what was really going on near
the front line. Depth targets depended purely on air reconnaissance, and I don’t think
we had any trouble with that.

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Trebilco: If I just could add a point here. Certainly, down
on the Pusan Perimeter when we were operating and had to be effective the Joint
Operation Centre (JOC) down there operated most effectively. All missions were
tightly controlled. The information came in on movements of the bomb line and pilot
reports came in on each mission. It was only, I think, after the 8th Army landed at the
end of August and started to move out in early September and MacArthur landed at
Inchon that the war got more complicated. Then there were large spaces to be
covered. But certainly, when the land forces were in desperate need of close air support, the JOC and the forward air controllers operated perfectly.

**Air Commodore Dave Hitchins:** I can comment a little bit here as I am sure you know there was one glaring example where there wasn’t proper cooperation between air and ground forces. That was when the United States Air Force got stuck into the Gloucester Regiment and they had horrendous casualties.

**Air Vice-Marshall Ray Trebilco:** Also I think one should recognise that identification of where army units are is very difficult. In a fluid situation and, despite all the checking you might do, you are still up in the air and someone’s down on the ground trying to delineate exactly who’s who and in what position. And all the time they are screaming out for help. All the time there will be mistakes made but in terms of straight command and control coming from JOC I don’t have a criticism of it in the first two to three months anyway.

**Les Reading:** I have a question for Wing Commander Cresswell. I wonder if you would be good enough to tell us a little of the American offer, before we got Meteors, to let us have a squadron of Sabres with support and, if you think it appropriate, to talk a little about the politics that led to the decision?

**Wing Commander Dick Cresswell:** When we retreated from Hamhung and went south, I got pretty close to 5th Air Force and Philip Hartley. He asked me how long we would retain Mustangs and I replied that we wanted jets, that is American Sabres. Of course he already realised that and said that maybe we could do a deal later on. This sort of conversation went on for the next four or five months until about the time we went back to Iwakuni in April 1951. The Americans, including Stratemeyer, came across to Japan to see us quite often. They wanted to give us some of their old Sabres, probably four at a time until we had a full squadron strength, but they were not sure how the Australian government would react. I flew a few of the old Sabres - they were ‘A’ models - but they were underpowered. Obviously the Australian government understood this as did the British High Commission in Canberra and the next thing we knew we were getting Meteors, the RAF’s finest fighter.

**Air Vice-Marshall Ray Trebilco:** If I could just interrupt, there was one unanswered question in terms of route packaging and I am not quite certain I fully understood it. When we had moved down to Pusan at the end of our nine months or towards the end of our nine months on Mustangs, we were really dealing with a fairly static situation and I suppose if you are going to use aircraft adequately the way to do it is to send them up and down the lines of communication. These areas were delineated into route package one, route package two, and so on. The only problem with that, of course, is that you are out looking for targets, and it doesn’t take long for the enemy to realise that you are coming out at 10 o’clock in the morning and you will be there for two hours on such and such a route. It gets pretty lethal after a while. I don’t know if that in part covers your route packaging question, but we were doing route packaging long before Vietnam.
Dr Alan Stephens - I would like to ask a question about training and standards in the RAAF, because I am a bit puzzled. It’s clear that in some aspects of operations 77 Squadron was excellent. AVM Trebilco mentioned flying around Korea by dead reckoning in shocking weather, in dangerous terrain and with only four radio channels available. By any standards this was an extremely demanding exercise and the squadron was clearly excellent at that. It is also clear that the squadron was outstanding at air-to-ground missions, yet, at the same time, there is this puzzling contradiction that pilots were arriving from Australia poorly trained, even without instrument ratings on some occasions. So why was the squadron so good in some areas and lacking in others? What was going on in the flying training schools Australia, what was going on in operational squadrons? Perhaps AVM Simmonds could start, but I would be interested in hearing from anyone who could throw some light on what I find a very puzzling business.

Air Vice-Marshal Bill Simmonds: My comments were in no way directed at the flying training schools in Australia. I think that the flying training I got was about as good as you’ll get anywhere. What I was complaining about was what occurred in my particular case. I underwent a 12-day conversion at Iwakuni to equip me and other participants for the dual roll of ground attack and air combat flying. It is the sort of thing which would not happen today. We now have lead-in fighter programs and all the rest of it. In my case, I had, I think, 40 hours on Vampires but then that in itself would have been sufficient if we had had 30, 40, or 50 hours on Meteors before we were committed to the squadron. But I would like to dispel any notion that the training system we had in place was inferior: it was first class.

Wing Commander Dick Cresswell: Initially, of course, there wasn’t an operational training unit in existence but the original members of 77 Squadron were all highly trained. The first replacement pilots that came up to Korea weren’t trained. They went through a Mustang conversion course at 3 Squadron in Canberra, I think, until the operational training unit started. We were not getting sufficiently trained pilots. I had a forward orientation training flight at Iwakuni to give the new ones some time on the Mustangs, and some time in the area and also to do some air-to-ground gunnery.

Air Vice-Marshal Bill Simmonds: I guess we are talking from the time we got our wings until the time we went into the squadron. Practically all the training was essentially air-to-ground. You converted to the aircraft, you fired the guns, you fired the rockets, you dropped some bombs and you did a bit of air-to-air on the banner. But that didn’t train you in the air-to-air combat, I can assure you.

Wing Commander Bernie Lane: I was an engine fitter in 77 Squadron at the time of the Korean War. I can confirm what Wing Commander Cresswell said about our camp equipment. The tentage was really pathetic. We had tropical tents in Pohang and these were totally inadequate for the climate. They just had curtain sides on them with no protection whatsoever. When we went up to Hamhung, we managed to find billets in some of the bombed out buildings that had no floors and no windows. We boarded up the windows so that we could get some warmth by burning fuel in buckets of sand. Then there were the problems associated with changing the mission of the aircraft at short notice. Preparation of each aircraft for the mission was essential.
depending on whether there were drop tanks to be fitted for fuel, or napalm tanks to be fitted, or rockets to be fitted. Each of these required a different maintenance procedure. In fact if the napalm tanks had to come off and the fuel tanks to be fitted, there was an essential engine-run which took time to ensure that the fuel was getting through. All of these procedures were difficult and, of course, they were executed while we were ankle deep in snow and slush. There were hot engines and cold winds, not very pleasant at all. I would also like to say that we were having difficulty getting fuel, because we were dependent on the Americans. Sometimes they wouldn’t be able to get their tanker into us until quite late at night, and sometimes it didn’t come at all. In fact on some occasions we were refuelling out of 44 gallon drums and even at that stage we were so short on ground staff that some of the aircrew were kind enough to help pump. That was quite something for us.

Wing Commander Dick Cresswell: We were at Hamhung for only about three and half weeks and didn’t get time to settle down. Sure, we lived in lousy housing, old Japanese housing. In relation to mission changes, we didn’t know until the last moment what kind of mission it was going to be because there were constant changes, largely because of the hectic state of the war at that stage. We simply had to stop the Chinese. Missions were changing all the time. That was the reason we were changing tanks and rockets and that sort of thing. The conditions weren’t good. In relation to the unsuitable camping equipment, we lost two people at Pohang in a tent fire. I came across from Iwakuni shortly after that event and my understanding was that the sleeping bags that we were issued were army summer sleeping bags. They had a zip that you couldn’t undo. The zip went right around the top and down the bottom. Most of the time - because it was so cold - we had the zip right up near the top. When these two people tried to get out, they tried to unzip the bag downwards. We didn’t know until after the event that the emergency release was to zip it over the top and the whole bag flew apart. We were disadvantaged from time to time by quite inadequate equipment.

Bruce Wells - To what extent, if at all, were your air operations integrated with naval air power and naval air operations?

Wing Commander Dick Cresswell: Occasionally, HMAS Sydney came in, especially when we were back at Kimpo. Sometimes we carried out missions in the same area but we never had any agreed joint operation procedure. We covered ‘Blue’ McMillan, one of the Navy pilots, when he bailed out. But other than that, we didn’t do any effective integrated exercises or attacks with the Navy at all. We didn’t do any with the Marines, but we were collocated with the Marines on two bases. We did missions at the Chosin Reservoir supporting the Marines on the ground when they were under dire threat from the Chinese but we didn’t actually do coordinated missions with the Marine Air Wing. However, the ‘frag’ order we received covered all missions right throughout Korea for that period, so we knew what they were doing.
Air Commodore Brent Espeland: Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you have enjoyed this last session and the four presentations as well as John Mordike’s introductory paper. Could I ask you to show your appreciation by joining with me in thanking Wing Commander Cresswell, Air Vice-Marshal Trebilco, Air Vice-Marshal Simmonds, Air Commodore Hitchins and Dr Mordike for a very interesting session on the War in Korea.
CLOSURE

Air Vice-Marshal D.N. Rogers

Air Marshal Evans, Air Marshal Newham, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, let me extend an apology from the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Fisher, who had to leave early today because he is representing the RAAF at a dinner in Sydney to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Polish Air Force.

I guess having to close the conference and draw together some of the conclusions has some advantages and disadvantages. I guess the advantages lie in the fact that you don’t have to listen to an account of an embarrassing career failure and lists of what hasn’t been done. Furthermore, I can say what I like, I don’t have to face any questions and I can only speak for ten minutes. I guess the disadvantage is that for the whole day you have had to sit there like a student taking notes and listening to every word that has been said. But let me assure you that I’ve certainly enjoyed that.

I think that today’s program has maintained the high standard that we have seen over the last four history conferences. It’s a credit to the Air Force that we took the initiative to hold these annual conferences, all of which have been organised by the Air Power Studies Centre. The Army and Navy have now followed our lead and also have annual history conferences, which have become important events for the recollection and the maintenance of history as well as the education of the younger generation of Australians. And I think today’s speakers, as the chairman has said, have presented their views not only based on their own personal experience in the events but also a lot of research.

Going back over the papers, I think Al Stephens in the first paper on demobilisation and the Interim Air Force perhaps described what was a period of organised chaos. I don’t intend that observation to reflect unfavourably on any of the people of that time or their efforts. Obviously they had the good of the Air Force and the good of the nation in mind and heart, but, when you are talking about reducing the Interim Air Force from a strength of 185,000 members down to 15,000, it was obviously a very difficult task. There were pressures from government, pressures from within, pressures from trying to satisfy people who wanted to leave the service and get back into their normal civilian lives, all producing tremendous difficulties for the responsible officers. Although there was a lot of criticism of George Jones in those days, I think we owe him a debt of gratitude because he had the foresight to maintain some very strong personalities in the Air Force. In this way, I think Jones established a good foundation for the future development of the Air Force.

I think that the personality clashes that went on during the war with the Jones-Bostock affair and the comments that were made by both sides about Air Vice-Marshal Hewitt are not to be taken too seriously because they were the opinions of people who were trying to promote their own interests and their own point of view. I would point out
that the Air Board in those days was not like it is today where we have the Chief of the Air Staff Advisory Committee and the Chief is the commander of the Air Force.

In those days, the Chief of the Air Staff was not the overall commander of the Air Force and you had a lot of members on the Air Board who were chiefs of their own areas, be it supply and equipment, be it training, or be it engineering. Each of these members had direct access to the Minister. Now I can assure you that doesn’t happen today. There is only one man who has direct access to the Minister. If you put that in context, I think there must have been a lot of politicking among the members of the Air Board in former years. So we have to be careful when we make judgments from our current vantage point. Alan’s paper was very, very good. I enjoyed it.

Air Marshal David Evans gave us a very insightful view of the Berlin Airlift and covered a lot of aspects that I had never heard before. I have been talking to some of the people here today who said exactly the same thing. It was interesting to find out the reasons behind the airlift and also how it was implemented. Not only was there the challenge of building up enough tonnage of supplies to sustain the city but also the vagaries of the weather to contend with. The problems of air traffic control for such a concentrated effort over an extended period should also not be overlooked. During the day I asked Air Vice Marshal Evans about what aircraft carried out after they had delivered their loads to the besieged city - everybody seems to worry about what was taken in terms of fuel and oil and supplies but there is very little information available on what was taken out. He said that the British took a lot of passengers out but the Americans would not for the simple reason that loading the aircraft would have delayed the turn-around time and upset the whole schedule for getting the supplies in.

Air Commodore John Jacobs took us through the deployment to Malta which is another one of the little known areas of RAAF history. While aspects of the deployment have been recorded in history, John gave us an insight from the perspective of a junior pilot, including garrison duties, flying operations, the involvement in Her Majesty’s coronation, and also the family aspects. John mentioned that there were some 30 Australian children born in Malta during that time. Indeed we have one of them here today - Wing Commander Buzz Pearson whose parents were involved in the deployment. Another interesting aspect of what John told us today was that the RAAF made a deliberate attempt to maintain its individual identity, unlike its involvement in Europe in World War II where its identity was largely subsumed within the identity of the RAF.

Warrant Officer Dave Gardner gave us a good idea what the RAAF Museum is. We can sit here and talk about history, we can do research into things that happened but he looks after the material aspects of the Air Force history. I think that Dave Gardner is owed a great debt of gratitude by everybody in this hall for his efforts over the last five to ten years in getting together the museum’s displays. He has been the driving force behind the museum. A succession of commanding officers have leaned on Dave Gardner’s strength of commitment to his work as curator. I recall what Dave said at the end of his presentation about the museum displaying history that was made by ordinary people. Those of you who are thinking of leaving this world soon might consider sending your memorabilia to Dave Gardner at the museum, or put it in your
will. We could consider it a duty to ensure that the RAAF’s history is not lost to future generations.

Group Captain John Harvey gave us an insight into the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan. I think the strategic perspective that was portrayed by John as to why Australia wanted to participate and, more importantly, take a leading role in the establishment of BCOF was very interesting. Australia wanted to establish its standing in the region. Training and standards were criticised. I know there has been a lot said about the standard of flying and the attitude in the post-war period about these issues. Alan Stephens raised the comment about the aero club environment in the RAAF, but I think that a lot of people that have lived through that period are here today. I think that we are being a bit unkind when we look back and make judgments on what it was like in those days. I think we have to bear in mind that a lot of people in the Air Force then had come through the war and the pressure was off. I don’t think the standards changed but maybe some attitudes did. I think John Harvey drew out the lessons on the constabulary role, or what we now call peace support operations, the importance of support or logistics, but, importantly, John also emphasised the flexibility of air power. I think an important lesson in the presentation was that, although our contribution was small, it was strategically effective.

John Mordike led us into Korea and into the last presentation by the panel of veterans of the war in Korea. I think John Mordike and his colleague Dr Chris Coulthard-Clark, who are both ex-Army officers, have added a degree of credibility to our Air Power Studies Centre over the years. I thank them both for their contribution for the simple reason that, if we appear to be a ‘blue-suit’ organisation and have a ‘blue-suit’ Air Power Studies Centre without an outside view then we can be subject to criticism. Today we have heard John’s views on the Korean War, views expressed with a degree of academic freedom that he rightfully enjoys. I think he outlined very, very clearly the historical development of the Korean War and why the roots of the struggle lay very much in the tribal or cultural differences between North and South Korea. I was intrigued that the arbitrary division of Korea was discussed at the Yalta conference in 1945. I have read a little bit about the Yalta conference and I think that must have been some agenda where four gentlemen got together and decided the way the world was to be divided up after World War II. It seems that the division at the 38th parallel was simply a political compromise respected by few, but it is still there today.

I think air power’s critical role in the Korean conflict has been made very, very clear by some of the speakers today. During the recent celebrations for the RAAF’s 75th anniversary, one of our guests was the Chief of Staff of the People’s Liberation Army Air Force of China, General Yu Zhen Wu. At one of the dinners we were talking to him and he said he joined the PLA Air Force in 1948. He had flown fighters. He doesn’t retire until next month so he has been in the air force a fair while. Air Marshal Fisher asked him whether he had flown in the Korean War. He replied through an interpreter that he had but described the war as the war of American aggression. Of course we didn’t pursue his comments but they illustrate the different perspectives on the origin of the war.
I turn now to the panel of Korean War veterans. Dick Cresswell, who is a bit of a legend in his own time (the words Korea, Cresswell and 77 Squadron go together), illustrated the importance of leadership and communication, decisive command and teamwork in war. Air Vice-Marshall Ray Trebilco gave us a good insight into the Mustang operations, the vagaries of the weather in Korea and critical role of air power. Air Vice-Marshall Bill Simmonds gave us a good account of his experience in Meteor operations, being one of the few people in our Air Force who shot down a MiG in Korea. But the loss rate sustained in the Korean War with 52 Meteors being lost illustrates the need to know our equipment before we start taking it into different environments. Specifically, in the case of the Meteor, we should have understood its performance at high and low altitude.

Air Commodore Dave Hitchins brought out one particular aspect of leadership and that is where responsibilities have not been formally allocated to a particular person. In such circumstances do not wait but take the initiative and get something done. I think Dave put that experience from Korea to good practice in Darwin when he was officer commanding during cyclone Tracey. We all know of his efforts up there. He has always been a man of determination and courage, able to get things done under trying conditions. Today in his presentation on support operations in Korea he reminded us that medical evacuation and transport are the backbone of any support operations that we do in any theatre.

A conference like this depends on the efforts of many people and I know the chairman has thanked very many of them, but on your behalf I would like to thank Dr John Mordike and also Mrs Sandra Di Guglielmo for their efforts in arranging this conference today. There is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes and I would also like to thank the members of RAAF Staff College for their help today. I would like to thank, on your behalf, Air Commodore Brent Espeland, our chairman, whom I think has done a sterling job in introducing the speakers and directing the questions. But no conference can, of course, succeed without its speakers and, on your behalf, I would like to say thank you very, very much to all of our speakers today. You have made a contribution to the record of RAAF history. I think you will agree with me that it has been a very stimulating day.

Finally I think it has been said on a number of occasions today but having 290 people here has been quite an achievement. But I would like to see more at the next conference. I would especially like to thank the airmen and airwomen for coming today. The RAAF’s history is not the preserve of its officers nor does it simply concern combat operations. I think it was John Jacobs who reminded us that the role of the maintenance people and logisticians is vital to all Air Force operations.

All delegates will receive a bound copy of today’s proceeding. And, to conclude, I am pleased to advise that next year’s conference will be held on Friday the 7th of November and the topic will be South East Asian Commitments 1950-1965.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming along today, safe keeping and a safe drive home, thank you.