



RAAF History Information - 2007

Australian Military Aviation and World War One



Although Australian Military aviation can be traced to flights made by a Royal Engineer Balloon Section at the Sydney Agricultural Ground on 7-8 January 1901, it wasn't till late 1910 that a plan for an Australian Aviation Corps was submitted to the Military Board. Final approval to establish the Australian Flying Corps was promulgated in Military Order No.570 on 22 October 1912, with orders placed for two B.E.2a, two Deperdussin and a Bristol Boxkite to equip the new air arm.

Two pilots, Henry Petre and Eric Harison, and four mechanics – R.H Chester, G.A Fonteneau, C.V. Heath and A.E. Shorland were appointed to create a flying school. 734 acres of grazing land was purchased at Point Cook, Victoria at a cost of over £6,000 (\$12,000), and the creation of the Central Flying School was announced on 7 March 1913. The first flying training course commenced on 17 August 1914. The four candidates on the course were Lieutenant R. Williams, Captain T.W. White, Lieutenant G.P. Merz and Lieutenant D.P. Manwell.

On 8 February 1915 the Government of India sought the assistance of the Australian Government to supply trained airmen, aircraft and transport for service in Mesopotamia (Iraq). The Australian Government replied that men and transport would be provided, but aircraft they could not. The unit (known as the Mesopotamian Half-Flight) was under the command of Petre and comprised White, Merz and Lieutenant W.H. Treloar and 41 other ranks. The Mesopotamian campaign culminated in the tragic siege of Kut and the subsequent ignominious surrender of the garrison included nine mechanics of the First Half-Flight.

Four Australian Flying Corps (AFC) squadrons also joined the British during World War I. No 1 Squadron flew against the Turks and Germans in the Middle East, while Squadrons 2, 3 and 4 served on the Western Front between September 1917 and November 1918. A variety of aircraft were flown, including Sopwith Camels and Snipes, RE8s, SE5 and DH5s. The Australian airmen engaged in photographic reconnaissance, artillery spotting and strafing and bombing raids on enemy troops and positions, and German aircraft. Additional Australian units were based in the United Kingdom. Nos 5, 6, 7 and 8 Squadrons were established to train aircrew for service in the four front line squadrons of the AFC.

The only Victoria Cross (VC) awarded to an AFC member was to Lieutenant F.H. McNamara of 1SQN for his heroism on 20 March 1917. However, the leading scorer of the AFC was 24 year old Captain A.H. Cobby from No 4 Squadron, who was credited with 29 aerial victories and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC] (with two bars) and a Mention in Dispatches (MID).

During World War I Australian airmen also served with distinction with Royal Flying Corps/Royal Naval Air Service and Royal Air Force Units in Europe and the Middle East. Richard Williams commanded a Royal Air Force Wing and S.J. Goble flew operationally with the Royal Naval Air Service and commanded a squadron in France. When the Royal Australian Air Force was established on 31 March 1921, these men played prominent roles, Williams reaching the rank of Air Marshal and Goble the rank of Air Vice-Marshal.

But it was not only the new Service which was to benefit from the experience of World War I. Many of the pioneers of civil aviation (Charles Kingsford-Smith, Ross and Keith Smith and Hudson Fysh for example)



RAAF History Information - 2007

gained their basic flying experience in the skies over France and the Middle East. Between 16 November-12 December 1919 Captain Henry Wrigley and Sergeant Arthur Murphy flew a BE2E from Point Cook to Darwin to meet Ross and Keith Smith. This was the first transcontinental flight.

The Inter-war years 1921 to 1939

Wartime experience and the technical development of aircraft made it obvious that air power had become an essential element in any military equation.

In Australia negotiations between Army, Navy and Defence officials from 1917 to 1921 resulted in the Australian Air Force being formed on 31 March 1921, with approval to use the 'Royal' prefix granted on 13 August 1921. At that time the RAAF comprised of 21 Officers, 128 Airmen and 153 aircraft (which included 127 of 128 'gift' aircraft from the British Government). By September 1939 when the Second World War was declared, there were 310 Officers, 3,179 Airmen in the RAAF, operating 246 aircraft.

RAAF bases had also been established around the country - Laverton, Victoria (1921), Richmond, New South Wales (1923), Pearce, Western Australia (1934), Darwin, Northern Territory, Archerfield, Queensland and Rathmines, New South Wales (1939).

Between 1926 and 1928 the Air Force also assisted in a variety of national survey operations, mostly using the Seagull V aircraft. They surveyed the Great Barrier Reef, Papua New Guinea, New Britain, the Solomon Islands, outback Australia, potential civilian landing grounds and civilian air routes. In 1924 Wing Commander S.J. Goble and Flying Officer I. McIntyre in a Fairey III D, aerial circumnavigated Australia. During 1929 and 1930 personnel flew a Gipsy Moth in the British Australian Antarctic Research Expeditions. And in January 1936 a crew in a Wapiti and Gipsy Moth assisted in the research of Lincoln Ellsworth and his pilot who were reported missing after attempting to fly across the Antarctic continent.

In late 1934 the Australian government announced that there would be increased funding for defence purposes and attempts were made to procure modern aircraft. The first of 48 Avro Anson general reconnaissance bombers were delivered in November 1936. The Bristol Beaufort began manufacture in Australia and Lockheed Hudson aircraft were purchased from the United States. It was during this period that the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation was established to produce the Wirraway trainer for the RAAF; a decision that affected the selection of aircraft operated by the RAAF for over two decades.

During this period nine Permanent Air Force Squadrons (No's 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 14) and four Citizen's Air Force Squadrons (No's 21, 22, 23 and 25) were either raised or re-raised. However, in most cases they were under strength and the RAAF was ill prepared for war when it was declared in 1939.



RAAF History Information - 2007



World War Two



When war against Germany was declared approximately 450 Australian pilots were serving with the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the United Kingdom (UK). Personnel from No 10 Squadron were also en route to the UK to take delivery of nine Short Sunderland flying boats. They remained in Britain for the duration of the War operating with RAF Coastal Command, earning an outstanding reputation.

Representatives of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand reached agreement at Ottawa, Canada, on 27 November 1939 to participate in the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). This scheme was to train aircrew for service with the Royal Air Force. Basic training was completed in Australia before undertaking advanced training in Canada (674 personnel also received training in Rhodesia) before service with the RAF.

The first 34 Australians graduated from RAAF Service Flying Training Schools on 18 November 1940, with a further 37,000 aircrew eventually trained in Australia. To meet this commitment, the RAAF established 2 Air



RAAF History Information - 2007

Navigation Schools, 3 Air Observers Schools, 3 Bombing and Gunnery Schools, 12 Elementary Flying Training Schools, 6 Initial Flying Training Schools and 8 Service Flying Training Schools. In addition, 7 Schools of Technical Training and other specialised technical schools were established to train ground crews in the maintenance of aircraft and equipment.

The duration of World War II saw 15,746 RAAF pilots, navigators, wireless operators, gunners and engineers sent to British squadrons and 11,641 to Australian squadrons. These men exemplified themselves in every major campaign front from the Battle of France, Battle of Britain, Normandy invasion, Egypt, the Middle East, Germany, Battle of the Atlantic, the defence of Malta, liberation of Italy, the Battles of the Coral and Bismarck Seas, Defence of Australia, to fighting in India, Burma, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Pacific.

When the armistice with Japan was signed on 15 August 1945, the RAAF in the Pacific had a total strength of 131,662 personnel and 3,187 front line aircraft. First Tactical Air Force, the major operational formation, had grown to 18,894 men in April 1945 and operated 20 operational squadrons. In addition to its execution of numerous air operations, the RAAF had also pioneered the development and operation of radar and operated its own shipping in the South West Pacific Area. The RAAF legacy of the Second World War is a proud one, with it now the world's 4th largest Air Force.





RAAF History Information - 2007

Post War 1946



The day World War II ended the RAAF had a total of 173,622 men and women working in 570 Units around the globe, maintaining 5,620 flying aircraft. The list of aircraft was divided equally into front-line and support machines which included 249 Liberators, 280 Mosquitoes, 378 Mustangs, 109 Dakotas, 109 Catalinas, 328 Beaufighters, 370 Kittyhawks and 367 Spitfires – war had transformed the RAAF into an immensely powerful force. Hence, disposing of aircraft and equipment and demobilising people and determining the composite size and structure of the post-war Air Force was an immense task. However by October 1946 the RAAF's personnel numbers had fallen to 13,238 and continued to decline. By May 1948 only around 4,000 actually applied to join the Permanent Air Force (PAF).

In the meantime the RAAF Nos 76, 77 and 82 Fighter Squadrons, No 381 (Base) Squadron and No 481 (Maintenance Squadron) assisted with the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF) in Japan, while No 5 ACS refurbished the main operational airfields of Iwakuni, Miho and Bofu. The Wing flew surveillance patrols to monitor the movements in the Inland Sea. However the British Government withdrew its forces in 1948 making the RAAF the sole aerial representative of the Commonwealth in Japan. The Australian commitment also decreased with the disbandment of Nos 76 and 82 Squadrons leaving only No 77 Squadron to serve in Japan until 1950.

In Allied Occupied Germany ten RAAF crews flew British RAF Dakotas with supplies and people from Lubeck to Gatow airport into Berlin. The RAAF aircrew transported 7,968 tonnes of freight and 6,964 passengers during 2,062 sorties and 6,041 flying hours. The last flight was made on 26 August 1949. An Australian Dakota (A65-69) was presented for display at the Gatow Berlin Airlift Museum on 20 June 1980.

From June 1950, during the period of the Berlin Airlift, the Communist Party of Malaya commenced terrorist activities in the region. The RAAF contributed No 1 Squadron and its Lincoln bombers and No 38 Squadron Dakotas to the anti-guerilla operations (RAF Operation 'Firedog'). They operated from Changi and Tengah, Singapore with a detachment at Kuala Lumpur, until 1958, moving supplies, passengers and cargo. The 1SQN Lincoln bombers dropped 85% of the total tonnage of bombs expended during Operation 'Firedog'.



RAAF History Information - 2007

On 25 June 1950 North Korean troops also invaded South Korea. No 77 Squadron worked with the United Nations force to counter the invasion and commenced operations from Iwakuni on 2 July, flying mainly ground support missions, combat air patrols and escort missions. The Dakotas of No 30 Communications Unit (renamed No 36 Squadron in March 1953) also operated from Iwakuni during the Korean War, flying freight to Korea and evacuating wounded soldiers to hospitals in Japan.

Another aspect of the 'Cold War' was the RAAF deployment of No 78 Wing to Malta from July 1952 until February 1954. This time families, technical and administrative personnel from Nos. 75 and 76 fighter Squadrons, No.378 Base Squadron and No. 478 (Maintenance) Squadron also travelled to Malta. The Wing flew Vampire FB-9 aircraft leased from the RAF. They contributed to the air defence of the Middle East, in NATO exercises, regular air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons practices, as well as participating in the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and the subsequent NATO Exercise 'Coronet' staged in Germany - an exercise with over 2,000 aircraft and 40,000 personnel.



South-East Asia and Vietnam

In August 1955, No. 2 Airfield Construction Squadron deployed to Butterworth to rehabilitate the airfield prior to the arrival of Canberra bombers from No. 2 Squadron and Sabres from Nos 3 and 77 Squadrons in 1958.

There were moments of tension in the South-East Asian region between January 1963 and, in August



RAAF History Information - 2007

1966, the Indonesian policy of 'confrontation' against the nascent Malaysian nation involved the RAAF. Units were placed at readiness at Butterworth to meet possible enemy incursions and Sabre fighters from Nos 3 and 77 Squadrons flew border patrols over Borneo from the airfield at Labuan. The RAAF also committed a single squadron of Sabres (No. 79 Squadron) to meet South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) commitments to the air defence of Thailand from June 1962 until July 1968.

Royal Australian Air Force units were also an important element in the Australian military commitment to the Vietnam War.

The initial involvement was the Caribou aircraft of RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (renamed No. 35 Squadron on 1 June 1966) that arrived at Vung Tau on 8 August 1964. The unit operated 'in country' until 26 February 1972. 'Wallaby Airlines', as the unit was affectionately called, operated a variety of missions ranging from daily freight runs to Saigon to the support (sometimes under enemy fire) of special forces units. Three Caribous were destroyed (one by enemy mortar fire at That Son on 29 March 1970) and another two had to be returned to Australia for major repairs.

The second RAAF unit to deploy was No. 9 Squadron, which arrived at Vung Tau with Iroquois helicopters during May 1966. Operations undertaken by No. 9 Squadron included troop insertions and extractions, 'dust off' of wounded soldiers, reconnaissance, fire support missions and aerial spraying. In 1968, Squadron Leader Brian Dirou and armament personnel modified their aircraft to carry a forward-mounted 7.62 mini-gun, a rocket launcher and two M60 door-mounted machine guns. In December 1971 No. 9 Squadron severed its connection with Vung Tau and returned to RAAF Base Amberley. During the course of their involvement in the Vietnam War, No. 9 Squadron suffered six fatalities and lost six helicopters.



The final operational squadron to deploy to Vietnam was No. 2 Squadron. The squadron flew Canberra bombers out of Phan Rang Air Base from April 1967 until June 1971. During its service with the United States Air Force's 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, the squadron accounted for 16% of the wing's assessed bomb damage. Missions were radar directed (Skyspot) and low-level visual bombing; the latter proved to be most effective. However, there was a price.

Canberra A84-231 and crew (Flying Officer M.P.J. Herbert and Pilot Officer R.C. Carver) went missing on 3 November 1970 while flying a Skyspot mission. Wing Commander F.J.L. Downing and Flight Lieutenant A.J. Pinches were shot down by a surface-to-air missile on 14 March 1971. Both were rescued.

Logistic support and medical evacuations were supplied by Hercules from Richmond, NSW. Air Defence Guards secured RAAF facilities at Vung Tau and Phan Rang that had been developed by detachments from No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron between 1966-68.

Other RAAF personnel in Vietnam flew as forward air controllers within the US Tactical Air Control System. Working with all the allied air forces, their role was to call in and control artillery and air strikes



RAAF History Information - 2007

against enemy ground forces, and to carry out visual reconnaissance. While flying these dangerous missions, the 36 RAAF pilots in this role won, among other awards, 15 Distinguished Flying Crosses and two Distinguished Service Orders. RAAF pilots served in the US Air Force in other roles too. Between 1965 and 1971, six officers flew F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, and all received British or US awards.

Overall, RAAF personnel earned 333 bravery awards during the Vietnam War. Two are of special note. Sergeant Gordon Buttriss was awarded a George Medal on 18 October 1966 and Corporal J.D. Coughlan a Conspicuous Gallantry Medal on 3 October 1967, both for life-saving bravery extracting crewmen from crashed helicopters.

1980s, 90s and Gulf War

By the early 1980s, due to the significance of the island chain to Australia's north-west, the structure of the RAAF featured highly capable platforms and strategic surveillance equipment.

The F-111 bomber, C-130 transport and P-3 maritime patrol aircraft were already in service, with the F/A-18 fighter and Boeing 707 long-range transport and air-to-air refuellers under consideration, along with the Jindalee over-the-horizon (long-range) radar, airborne early warning and control aircraft, and additional air bases across the continent's north. By May 1985, the first of 75 F/A-18 Hornets also arrived in Australia. The new fighter aircraft replaced the Mirage IIIs, which had been in service since 1964.

In December 1987 the first contingent of RAAF personnel and their families arrived at Tindal, 300 kilometres south of Darwin. RAAF Base Tindal was the first new operational air base to be built in Australia since World War II and was placed squarely within the ADFs designated 'area of operations'. Home to No. 75 Squadron and the second contingent of F/A-18 Hornets, Tindal was officially opened on 31 March 1989 by then Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990 paved the way for the formation of a multinational force comprising 40,000 troops from thirty countries to enforce United Nations Security Council resolutions and drive back Iraqi forces. Over 1800 ADF personnel were deployed in the Gulf War from August 1990 to September 1991. The force comprised units from the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force. Operations were named Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Desert Farewell. No deaths occurred among Australian personnel although Coalition forces lost 166 personnel.

In addition, Army and Air Force provided personnel to Operation Habitat, the delivery of humanitarian aid to Kurds living in the UN-declared exclusion zone in northern Iraq. Air Force support also included the evacuation of Australian nationals. Boeing 707 tanker aircraft from No. 33 Squadron also flew to the Gulf during March–May 1998 to support Allied air operations in the region.

2000 – A New Century

On 25 October 2000 the UN Mission in Support of East Timor (UNMISET) was established by UN resolution 1272/99 and was implemented on East Timor's Independence Day, 20 May 2002. Currently Australia provides about 25% of the Peace Keeping Force in East Timor, conducting a broad range of functions and tasks, ensuring stability during the establishment of independence and the rebuilding of the nation.

In October 2001, Prime Minister John Howard announced that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) would contribute to coalition operations against terrorism in Afghanistan. Known as Operation Slipper, Australia's original contribution included two B707 air-to-air refuelling aircraft and support personnel



RAAF History Information - 2007

based at Manas, Kyrgyzstan to refuel coalition aircraft. A Detachment of F/A-18 Hornets was based at Diego Garcia, providing support to the Coalition. Australia filled the leadership position of Operations Group Commander at Manas during the air-to-air refuelling deployment, with RAAF C-130 transport aircraft also transporting ADF personnel and equipment to/from and within the area of operations. Currently our contribution includes the Australian National Headquarters - Middle East Area of Operations, located in the Middle East, providing command and control for deployed Australian forces, and two RAAF AP-3C Orion maritime aircraft on patrol missions and in support of aircraft carrier operations and maritime interdiction.

March 2003 saw the Prime Minister announce that the Government had committed ADF elements in the Middle East to the coalition of military forces prepared to enforce Iraq's compliance with its international obligations to disarm. Australia's contribution to the coalition, known as Operation Falconer, has to date involved about 2000 ADF personnel including approximately 650 airmen, airwomen and support crews deployed with 14 RAAF F/A-18 Hornet fighter aircraft, 3 RAAF C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, 2 P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft, and an Air Forward Command Element responsible for coordinating air operations with coalition partners and providing national control of RAAF assets.