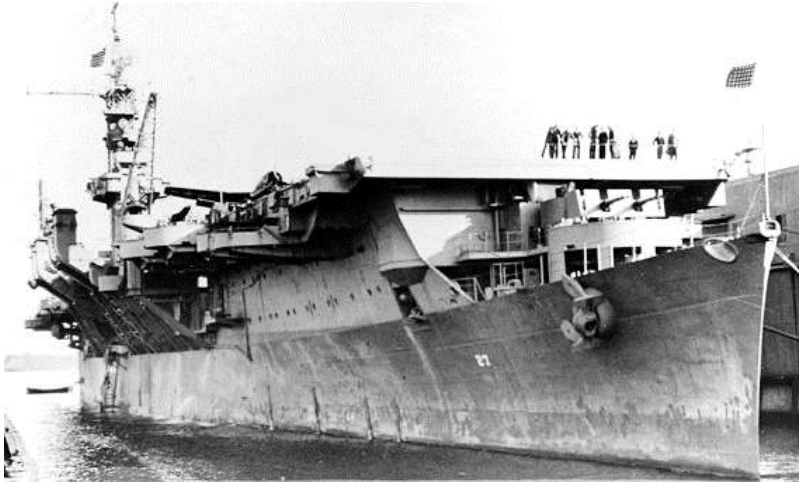


Preface

*Turning into wind now,
Ship goes full ahead.
All eyes on the island,
Light's remaining red.
Up pops the Flag, your leader's gone!
Pour on the coal, the thrust so strong!
Off brakes, you navy pilot,
Get up where you belong.*

—From the poem *Flight of Angels* by Bill Babbitt.¹

Photo Preface-1



Light fleet carrier USS *Langley* (CVL-27) berthed in port, location and date unknown. This starboard bow aspect clearly shows that she, and her eight *Independence*-class sister ships were laid down as cruisers in builders' yards, then had flight decks affixed atop their hulls during construction.
Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 67579

Turn into the Wind Volume II is devoted to the American- and British-built light fleet carriers that served as units of the United States Navy, Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, and Royal Australian Navy in the Korean War, Cold War, UN Peace Keeping Missions, Vietnam War, and up until 1982 when HMAS *Melbourne* was decommissioned. The WWII service of USN and RN light fleet carriers is the subject of

Volume I of *Turn into the Wind*, but it's worthwhile to describe here the desperate conditions in that war that spurred America and England to acquire small carriers with modest capabilities, whose contributions, nevertheless, would be considerable.

When America was thrust into World War II by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, the US Navy had only five fleet carriers in the Pacific. As a result, for the first four months of 1942, the carrier admirals were ordered to avoid engaging the Japanese fleet and were relegated to raiding actions against island bases. The dearth of fleet aviation capabilities became even more acute following the loss in 1942 of four carriers to combat action:

- USS *Lexington* (CV-2): Torpedoed and bombed by Japanese carrier-based aircraft on 8 May 1942, in the Battle of the Coral Sea
- USS *Yorktown* (CV-5): Torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on 7 June 1942, after being disabled by Japanese carrier aircraft bombs and torpedoes, 4 June 1942, in the Battle of Midway
- USS *Wasp* (CV-7): Torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on 15 September 1942, while operating in the Southwestern Pacific in support of forces on Guadalcanal
- USS *Hornet* (CV-8): Hit by Japanese carrier aircraft bombs and torpedoes on 26 October 1942, in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands²

The Navy's solution was the *Essex*-class fleet aircraft carrier. Twenty-four of the 30,000-ton ships were built in American shipyards between 1943 and 1950. As shown in the following table, twelve of the carriers were completed in time to collectively earn 84 battle stars in the Pacific Theater in World War II.³

***Essex*-class Aircraft Carriers
(that saw combat in WWII)**

Aircraft Carrier	Commissioned	Battle Stars
USS <i>Essex</i> (CV-9)	31 Dec 42	13 WWII
USS <i>Yorktown</i> (CV-10)	15 Apr 43	11 WWII
USS <i>Intrepid</i> (CV-11)	16 Aug 43	5 WWII
USS <i>Hornet</i> (CV-12)	29 Nov 43	7 WWII
USS <i>Franklin</i> (CV-13)	31 Jan 44	4 WWII
USS <i>Ticonderoga</i> (CV-14)	8 May 44	5 WWII
USS <i>Randolph</i> (CV-15)	9 Oct 44	3 WWII
USS <i>Lexington</i> (CV-16)	17 Mar 43	11 WWII
USS <i>Bunker Hill</i> (CV-17)	24 May 43	11 WWII
USS <i>Wasp</i> (CV-18)	24 Nov 43	8 WWII
USS <i>Hancock</i> (CV-19)	15 Apr 44	3 WWII
USS <i>Bennington</i> (CV-20)	6 Aug 44	3 WWII ⁴

Photo Preface-2



USS *Essex* (CV-9) underway in May 1943. The aircraft on her flight deck include 24 SBD scout bombers (located aft), about 11 F6F fighters (after midships area) and some 18 TBF/TBM torpedo planes (amidships). National Archives photograph #80-G-68097

INTERVENTION OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, not content with the ship completion schedule for the *Essexes*, directed the conversion of *Cleveland*-class light cruiser hulls already laid down in yards, to produce light carriers. A former Assistant Secretary of the Navy (17 March 1913 to 26 August 1920), Roosevelt had a keen interest in, and periodically personally directed, naval matters during World War II.⁵

In this case, Roosevelt ignored the warnings of naval architects that the fine lines of the cruiser hulls would preclude a roomy hangar and large island, and make it difficult to position the elevators or support the forward flight deck. Modifications made to address these issues included: truncating the flight deck, designing a very small island resembling those of escort carriers, making do with a rather small hangar, and bulging the hull to maintain stability.⁶

Interestingly, these 619-foot petite carriers with 71-foot beam and 26-foot draft would earn more battle stars on average than the larger, more well-known *Essex*-class carriers. The *Essexes* stretched 872 feet in length, with twice the girth (147-foot beams), and slightly deeper drafts

of twenty-eight feet. Both ship classes were fast; the *Essex* could make 33 knots, and the *Independence* one knot less.

Independence-class Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers

Aircraft Carrier	Commissioned	Battle Stars
<i>Independence</i> (CVL-22)	14 Jan 1943	8 WWII
<i>Princeton</i> (CVL-23)	25 Feb 1943	9 WWII
<i>Belleau Wood</i> (CVL-24)	31 Mar 1943	12 WWII
<i>Compens</i> (CVL-25)	28 May 1943	12 WWII
<i>Monterey</i> (CVL-26)	17 June 1943	11 WWII
<i>Langley</i> (CVL-27)	31 Aug 1943	9 WWII
<i>Cabot</i> (CVL-28)	24 July 1943	8 WWII
<i>Bataan</i> (CVL-29)	13 May 1943	5 WWII/7 Korean War
<i>San Jacinto</i> (CVL-30)	15 Dec 1943	6 WWII

POST-US NAVY SERVICE IN FOREIGN NAVIES

Three of the nine *Independence*-class light fleet carriers later served in the French or Spanish navies, whose service is not included in the book.



US Navy and Subsequent Service of *Independence*-class Ships

USS <i>Belleau Wood</i>	USS <i>Langley</i>	USS <i>Cabot</i>
France	France	Spain
<i>Bois Belleau</i> (R97)	<i>Lafayette</i> (R96)	<i>Dedalo</i> (R01)
Comm: 23 Dec 53	Comm: 1951	Loan: 30 Aug 67
Decom: 12 Dec 60	Decom: 1963	Struck: 1989

SAIPAN-CLASS LIGHT FLEET CARRIERS

In addition to the nine *Independences*, the US Navy completed two other light fleet carriers, post-World War II. *Saipan* and *Wright* were follow-on ships to the earlier light fleet carriers. Their design remedied some of the problems the *Independence*-class had suffered. With a hull design based on the *Baltimore*-class heavy cruisers, the 683-foot, 19,086-ton *Saipans* were a little larger. Instead of being fitted with above water-line bulges, their hulls were widened several feet at the design stage, allowing a much greater growth margin than their predecessors. The general configuration of *Saipan* and *Wright* was the same as the earlier CVLs.⁷

Neither ship saw any combat duty as light fleet aircraft carriers. Both were decommissioned following their service as carriers, then later brought out of “mothballs” and reconfigured for other duties. Following *Saipan*’s conversion to Major Communications Relay Ship,

and renaming as *Arlington* (AGMR-2), she served off Vietnam in the late 1960s. Her duties included relaying communications between “top brass” in the Pentagon and combat commanders in theater. She was decommissioned on 14 January 1970.⁸

Wright (former CVL-49 and AVT-7) was converted to a National Emergency Command Post Afloat in March 1962. Fitted with extensive presidential command and control facilities, she was redesignated *Wright* (CC-2). Her service to the Navy ended a little after *Saipan*'s. She was decommissioned on 27 May 1970.

Photo Preface-3



USS *Wright* (CC-2) under way on 17 June 1963, following her conversion to National Emergency Command Post Afloat. An extensive array of large communications antennas was installed on her flight deck to provide presidential command facilities. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 97621

***Saipan*-class Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers**

Ship	Comm	Decom
Light Fleet Aircraft Carrier <i>Saipan</i> (CVL-48)	14 Jul 1946	3 Oct 1957
Major Communications Relay Ship <i>Arlington</i> (AGMR-2)	27 Aug 1966	14 Jan 1970
Light Fleet Aircraft Carrier <i>Wright</i> (CVL-49)	9 Feb 1947	15 Mar 1956
National Emergency Command Post Afloat (CC-2) ⁹	11 May 1963	27 May 1970

THE ROYAL NAVY'S LIGHT FLEET CARRIERS

Ten *Colossus*-class light fleet aircraft carriers were built in UK shipyards in the 1940s to Royal Navy design. They, like their American cousins, were intended to serve as an intermediate step between the expensive, full-size fleet aircraft carriers and less costly but limited-capability escort carriers. Sixteen of these ships were laid down in 1942 and 1943. However, only eight were completed to the specified design; of these only four entered service before the end of the war, and none saw front-line combat operations in WWII.¹⁰

Four of the *Colossuses*—HMS *Triumph*, HMS *Theseus*, HMS *Ocean*, and HMS *Glory*—served, along with the Australian and American light fleet carriers HMAS *Sydney* and USS *Bataan*, in the Korean War. HMS *Warrior* was deployed as a transport for troops and aircraft to support British forces during the conflict, but did not engage in combat and did not receive battle honours.

Photo Preface-4



Light fleet carrier HMS *Triumph* off Subic Bay, Philippines, during joint U.S. and UK naval exercises, 8 March 1950. Planes on her deck include Supermarine Seafire 47s of 800 Squadron, forward, and Fairey Fireflys aft.

Naval History and Heritage Command photograph #NH 97010

Colossus-class Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers

695 feet, 18,000 tons, 23.3-foot draft, 25 knots, 1,050 ship's complement
 Four Admiralty 3-drum boilers, Parsons turbines (40,000hp), 2 shafts
 Six 4-barrelled 2-pounder AA guns, sixteen twin 20mm Oerlikon AA guns
 (all weapons later replaced by 40mm Bofors in varying configurations)
 Full flight deck and hangar for up to 52 aircraft

Ship	Builder	Comm	Paid off
HMS <i>Colossus</i> (R61)	Vickers-Armstrong Shipbuilding, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK	16 Dec 44	1946 UK
HMS <i>Glory</i> (R62)	Harland & Wolff Shipbuilding, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK	2 Apr 45	1956 UK
HMS <i>Ocean</i> (R68)	Stephen & Sons Shipbuilding, Glasgow, Scotland, UK	8 Aug 45	1960 UK
HMS <i>Venerable</i> (R63)	Cammell-Laird Shipbuilding, Birkenhead, UK	17 Jan 45	April 1947 UK
HMS <i>Vengeance</i> (R71)	Swan Hunter Shipbuilding, Wallsend, Tyne and Wear, UK	15 Jan 45	April 1952 UK
HMS <i>Pioneer</i> (R76)	Vickers-Armstrong Shipbuilding, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK (maintenance carrier)	8 Feb 45	1954 UK
HMS <i>Warrior</i> (R31)	Harland & Wolff Shipbuilding, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK	2 Apr 45	April 1946 UK
HMS <i>Theseus</i> (R64)	Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering, Govan, Glasgow, Scotland, UK	9 Feb 46	1957 UK
HMS <i>Triumph</i> (R16)	R&W Hawthorn Leslie & Company, Tyneside, UK	9 May 46	1975 UK
HMS <i>Perseus</i> (R51)	Vickers-Armstrong Shipbuilding, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK (maintenance carrier) ¹¹	19 Oct 45	1957 UK

As indicated in the table, two of these ten carriers—HMS *Pioneer* and HMS *Perseus*—were fitted with maintenance and repair facilities instead of aircraft catapults and arresting gear, and entered service as aircraft maintenance carriers.¹²

POST-ROYAL NAVY SERVICE IN FOREIGN NAVIES

Following their service to the Royal Navy, four *Colossus*-class light fleet carriers collectively sailed under the flags of Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, France, and the Netherlands. *Vengeance* and *Warrior* first assisted the Commonwealth countries Australia and Canada in developing their fledgling aircraft carrier programs. Later acquired by Brazil and Argentina, respectively, the World War II-vintage ships continued their long service and, in the case of *Vengeance*, until October

2001. Only the Australian and Canadian service of these ships is covered in this book.



Royal Navy and Subsequent Service of *Colossus*-class Ships

HMS <i>Colossus</i>	HMS <i>Venerable</i>	HMS <i>Vengeance</i>	HMS <i>Warrior</i>
France	Netherlands	Australia	Canada
<i>Arromanches</i> (R95)	HNLMS <i>Karel Doorman</i> (R81)	HMAS <i>Vengeance</i> (R71)	HMCS <i>Warrior</i> (R31)
Acquired: 1946	Comm: 28 May 48	Comm: 13 Nov 52	Comm: 14 Mar 46
Decom: 1974	Decom: 29 Apr 68	Decom: 25 Oct 55	Decom: 23 Mar 48
	Argentina	Brazil	Argentina
	<i>Veinticinco de Mayo</i>	<i>Minas Gerais</i> (A11)	<i>Independencia</i> (V1)
	Comm: 12 Mar 69	Comm: 6 Dec 60	Comm: 8 Jul 59
	Decom: 1997	Decom: 16 Oct 01	Decom: 1970

After decommissioning, HNLMS *Karel Doorman* was transferred to Argentina and renamed ARA *Veinticinco de Mayo*, where she would later play a role in the 1982 Falkland Islands Conflict. She was commissioned into the Argentine Navy on 12 March 1969 and finally decommissioned in 1997. After being stripped of spares to support the Brazilian carrier *Minas Gerais*, *Veinticinco de Mayo* was scrapped in India in 2000.¹⁵

MAJESTIC (MODIFIED COLOSSUS) CLASS SHIPS

The final six, of the sixteen *Colossus*-class light fleet aircraft carriers laid down, were modified during construction to handle larger and faster aircraft. Redesignated the *Majestic*-class, their construction was suspended at the end of World War II. Five were eventually completed with the last one commissioning in 1961. These ships were transferred, loaned, or sold to Australia, Canada, and India, assisting these countries in the development of carrier air warfare capabilities.

***Majestic*-class Light Fleet Aircraft Carriers**

- 695-feet, 19,500-tons, 24.9-foot draft, 25 knots, 1,050 ship's complement
- Four Admiralty 3-drum boilers, Parsons turbines (40,000hp), 2 shafts
- Thirty Bofors 40mm AA guns (6 twin/18 single)
- Full flight deck and hangar for up to 52 aircraft

Ship	Builder	Comm	Decom
HMS <i>Majestic</i> (R77)/HMAS <i>Melbourne</i> (R21)	Vickers-Armstrong Shipbuilding, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK (transferred to Australia)	28 Oct 55 RAN	30 May 82 RAN
HMS <i>Terrible</i> (R93)/HMAS <i>Sydney</i> (R17)	HM Dockyard, Devonport, UK (transferred to Australia; aircraft carrier service until 30 May 1958)	16 Dec 48 RAN	12 Nov 73 RAN
HMS <i>Magnificent</i> (R36)/HMCS <i>Magnificent</i> (CVL-21)	Harland & Wolff Shipbuilding, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK (loaned to Canada)	21 Mar 48 RCN	14 Jun 57 RCN
HMS <i>Hercules</i> (R49)/INS <i>Vikrant</i> (R11)	Vickers-Armstrong Shipbuilding, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK (sold to India, 1957)	4 Mar 61 INS	31 Jan 97 INS
HMS <i>Powerful</i> (R-95)/HMCS <i>Bonaventure</i> (CVL-22)	Harland & Wolff Shipbuilding, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK (transferred to Canada) ¹⁴	17 Jan 57 RCN	3 Jul 70 RCN

USN, RN, RAN, AND RCN LIGHT FLEET CARRIERS

A summary of the *Independence*- and *Saipan*-class light fleet aircraft carriers that served in the United States Navy, and those of the British *Colossus* and *Majestic* classes that sailed under the ensigns of the Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy, and Royal Canadian Navy follows:



USS *Bataan*
USS *Belleau Wood*
USS *Cabot*
USS *Compens*
USS *Independence*
USS *Langley*
USS *Monterey*
USS *Princeton*
USS *San Jacinto*
USS *Arlington*
USS *Wright*



HMS *Colossus*
HMS *Glory*
HMS *Ocean*
HMS *Venerable*
HMS *Vengeance*
HMS *Pioneer*
HMS *Warrior*
HMS *Theseus*
HMS *Triumph*
HMS *Perseus*



HMAS *Sydney*
HMAS *Vengeance*
HMAS *Melbourne*



HMCS *Warrior*
HMCS *Magnificent*
HMCS *Bonaventure*

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Turn into the Wind opens with an account of the daring rescue, of a downed fighter pilot on a frozen reservoir in North Korea, by a US Air Force air commando helicopter. Marine Corps major David Cleeland, USMC, was not having a particularly good day on his 101st mission,

lying aside his crashed F4U Corsair, under fire from enemy forces, and with no good options for his survival available. The H-19A Chickasaw then swooped in and picked him up. The normal activities of this “bird” and other three members of H-19 Helicopter Flight based at Seoul City Airbase were so highly classified, they were blended in with elements of the 2157th Air Rescue Squadron. Standard operations for the pilots and aircrews involved nighttime insertion of agents behind enemy lines.

Action-packed Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the six light fleet carriers identified previously that served in the Korean War—four Royal Navy, one Royal Australian Navy, and one US Navy.

The Royal Canadian Navy did not acquire its first carrier (HMCS *Warrior* on loan from Britain) until 1946. However, the RCN’s entry into naval aviation extended back to a fledgling pilot training program undertaken in the closing months of WWI. Pilot training in England ceased at war’s end, but eight Canadians were later awarded RCNAS wings. Chapter 4 takes readers from this point through World War II. Britain, short of personnel for newly built ships coming off the ways, requested that the Royal Canadian Navy operate two RN carriers, with the RN Fleet Air Arm providing the aircraft and aircrews. The RCN commanded and manned HMS *Nabob* and *Puncher*, which participated in combat operations off German-occupied Norway—gaining valuable experience in fleet operations before launching its own carrier program.

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY AIRCRAFT CARRIERS



Chapter 5 describes the sequential service of three aircraft carriers in the Canadian Navy between 1946 and 1970, the first being HMCS *Warrior*. The Royal Navy’s HMS *Warrior* was transferred to the RCN on 14 March 1946 and commissioned HMCS *Warrior* that same day. After her heating system proved insufficient to deal with the cold waters of the North Atlantic, she was transferred to Canada’s west coast until returned to the RN in exchange for a more suitable light fleet carrier, the *Magnificent*.¹⁵

Warrior arrived at Belfast, Northern Ireland, in February 1948. Her crew transferred the stores on board to *Magnificent*, then took possession of their new ship. *Magnificent* operated both fixed and rotary-wing aircraft. The former included Fairey Fireflies and Hawker Sea Furies. In 1953 she participated in the Coronation Spithead Review off Portsmouth, England. (In addition to HMCS *Magnificent*, the light fleet carriers HMS *Persens*, HMS *Theseus*, and HMAS *Sydney* were also present, as were the larger carriers HMS *Eagle*, *Indomitable*, *Implacable*, *Indefatigable*, and *Illustrious*.) Near the end of her Canadian service, *Magnificent* functioned as a transport during the Suez Crisis, carrying a large part of the Canadian peacekeeping force to Egypt, its vehicles parked on her deck. *Magnificent* was decommissioned at Plymouth, England, on 14 June 1957, and turned over to the Royal Navy.¹⁶

Magnificent's successor was HMCS *Bonaventure*, named after the bird sanctuary in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Work on the former HMS *Powerful* had stopped three months after her launching in February 1945. However, the lengthy delay before construction resumed in 1952, allowed improvements to be incorporated. The most significant was an angled flight deck, which provided a longer landing run without sacrificing forward parking space. Other associated improvements included the removal of the unpopular crash barrier, and the addition of a steam catapult and a mirror landing sight. The latter went far in helping to eliminate human error in landing.¹⁷

“Bonnie” was commissioned at Belfast on 17 January 1957, and arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, six months later on 26 June. Unlike her predecessors, *Bonaventure* boasted F2H-3 Banshee jet fighters and CS2F-2 Tracker anti-submarine aircraft as her complement. Over the next thirteen years, she enjoyed a busy career of flight training and participation in anti-submarine exercises with ships of other North Atlantic Treaty Organization nations, and served as the flagship for the commander, Canadian Fleet Atlantic. In March 1964, *Bonaventure* transported Canadian UN forces and materiel to Cyprus. She was paid off on 3 July 1970.¹⁸

POST-WORLD WAR II, COLD WAR, AND VIETNAM WAR SERVICE OF THE US NAVY LIGHT CARRIERS

The service of USS *Bataan*, *Cabot*, and *Monterey*, less the combat duty of *Bataan* during the Korean War, is taken up in Chapter 6. USS *Princeton* was lost during World War II—scuttled following a Japanese dive-bomber attack on 24 October 1944, in which she suffered great damage and loss of life. Of the remaining eight CVLs, seven took part in Operation MAGIC CARPET, to transport home former POWs during

the immediate aftermath of the war. *Independence* participated in nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll in 1946. Her ruined, radioactive hulk was towed to San Francisco and, following study, later sunk off the Californian coast. The remaining seven light carriers were laid up in 1947. Three—*Bataan*, *Cabot*, and *Monterey*—were returned to service, and ultimately, *Cabot*, *Langley*, and *Belleau Wood* were transferred to Allies.

Chapters 7 and 8 introduce readers to the very interesting duty of the two *Saipan*-class ships—*Saipan* and *Wright*—commissioned in 1946 and 1947, respectively. As noted earlier, following service with the fleet as aircraft carriers, *Saipan* was laid up in the Reserve Fleet in 1956, followed by *Wright*, a year later.

Both ships were later “brought out of mothballs” in the early 1960s and, following modification, were utilized for duties other than mobile bases for the operation and support of naval aircraft. *Saipan* was renamed *Arlington*, and served as a major communications relay ship during the Vietnam War. In addition to multiple tours in the combat zone, she also supported the recovery of the Apollo 8, 10, and 11 space capsules.

Photo Preface-5



Painting *Recovered Apollo 11 Module, USS Hornet* by Cliff Young, 1969, depicting the space capsule aboard the recovery ship, the aircraft carrier *Hornet*. *Arlington* was nearby, functioning as a communications relay link for Navy and NASA radio and voice circuits. Naval History and Heritage Command photograph 88-163-AM

During the Cold War, the U.S. government devised top-secret plans to ensure its survival if the Soviet Union launched a nuclear attack. USS *Wright* was specially configured as an Emergency Command Post Afloat, and either she or the USS *Northampton* (CC-1) was always at sea in the Atlantic Ocean, Chesapeake Bay, or shadowing the president around the world, serving as a “Floating White House/Pentagon.” In readiness for a possible national military command role, the ships carried special Joint Chiefs personnel and featured elaborate staterooms with full communications capabilities.¹⁹

Plans also existed for the evacuation and safeguarding personnel for critical government functions, other than the president and his key advisors and senior military leaders. A secret bunker was built beneath Greenbrier, a luxury resort in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, 250 miles southwest of the capital city, to host the U.S. Congress. Members of the Supreme Court were to relocate to the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. To ensure continuity of government finances, the chairman, board of directors, and staff of the Federal Reserve System were to move into a bunker built into a hillside at Culpeper, Virginia, 75 miles south of Washington, D.C.²⁰

COLD WAR CRISES AND HOT SPOTS

The Korean War marked the last combat duty of the USN *Independence*-class ships. Subsequent conflicts/hotspots involved only RN, RCN, and RAN light fleet carriers. These included the Suez Crisis of 1956, and associated peace keeping operations the next year; the Cyprus Crisis, 1963-1964; and the Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation, 1965-1966.

THE SUEZ CRISIS (OPERATION MUSKETEER) 1956

In the summer of 1956 President Nasser of Egypt seized the Suez Canal from the Anglo-French Company which administered it. Some eight weeks prior to this action, Britain had withdrawn its military presence in the Canal Zone, which it had maintained since 1953. In response, the British and French Governments subsequently decided to reoccupy the Canal Zone via a sea and airborne assault of Port Said, Egypt.²¹

On 6 November 1956, aboard HMS *Ocean* and HMS *Theseus*, the Royal Marines of No. 45 Commando unit prepared for the first helicopter-borne assault landing in history. In eighty-three minutes, 22 Sycamore and Whirlwind helicopters from the light fleet carriers landed alongside the statue of canal builder Ferdinand de Lesseps, and put ashore 415 marines and 23 tons of stores. The helicopters then brought in reinforcements and more supplies, and ferried out wounded,

including 18 Marines who had been strafed in error by a Fleet Air Arm fighter-bomber.²²

In a day of street fighting, the Royal Marines seized Port Said, but political pressure from the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations, resulted in military operations being suspended after the objectives had been achieved. Following a cease-fire, the Royal Marines were withdrawn and a UN force took over.²³

THE SUEZ CRISIS UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE (UNEF) PEACE KEEPING OPERATION 1957

In an operation suggested by Canada, a force made up of troops from eleven separate countries was organized to supervise the reopening of the canal and the ceasefire between Egyptians and Israelis. Then Foreign Minister (and later Prime Minister) Lester B. Pearson received consideration for this when awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize. In her penultimate duty in the RCN, HMCS *Magnificent*, known affectionately by her crew as the “Maggie,” transported 406 troops, 233 vehicles, four Otter aircraft, one helicopter, and 400 tons of equipment to Port Said in Egypt.²⁴

Her final mission, before being paid off in June 1957, was to transport home from Scotland to Halifax 59 RCAF Sabre jets, which Canada had been employing as part of their NATO commitment.²⁵

CYPRUS CRISIS OF 1963-1964

Cyprus, a small island in the eastern Mediterranean located south of Turkey, has a very tumultuous history, including the period leading up to and after the island gained independence. In 1960, the former British crown colony became the Republic of Cyprus. However, long-standing conflict between the Greek Cypriot majority and the Turkish Cypriot minority continued and, because of this unrest, Cyprus asked the UN to establish a peacekeeping force for the island in 1964.²⁶

In March 1964, HMCS *Bonaventure* transported Canadian Army peacekeeping elements to Cyprus. A large Canadian contingent served on the island from 1964 to 1993, and today, a small Canadian Armed Forces presence remains there as UN peace efforts continue. More than 25,000 Canadian Armed Forces members have served in Cyprus over the decades, and this effort is one of Canada’s longest and best-known overseas military commitments.²⁷

MALAYSIA 1964-1966

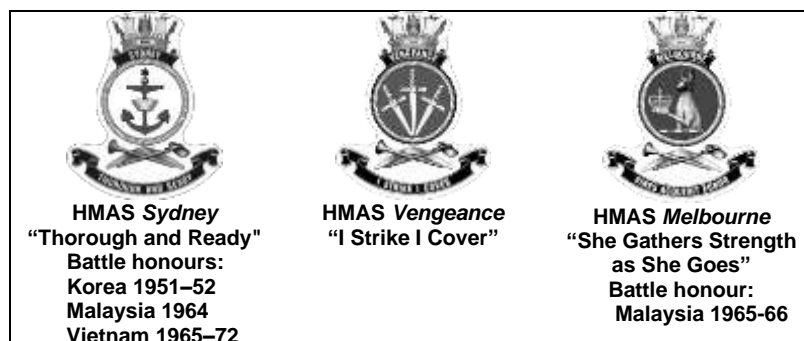
Between 1962 and 1966, Indonesia and Malaysia fought a small, undeclared war which came to involve military forces from Australia, New Zealand, and Britain. The conflict resulted from Indonesia's President Sukarno believing that the creation of the Federation of Malaysia represented a British attempt to maintain colonial rule behind the cloak of independence granted to its former possessions in southeast Asia. Malaysia was officially formed in September 1963, when what had been British Malaya (nine Malay states and the British Straits Settlements Penang and Malacca) united with the Singapore, North Borneo, and Sarawak Crown Colonies.²⁸

Australia's commitment of military forces to operations against Indonesia in Borneo and West Malaysia fell within the context of its membership in the Far East Strategic Reserve. Australian Army units fighting ashore during the Confrontation, as part of a larger British and Commonwealth force under British command, were supported by ships of the Royal Australian Navy serving in surrounding waters.²⁹

Two of the fleet units were light fleet carriers. HMAS *Melbourne* garnered Battle Honours MALAYSIA 1965-66 battling communist uprisings. HMAS *Sydney* (the RAN's most decorated carrier) had earlier earned Battle Honours MALAYSIA 1964, adding to battle honours for KOREA 1951-52, and preceding those for VIETNAM 1965-1972.

Among the officers and men who served aboard light fleet carriers in the American, British, Canadian, and Australian navies, former crewmembers of HMAS *Sydney* have bragging rights as being the last such engaged in war duty, before departing Vietnam for the last time in March 1972. (*Sydney* was then functioning as a troop transport). USS *Arlington*, serving as a major communications relay ship, earned her last Vietnam Service Medal for the period 26 June to 8 July 1969.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY AIRCRAFT CARRIERS



The final two chapters of the book and the Postscript, authored by Commodore Hector Donohue AM RAN (Retired), introduce readers to the rich history of the Royal Australian Navy's former aircraft carrier program. This warfare capability, like that of Canada, perished as a result of limited military funding, and fierce interservice fighting for those monies.

The next four pages of the Preface provide schema for Chapter 9, aptly titled "The Australian Aircraft Carrier Program."

In 1947 the Australian government decided to acquire two of the *Majestic*-class carriers for the Royal Australian Navy. Work therefore resumed on HMS *Terrible*, which was to be the first "flattop" operated by the RAN. She was handed over to Australia during a ceremony at Devonport, England, on 16 December 1948, at which she was renamed HMAS *Sydney*, and went into service on 5 February 1949 under the command of Capt. Roy Russell Dowling, DSO RAN.³⁰

Photo Preface-6



HMAS *Sydney* at anchor in an unidentified harbor during the Korean War. The *Sydney* was mainly involved in patrolling off the western coast of Korea, while its Hawker Sea Fury aircraft of 805 and 808 Squadrons, and Fairey Firefly aircraft of 817 Squadron, carried out strikes against North Korean units and supply lines. Australian War Memorial photograph P05890.033

Sydney and the planes of her embarked air groups engaged in extensive combat in the Korea War. In 1962, *Sydney* was converted to a fast troop transport. Two years later, owing to tensions associated with Indonesia's opposition to the creation of the Malaysian State, she engaged in her first operational tasking since the Korean War.³¹

After embarking Army personnel, vehicles, and operational cargo in Sydney at the Fitting Out Wharf at Garden Island, *Sydney* sailed shortly after midnight on 25 May 1964 with 1,245 personnel on board. Her tasking was to transport the soldiers and equipment to Malaysia as

part of the Australian Army's commitment to the confrontation. *Sydney* and her escorts arrived at Jesselton, Borneo, on 4 June, and discharged all personnel, vehicles, stores and equipment for that location by noon the following day. Leaving Jesselton, she proceeded to Singapore, then Penang on the northwest coast of peninsular Malaysia, and discharged the remainder of her cargo. She then set a course for Fremantle, arriving on 26 June, via a stop at Sumatra, a large island located to the west of Java and south of the Malay Peninsula.³²

On 29 April 1965, the Australian Government made the decision to commit an infantry battalion to serve in South Vietnam. *Sydney* subsequently received orders to make preparations to transport the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) to Vung Tau. This military commitment was increased on 8 March 1966, to a force of approximately 4,500 men. Establishment of the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF), based in Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy Province, required the deployment of 5RAR battalion and 6RAR battalion. With Australian ground forces well established in Vietnam, *Sydney* began a regular deployment pattern of ferrying troops to and from Australia, disembarking one battalion at Vung Tau and back loading another for the return passage to Australia.³³

She regained some air capability when a detachment of four Wessex MK 31A helicopters from 725 Squadron was embarked in April 1967, to provide additional anti-submarine protection during transits. The Wessex Flight was later replaced by a similar flight, with the detachment (Flight) usually drawn from a component of the HMAS *Melbourne* Carrier Air Group.³⁴

Australia's combat role in the Vietnam War ceased in March 1972 when HMAS *Sydney* transported home the last combat elements. She was decommissioned the following year on 12 November 1973.³⁵

SHORT SERVICE OF HMAS VENGEANCE

Thirty-one years earlier, HMS *Vengeance* had been commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy as HMAS *Vengeance*, on loan from the Royal Navy, at Devonport, England, on 13 November 1952. She arrived at Sydney on 11 March 1953, having proceeded via Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, the Suez Canal, Colombo, Fremantle, and Melbourne. Following a three-month refit, *Vengeance* began operations with the Australian fleet in June 1953, working up in preparation for a deployment to Korea. At the end of July, it was announced that HMAS *Sydney* would deploy to Korea in lieu of *Vengeance*.³⁶

Her duties over the next three years included serving as escort ship for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip (the Duke of Edinburgh),

during a trip by the Royal Party aboard the Royal yacht SS *Gothic* (a former passenger-cargo liner) to the Cocos Islands.³⁷

Following her return to Australia, *Vengeance* later departed Sydney on 27 October 1954 for Japan to embark aircraft, men and equipment of No. 77 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, and return them to Australia. *Vengeance* sailed from Sydney for the final time, on 16 June 1955, to commence the long passage to England and her return to the Royal Navy. Aboard her were almost 1,000 officers and sailors who were to commission HMAS *Melbourne*.³⁸

Vengeance arrived at Devonport, on 13 August 1955, at which time administrative control was assumed by the Senior Officer Reserve Fleet, Plymouth. She was decommissioned, on 25 October 1955, and turned over to the Royal Navy. HMAS *Melbourne* was commissioned three days later, on 28 October 1955.³⁹

EXTENSIVE SERVICE OF HMAS MELBOURNE

The first aircraft to touch down on *Melbourne*'s flight deck, the former HMS *Majestic*, was a Westland Whirlwind helicopter of the Royal Navy, on 6 December 1955. Thereafter, the first fixed-wing aircraft, a Hawker de Havilland Sea Venom and a Fairey Gannet, arrived during trials in the English Channel. *Melbourne* left Glasgow, Scotland, for Australia, on 11 March 1956, with 808 Squadron (Sea Venom all-weather fighters) and 816 and 817 Squadrons (Gannet anti-submarine aircraft) embarked.⁴⁰

Melbourne arrived at Sydney, on 9 May 1956, with thousands of people turned out to watch her enter the harbour. Three days later, she replaced HMAS *Sydney* as the flagship of the RAN when Rear Adm. Henry Mackay Burrell 'broke' (hoisted) his flag in her. In September, *Melbourne* sailed for what was to be the first of many deployments to South East Asia. The Australian Government had by this time committed naval forces to what became known as the Far East Strategic Reserve, which provided for the annual participation of an aircraft carrier in training exercises as part of the RAN's contribution. The deployment was also notable as it was the only occasion on which both RAN aircraft carriers, *Melbourne* and *Sydney*, deployed overseas together.⁴¹

Over the next several years, *Melbourne* maintained a regular program of fleet exercises, training and maintenance, and annual deployments to the Asia-Pacific region.⁴²

Australian budgetary constraints from the late 1950s had placed some doubt over the future of naval aviation, given the large financial outlay required to operate aircraft carriers and their associated aircraft.

A two-carrier navy was no longer feasible, and HMAS *Sydney* was relegated to a training vessel before being placed into reserve in 1958. To save costs, a decision was made to eliminate fixed-wing naval aviation in 1963, when *Melbourne* became due for a major refit, and retain her in an anti-submarine capacity. Twenty-seven Westland Wessex anti-submarine helicopters were ordered, the first having come into service in November 1962. Nevertheless, the service life of the Sea Venoms and the Gannets was extended past 1963.⁴³

While deployed on a South East Asia cruise in 1965, *Melbourne* joined HMAS *Sydney*'s escort force for four days during the troop carrier's voyage to Vietnam in early June. The Royal Australian Navy received a boost that year with the decision to re-equip its Fleet Air Arm with Douglas A4G Skyhawk fighter bombers and Grumman S2E Tracker anti-submarine warfare aircraft. The Douglas and McDonnell aircraft companies later merged, and the Skyhawk was known as the McDonnell-Douglas Skyhawk by the time it entered RAN service.⁴⁴

The standard routine of South East Asia cruises and fleet exercises was broken in 1977, when *Melbourne* made a 5-month cruise to Europe for the Royal Silver Jubilee and Naval Review. (These events marked the 25th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the thrones of the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth realms.) On 28 June, with some 175 ships from 18 nations (and around 30,000 sailors embarked) assembled at the Spithead anchorage, Her Majesty's Yacht *Britannia* with the queen aboard anchored at the head of the review columns. After weighing anchor, she proceeded down the lines, conducting the review over the course of two hours.⁴⁵

Melbourne arrived back in Sydney on 4 October 1977. In February 1982, the Australian government announced that arrangements had been made to purchase HMS *Invincible* from the Royal Navy to replace the ageing *Melbourne*. HMAS *Melbourne* was decommissioned on 30 June 1982. Subsequently, Britain decided it was necessary to retain the aircraft carrier following lessons learned during the 10-week Falklands War with Argentina (2 April-14 June 1982), and the RAN lost many of the advantages accorded by the carrier it had hitherto enjoyed in the Pacific region.⁴⁶

AUSTRALIAN FLEET AIR ARM

Following the introduction in Chapter 9 of the ships that carried the aircraft and crews of the Royal Australian Navy's Fleet Air Arm, Chapter 10 takes readers inside the world of carrier pilots. The chapter's title, "Some Australian Fleet Air Arm Personalities," provides a hint of the material that follows. The twenty-two pages—offering gripping

action, colorful escapades, and humorous misadventure—begin with a short first-hand account by Capt. Jeffrey Gledhill, DSC RAN, of his combat experience during World War II. We then join (vicariously) Robert Bluett and Peter McNay, two officers on loan from the Royal Navy, dispatched to shoot down a pilotless aircraft (this occurred only by accident back then) loose in the skies over Sydney, posing potential danger to citizens and property below.

Next, Commodore Norman Lee, RAN (Retired), a junior Firefly pilot embarked aboard HMAS *Sydney* during the Korean War, treats us to a very detailed and thorough account by of the tactics employed in carrying out combat missions. Navy duty could also be dangerous aboard ship, as recounted by Thomas Henry, a young Able Seaman aboard *Sydney*, a chockman who found himself in peril when the pilot of a Sea Fury undertook a power run with his aircraft chocked, and lashed to ringbolts in the flight deck. As Henry remained in position, engine power dramatically increased, and the lashings started to part....

Ian Webster, apparently the first Sea Fury pilot to ditch at sea, did so successfully and was in his dinghy fishing, having already eaten all the food aboard, when *Sydney's* rescue boat came to his aid. Conventional wisdom was that ditching was not possible, because the heavy engine nosing down would cause the aircraft to flip. Despite engine failure and his plane falling like a stone, Webster pulled off this seemingly impossible feat. Chapter 10 closes with an account of the first ejection in the RAN and the first such from a Sea Venom jet aircraft. Brian Dutch and Edward “Sandy” Sandberg also lived to tell others, with much exactness, of how this was possible.

POSTSCRIPT

Commodore Donohue's postscript provides a nice introduction to an individual whose career closely paralleled and, was in fact, intertwined with the RAN aircraft carrier program. During his lengthy military career, begun in 1940 with the New Zealand Waikato Mounted Rifles, Commander Guy Alexander Beange, DSC RAN (Retired) served as both a soldier and naval aviator in the New Zealand military, and later joined the Royal Australian Navy. Working his way up from junior enlisted man to commissioned officer over the course of World War II, he reported to HMS *Glory*, which joined the British Pacific Fleet in August 1945, too late to see combat. *Glory* was off Rabaul when Japanese forces there surrendered to the General Officer Commanding 1st Australian Army, on 6 September 1945.

Beange joined the RAN in 1948 as a Lieutenant (Pilot) (Acting) (on Probation) and over the next thirty-one years until his retirement in

1979, repeatedly validated Australia's decision to offer him an officer's commission, albeit a probationary opportunity. Beange would be one of only three RAN naval aviators to earn the Distinguished Service Cross in the Korean War. His came while embarked aboard HMAS *Sydney*. During the war, Beange also commanded 808 Squadron aboard HMAS *Vengeance*. Following the war, he took command of the corvette HMAS *Junee* in 1956. Built as a minesweeper in World War II, the still relatively-new, 13-year old *Junee* was then employed as a training ship.

Photo Preface-7



Corvette HMAS *Junee* (J362), date and location unknown.
RAN photograph

Returning to flying, Beange commanded 805 Squadron embarked aboard HMAS *Melbourne*. The remainder of his career was occupied with a series of shore assignments, including diplomatic duty as the Australian Service attaché to Manila. Late in his career, Beange served as Command Aviation Officer to Flag Officer commanding East Australia. He retired in 1979, and “crossed the bar” (passed away) in 2004. Little known today outside aviation circles, he gave much to the RAN and will always be closely linked to its aircraft carrier history.

USE OF QUEEN'S ENGLISH IN PARTS OF THE BOOK

American readers may have noticed the use in some forewords and the preface of what Rob Hoole (retired Royal Navy mine clearance diver) terms “English, English.” Such involves the use of the letter “u” in certain words, creating, for example, harbour, honour, and colour in lieu of the American versions of harbor, honor, and color. Other differences involve the use of “c” and “s” in words non-citizens of Commonwealth countries would expect to find an “s” or a “z.” Defence and minimise are two examples. These and similar words will

be found in Chapters 4 and 5, penned by Canadian George Duddy, and Chapters 9 and 10 and the Postscript by Australian Hector Donohue.

EXPLANATION OF “STONE FRIGATES”

As most readers are aware, the acronyms HMS and HMAS mean “His or Her Majesty’s Ship” or “His or Her Majesty’s Australian Ship,” respectively, depending on whether a king or queen is sitting on the throne. Ship names that follow HMS or HMAS are italicized to denote their connection to a vessel. So far so good. However, HMS or HMAS may also be associated with the names of shore establishments that provide, ashore, functions previously carried out by an afloat vessel.

Prior to the first of January 1959, the Naval Discipline Act only applied to those officers and men who were carried on the books of one of His or Her Majesty’s ships of war. Thus, all personnel were allocated to a nominal ship when not actually serving in a proper seagoing warship. This peculiar ordinance even affected Naval Air Stations which were given names prefixed with HMS. This custom was a legacy from the days when anchored hulks served most of the Navy’s accommodation, administrative, accounting, and training needs afloat; the only shore facilities were small outposts or the Royal Dockyards where ships were built and repaired.

To try to minimize confusion between real ships and non-ships, the names of the so-called “stone frigates” are not italicized in this book, although such is the convention in the Royal Australian Navy.

Photo Preface-8



Painting by Richard DeRosset of the rescue by a USAF air commando helicopter of a downed Marine fighter pilot from a frozen reservoir in North Korea, while under fire by enemy troops.