

Foreword

David Bruhn's *Turn into the Wind Volume II* provides a valuable insight into the U.S.- and British-built light fleet carriers, that served in the US Navy, Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in the Korean War, Cold War and Vietnam War. The book concludes with the decommissioning of HMAS *Melbourne* in 1982 and the cessation of fixed-wing carrier flying in the RAN.

The Korean War has been referred to as the 'Forgotten War' in terms of both public interest and historical research. But for those who served there, Korea was a deadly conflict against a well-armed and disciplined enemy. The detailed descriptions in the book of the impact that light fleet carriers made, provides a valuable insight into that war. From the British Commonwealth forces perspective, the most conspicuous role in the war was undertaken by the British and Australian light fleet carriers. Their performance was assessed as outstanding but rendered possible only by the virtual absence of enemy air activity. However, despite this, the results achieved demanded extremely hard work, much improvisation, machinery driven to the limit and the acceptance of calculated risks.

HMAS *Sydney's* Carrier Air Group performance must have been of particular satisfaction to her Executive Officer, Commander VAT Smith, (later Admiral Sir Victor Smith) who only a few years earlier had been instrumental in the planning and execution of forming the new Air Arm – an exercise fraught by the politics of the day. In the post-World War II force structure planning process in Australia, it had been accepted within the defence establishment that a balanced naval task force should include aircraft carriers and that these should be included in the RAN's force structure. The issue remained whether the RAN should manage naval air or whether the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) should perform the task.

Convinced that effective air power required unity of effort and maximum flexibility of employment, the RAAF firmly believed that it should maintain overall command of both land-based and ship-borne aircraft. The RAN in contrast, feared the withdrawal of operational control in national emergency and stressed the uniqueness of naval service and the need to weld a ship's company – including its embarked aircrew - into a cohesive unit. With air force recording its strong dissent, the Council of Defence accepted the naval arguments and on 15 August

1947, Cabinet endorsed the decision to create a separate Naval (later Fleet) Air Arm.

The Fleet Air Arm (FAA) came into being with the commissioning in 1948 of the Naval Air Station at Nowra, HMAS Albatross, with two Naval Air Squadrons, 805 equipped with the Hawker Sea Fury FB11, a single seat fighter-bomber and 816 with the Fairey Firefly Mk 5 two-seat armed reconnaissance/strike and anti-submarine aircraft. Prior to this, an extensive recruitment drive was undertaken to seek personnel for the new branch. The obvious lack of trained Australian personnel necessitated significant reliance on experienced Royal Navy (RN) officers in both operational and training capacities.

For these first FAA trainee pilots and the many who followed, the RAAF conducted the initial flight training until trainees reached a level of competence where they were awarded their 'wings'. Following this milestone, FAA aircrew completed their training in a wholly maritime environment. In the 1940s Australia did not possess either the trained instructors, facilities, ships or the aircraft to ensure their naval aviators reached the required competence so, once again, the RN and her Fleet Air Arm filled the breach while training was conducted in UK.

When the British Pacific Fleet came to Australia in the latter part of the war, about 24 RAAF pilots volunteered to transfer to the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RANVR) and they subsequently served aboard RN aircraft carriers and at RN Air Stations established in Australia. Post-war many joined the RAN's new FAA. During *Sydney's* deployment to Korea six aircrew had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and one a Distinguished Flying Medal, from their time in the RAAF.

Photo Foreword-1



Group portrait of 12 former Royal Australian Air Force, (RAAF), pilots, who were the first group selected for training as naval aviators with the British Pacific Fleet (Fleet Air Arm), HMS Nabthorpe, at Schofields, NSW. Back row from left: Acting Sub-Lieutenant (A/Sub Lt) Leslie John Norton, of Sydney, NSW, killed in a flying accident at Schofields on 29 November 1945; A/Sub Lt Robert Lindsay Davies (later Lieutenant Commander, (Lt Cmdr)), of Adelaide, SA; A/Sub Lt John Bradley (Jack) O'Connor, of Yarrowonga, Vic, formerly of 80 Squadron (Sqn), RAAF; A/Sub Lt Charlie Bowley, who later crash landed, going over the side of HMS *Indomitable* but was rescued by a following destroyer; Acting Lieutenant (A/Lt) Kenneth Brian Innes Smith, of Adelaide, SA, formerly of 80 Squadron, RAAF, A/Lt George Edward Pagan, of Damar, Qld; A/Lt Arthur John 'Nat' Gould, of Queensland, 2 Operational Training Unit and formerly of 75 and 457 Sqns, RAAF; A/Lt Clifford Herald Gray of Dungog, NSW. Front row: A/Sub Lt George Firth Spencer 'Spanky' Brown, DFC, (later Lt Cmdr) of Echuca, Vic, formerly of 8 Operational Training Unit, who was killed in a flying accident on 5 January 1956; A/Lt Roy Clayson 'Shorty' Carroll, of Blackall, Qld, formerly of 1 Aircraft Depot; A/Sub Lt Philip Crothers, of Northhampton, WA, formerly of 2 Operational Training Unit; A/Lt Ian Sandford Loudon, of Port Moresby, PNG, formerly of 76 Sqn, RAAF. (AWM)

Sydney's initial Carrier Air Group comprised experienced RN personnel and RN trained RAN recruits who were joined by HMAS Albatross trained Safety Equipment, Aircraft Handler, Ordnance and Photography recruits. Almost all the key air related positions in *Sydney* during that deployment were RN loan officers including: Commander Air, Operations Officer, Deck Landing Officer, Carrier Air Group Commander and two of the three Squadron Commanding Officers.

Turn into the Wind Volume II describes the evolution, deployment and the ultimate demise of the aircraft carrier within the RAN's force structure. Aviation within the maritime environment was and remains a versatile weapon in any modern navy and after finally coming into

existence in 1948, the Australian Fleet Air Arm operated from the three Australian aircraft carriers: HMA Ships *Sydney*, *Vengeance* and *Melbourne* as well as the shore establishment at Nowra, HMAS Albatross. These carriers embarked, operated and fully maintained various fixed-wing aircraft and the naval personnel needed for operational deployments until 1982. These deployments included contributions to national and multinational combat, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

The FAA deployed a helicopter Flight to Vietnam with aircrew and maintenance personnel from 723 Squadron serving in-country with the United States Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company from October 1967 until June 1971. This is outlined in David Bruhn's *Gators Offshore and Upriver* pages 85 – 87.

The FAA met every operational challenge during its years of service but faced its most significant challenge in 1982, when the newly elected Labor Government made the decision not to replace *Melbourne*, the last of the aging aircraft carriers. Several factors influenced this decision, including the end of the Cold War and the prohibitive cost of replacing and operating both an aircraft carrier and its associated aircraft.

Although it was a testing time, this major transition from fixed wing to rotary wing aircraft was ultimately very successful and the role of the FAA was expanded rather than curtailed by the transformation. This was a major turning point for Australian Naval Aviation; with the FAA concentrating on helicopters and adapting to flight operations from frigates and destroyers. Today, the Fleet Air Arm continues its role in providing sea-borne air power with the focus on the embarked helicopters.

The Fleet Air Arm has seen active service in Korea, the Malaya Emergency, Indonesian Confrontation, Vietnam, the Gulf War, East Timor and more recently, the War Against Terrorism. Since 1948, the FAA has operated 22 different types of aircraft - a real challenge to the aircrew and the maintenance personnel. It has forged a proud tradition over the years. a tradition of professional service and outstanding achievements.

Turn in to the Wind Volume II puts into perspective the impact of light fleet carriers in four navies' force structure. The book provides a valuable insight into the role of carriers in the post-World War II era and the professionalism of those personnel involved in flying and maintaining this unique capability.

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