



SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

RAAF 'Rocket Man'

From WGCDR Barry Schulz, AFC

In July 1995 I was posted to DSTO (DTRIALS-AF) and, in November 1995, was appointed as Project 'DUNDEE' Range Controller. The Project was conducted between November 1995 and September 1997.

Project DUNDEE (**Down UNDER Early-warning Experiment**) was a series of missile defence experiments conducted in September 1997 by the US Ballistic Missile Defence Organization (BMDO) and the Australian Defence Science and Technology Organization (DSTO). The purpose of DUNDEE was to test whether Australia's Jindalee Over-The-Horizon Radar (OTHR) and other HF sensors could detect theatre ballistic missile launches at long ranges. During these experiments, the BMDO and the DSTO launched four Terrier-Orion tactical surface-to-air rockets, modified with radar cross-sections that resembled typical theatre ballistic missiles. The four missiles were fired from a coastal military launch area on the northwest corner of Australia between Broome and Port Hedland, and travelled 100 km out to sea. The BMDO and DSTO were thus able to test the capacity of a range of land and space-based sensors, including the Jindalee OTHR based near Alice Springs. In the end, the Jindalee radar worked as expected, and the experiments were successful.

Project DUNDEE exists today as a high-profile example of international contribution to US missile defence development, and evidence of Australia's close relationship with the United States. although Australia's former minister for defence Ian McLachlan remarked at the time that Australia had no plans to develop its own theatre missile defence system. He noted that it was important to acquire an understanding of missile defence technologies.

In July 2004, the United States and Australia signed a memorandum of understanding pledging cooperation on missile defence for the next twenty-five years.

As Range Controller, I had a permanent staff of a Sensor Controller and a Ground Support Controller. The Sensor Controller designed, built and managed communications, audio and video equipment for all DUNDEE operations. This entailed provision of:

- an Operations Room with audio, visual and electronic recording of all DUNDEE operations
- a VHF repeater station to enable VHF communications across the DUNDEE sites
- Satellite communications with external agencies (Anna Plains Station had only one unreliable telephone line)
- creating 10 km of 32 twisted pair cable which had to be joined at each one km length
- Video coverage of the launch platform.

The Ground Support Controller managed:

- Design and contracting of:
 - the launch pad and adjacent support area construction
 - 10 km of compacted gravel roads to support operations
 - electrical power and support structure for all DUNDEE operations

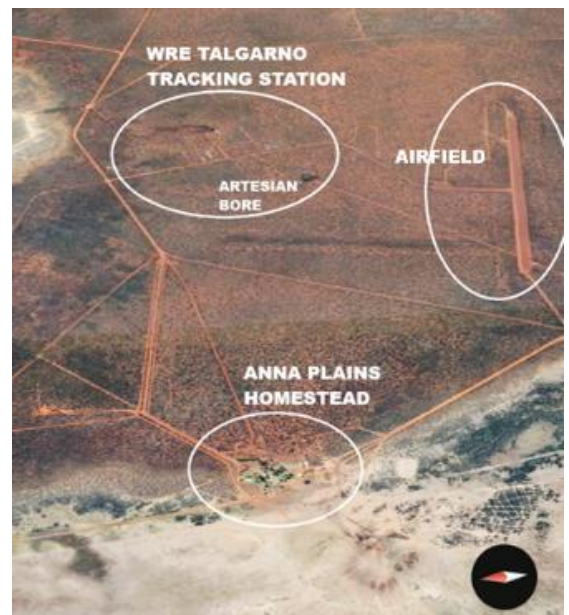
- Provision of:
 - 10 km of water pipe and a tank to support fire-fighting capability
 - fuel depots and fuel re-supply in support of all operations
 - transportation assets before, during and after DUNDEE operations.

The team planned and developed the Range area after consulting with:

- Defence (Army, Navy and Air Force) for manpower and support including:
 - RAAF deployable Air Defence Radar – airspace surveillance,
 - RAN Patrol Boat – surveillance of maritime range impact area,
 - Civil Air surveillance – surveillance of maritime range impact area,
 - RAAF and Army military vehicles – ambulance, fire trucks
- Aboriginal Land Councils – land clearance
- WA Dept of Environment – Environmental Impact Statement
- Anna Plains Station management
 - Access to grazing land,
 - Coordination of cattle movements,
 - Building / improving roads,
 - Adding water pipes and tanks
 - Provision and storage of large fuel tanks
- CASA – to conduct safe operations within Australia airspace, NOTAMS.
- Maritime Safety Authority – to conduct safe operations offshore, NOTAMS.
- WA Police – to conduct safe operations within Anna Plains Station perimeter.
- NASA – to clear missile trajectory and spacecraft. The missile apogee was 200 km and sea impact 200 km seaward; a booster fell about 2 km from the launch pad.
- Fishing and Pearling industries. The northern part of the Danger Aea impacted on fishing and pearling activities. Their activity was coordinated through consultation and direct communications during firing periods.
- OH&S – an extremely high-powered LASER was used to track the missile – this required 'lock-down' during the firing period – up to 6 hours.

Site Selection – April - November 1996

My brief was to select and develop a 'green site' in coastal NW Australia between Gove to Port Hedland which was capable of providing a 200 km sector, free of population and sea-land movements, but reasonably accessed for DUNDEE support. Anna Plains station, a million-acre cattle station along 80-Mile Beach between Broome and Port Hedland was the chosen site, with station management overwhelmingly cooperative in assisting with formulating access, coordinating with cattle management, infrastructure development, ground security and accommodation. I subsequently discovered that Anna Plains was host to the 1950s Talgarno Tracking Facility. (*The Talgarno Tracking Station was operational from 1958 to 1964, primarily used for monitoring British Blue Streak rockets that were test-fired from the Woomera Range in South Australia.*) The airfield was still serviceable and was used by RAAF C-130s to support DUNDEE logistics.



Domestic Arrangements

The DUNDEE management team was accommodated at the Anna Plains Station homestead for the duration of the Project. During the operations phase, up to 75 support staff (missile team, US and DSTO HF Radar tracking teams, BMDO and DSTO observers, RAAF radar and ambulance personnel, Army firefighting teams and guards) were accommodated at nearby Sandfire Roadhouse and 80-Mile Beach Caravan Park.

Ballistic Rocket Range - Danger Area



Key

- 1 RAAF Air Defence Radar
- 2 US HF RADAR
- 3 ARDU Optical Tracker
- 4 US Laser Tracker
- 5 DSTO HF RADAR
- 6 DSTO HF RADAR
- O Operations Complex
- L Launcher Complex (launcher 10 nm from occupied areas, 5 nm from cattle/bores)

Project DUNDEE Staff Visit to USA – May 1997

Meetings were conducted with BMDO, missile and tracking sensor providers. At these meetings missile launch operations, launch checklist and procedures were established, including



integration of US HF radar sites and LASER tracking equipment into DUNDEE planning. A prototype was successfully launched at Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia, USA.

A hybrid missile was manufactured, consisting of Terrier-Orion stages with a lengthy forebody to emulate a generic ballistic missile cross-section and the electronic characteristics to enable HF radar detection.

Project DUNDEE Missile Firing Campaign – September 1997

During the launch phase I became the Range Safety Officer responsible for the safe conduct of all operational procedures. These duties included adherence to the Launch Checklist which covered a 3-hour countdown while all sensors and the missile preparations were finalized. These pre-launch activities included:

- Land-range clearance by RAAF and Army guards (Anna Plains Station locked down and sign posted as a Defence Danger Area).
- Danger Area air-space clearance by RAAF deployed Air Defence Radar (NOTAMS promulgated).
- Danger Area sea-surface clearance by CIVIL AIR contractors and RAN Patrol Boat (NOTAMS promulgated). Despite NOTAMS, coastal traffic was often detected and redirected. Pearl operators along 80-Mile Beach were affected during launch periods.
- All personnel were restricted within an enclosed habitat for the 3-hour countdown (due to the high-power non-eye safe LASER at 10 km).
- Manning ARMY fire and RAAF ambulance teams – wearing LASER safe goggles when in the field.
- Launches were dictated by wind conditions at the Launcher site and at 30,000 ft to ensure the predicted missile flight-path was contained within the declared Danger Area.

Between 10 to 14 September 1997, four missiles were launched - three day launches and one night launch - transversing 200 km altitude and 100 km down range. All firings were successful and the night firing provided entertainment to local Station personnel as well as road travellers along the adjacent Great Northern Highway!



FAC: Forward Air Controller Commander

From Ken Mitchell DFC, DFC (US), AM (US); Vietnam FAC

On 18 April 1969 I flew to Bien Hoa to pick up a replacement aircraft, and also the newly arrived Aussie FAC, Doug Riding, who was to be my replacement. The next day I flew back to Lai Khe with Doug. On the same day I took part in a mission north west of Lai Khe where intelligence had reported an unusual amount of trail and electronic activity around a particular patch of jungle. It had been decided to mount an operation to investigate the area. Two columns of tanks, APCs and infantry were to approach the area from opposite directions; I hoped that they were not going to shoot each other!

I was the FAC (callsign Sidewinder 32) assigned to support the sweep. Both columns moved off towards each other; they were about one to two clicks apart. They had advanced about a hundred metres when both columns came under rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and automatic weapons fire. The tanks and APCs returned fire and TACAIR was ordered. I suggested to the brigade commander that I mark a hundred metres to the front of both lead tanks and he agreed. The fighters arrived with snake eye bombs and cannon. I requested 'fuse instant' – we wanted to clear the jungle to see what we had. I ordered all the friendlies to button up and take cover.

I commenced the air strikes and the fighter jocks were spot on target. Their first bombs put my smoke out. After the first strike was completed and the dust cleared, I could clearly see the square concrete roofs of bunkers or buildings. It was a very large complex.

At this stage the brigade commander radioed that he was low on gas and was returning to base to refuel. Before his departure he said, 'Sidewinder 32, handing over control until I return.' That meant that he had passed operational control of the sweep over to a RAAF FAC! That's one of the attributes I admired when working with the Yanks, if you demonstrated ability and competence, you got the job, no matter who you were. I often used to think afterwards that I could never imagine this happening if it had been an Australian Army operation.

I was now in charge of directing tanks, APCs and infantry onto the target while in contact. I warned the lead tank commanders what was in front of them and they cautiously moved forward. I was about to commence more air strikes when a startled tank commander called me and awarded the air force a VC POW. A very battered and shell-shocked VC had crawled up onto his tank, tapped him on the shoulder and surrendered! It was decided that more air strikes were not necessary because enemy fire had ceased and VC were surrendering. It was then discovered that we had exposed and damaged an enemy hospital. Unfortunately for the enemy there were no red crosses on display and no one had any way of knowing that it was indeed a hospital. The APCs took hours to load up all the medical supplies from there and transport them back to base.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

VN/68/0096/11

FLTLT Ken Mitchell, RAAF FAC



A Career Forged in Service

From Col Coyne, No 37 Squadron (RAAF) Association

Noel Darr's exemplary Air Force career began in 1958 when he enlisted as an Equipment Assistant — the first step in what would become one of the most distinguished careers ever recorded among RAAF airmen aircrew. His re-muster to Loadmaster in 1967 marked the true beginning of his operational legacy, coinciding with his posting to No. 37 Squadron at RAAF Richmond, the unit that would become his professional home for nearly three decades. Across the following 27 years, Noel served in a succession of Richmond-based postings, including AMTDU and MOVCORDC (now AMCC), yet always returned to his beloved 37 Squadron. His presence became a constant: a mentor, a standard-setter, and ultimately an institution within the unit.



Noel Darr, OAM - Loady extraordinaire

On 9 May 1985, during a task leg from Amberley to Richmond, Noel became the first RAAF Airman Aircrew to surpass 10,000 C-130 flight hours — an achievement unmatched at the time and celebrated across the Air Mobility Group. He continued flying for several more years, ultimately amassing an extraordinary 14,330 flight hours on the Lockheed C-130E Hercules. This total places Noel among the highest-time Hercules aircrew in Australian history, a testament not only to longevity but to unwavering professionalism, reliability, and operational mastery.

On 26 January 1986, Noel Darr was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. The citation recognised his outstanding service as Loadmaster Leader with No. 37 Squadron, a formal acknowledgement of what his peers already knew: Noel embodied the very best of RAAF Air Mobility.

Noel's influence extended far beyond his logged hours. He shaped generations of loadmasters, contributed to the squadron's culture of safety and excellence, and helped cement 37 Squadron's reputation as one of the world's most professional Hercules units. His career stands as a model of dedication, humility, and service — a legacy that continues to inspire today's aircrew. On Saturday, ironically Noel's 89th birthday, he attended a function at the Royal Hotel Richmond celebrating 37SQN's 60 years of C-130 operations, a fitting venue to also celebrate Noel's birthday.



37 Squadron Celebrates 60 Years of C-130 Operations 1966~2026.

From Col Coyne, No 37 Squadron (RAAF) Association

On 23 August 2026, No 37 Squadron marked an extraordinary milestone: sixty years of continuous operation of the C-130 Hercules, with not a single airframe lost throughout this period. When the first C-130E, A97-159, landed at Richmond on that day in 1966, it would have been unimaginable that the squadron would still be flying the same type of aircraft six decades later.

To celebrate this historic occasion, on 22 August, current and former member gathered at the Royal Hotel, Richmond NSW to celebrate 60 years of continuous RAAF C-130 Hercules operations and the Squadron's achievement surpassing 500,000 C-130 flight hours without the loss of an aircraft, an accomplishment envied by global Hercules operators. This success is attributed not only to the aircrew who flew these missions, but also to the maintenance personnel responsible for servicing and repairing the aircraft, as well as the support staff who ensured safe operations. The legacy of this accomplishment reflects the high standard of training and expertise passed down through generations within the RAAF C-130 fraternity.

The event at the Royal Hotel, hosted by the No. 37 Squadron (RAAF) Association, brought together generations of aircrew, maintenance personnel and support staff whose collective professionalism has sustained the Squadron's reputation for safe, reliable and mission-ready air mobility across six decades. The celebration honoured not only the longevity of Hercules service, but the enduring culture of knowledge transfer, technical mastery and operational discipline that has defined 37SQN since the arrival of C-130E A97-159 on 23 August 1966.

The function reaffirmed the 37SQN Association's commitment to preserving the unit history and heritage, recognising all who have worn the Squadron patch over the last six decades. It also underscored the extraordinary contribution of aircrew, maintenance personnel and ancillary staff whose dedication has ensured that the C-130 Hercules remains a cornerstone of Australian air mobility.

A highlight of the event was the attendance of eight former 37SQN Commanding Officers, a rare and historic gathering in its own right. Those gentlemen were: AVM (Ret'd) Roxley McLennan [Jun87-Nov89]; AVM (Ret'd) Greg Evans [Oct97-Dec99]; AIRCDRE Matt Hegarty [Jan08-Jun10]; AIRCDRE (Ret'd) Gary Martin [Jul02-Nov04]; AIRCDRE (Ret'd) Ian Scott [Jan93-Sep95]; GPCAPT (Ret'd) Bryan Harris [Jun81-Jan84]; WGCDR Charlie Freebairn [Dec22-Jan25]; and WGCDR (Ret'd) Tony Kempnich [Dec99-Jul02].



CDRAMG with some of the attending former COs

Mr Allan Harris, President No 37 Squadron [RAAF] Association welcomed attendees and introduced CDRAMG, AIRCDRE Ben Poxon, a former 37SQN C-130J-30 QFI, to address the attendees, followed by WOFF Paul Ross who passed on the best wishes of current 37SQN CO, WGCDR Dianne Bell, who unfortunately was unable to attend, but thanked her predecessors for the continuity of command, shared stewardship, the Squadron's safety record and evolving legacy. WGCDR Bell is the first female CO 37SQN, another piece of squadron history in this 60th year of RAAF C-130 Hercules.

The tradition continues with the current fleet of 12 C-130J-30 Hercules to commence replacement with 20 new, latest technology C-130J-30s from 2028. With a 30-year life span those latest J-30 Hercules will see the Australian Air Force celebrate a century of C-130 operations in December 2058.



Snippets from *This Week in Air Defence, Airspace Control and Radar History*

From SQNLDR (Ret'd) AJ "Jimbo" Stewart: 41 Wing Honorary Historian

I may have joined before the Dead Sea first reported sick, and when Centurion was a rank, not a tank – but contrary to popular belief, I did NOT provide GCI support to Pontius the Pilot! But I'll tell you, his dad was an absolute pain in the arse to control.

24 June 1944: Death of Radar Personnel whilst Prisoners of War

On this day, the Japanese freighter *TAMAHOKO MARU* was torpedoed by the US Navy Submarine USS *TANG* 60 nm from Nagasaki; the ship being in transit from Singapore to Japan. Tragically it was carrying 772 Prisoners of War from camps in the Netherlands East Indies and Malaya; of those POWs, only 212 survived the sinking. Two Radar members were amongst the fourteen RAAF members lost in the sinking; they were:

- 39872, Aircraftman Class 1 Charles Dudley Potts, Radar Mechanic, 8 Squadron/Radar Installation and Maintenance Unit (RIMU) Batavia; and
- 8594, Aircraftman Class 1 Maxwell Henry Buchhorn, RAF Far East/RIMU Singapore.

AC1 Buchhorn was serving in Singapore, becoming a POW after the surrender. AC1 Potts had survived a ground battle with the Japanese on Java, becoming a POW after the battle.

25 June 1942: (RAAF) 37 Radar Station arrives at Milne Bay, Papua

37 Radar Station arrives at Hagita, Milne Bay (adjacent to the No. 3 airstrip (later Gurney Airfield) with their UK-supplied Mk V "Chain Overseas Low" (COL) radar. The unit was fortunate that the Station Senior NCO, was Sergeant Les BELL, an old New Guinea hand and an experienced engineer and 'Ham' radio operator who was promoted to Acting Sergeant before he actually qualified for re-classification to leading Aircraftman. It was Les Bell who used his local contacts with the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) to have the unit camp built in the style of a small Papuan village. 37 RS was to play a major role in the subsequent Battle of Milne Bay.



The 37 RS UK Mk V COL Radar with a simulated Papuan Hut constructed around it

26 June 1794: First Successful Application of Air Power in War – The Battle of Fleurus

The Battle of Fleurus was fought on this day in 1794, with the French Revolutionary Army defeating an Austrian army. The Compagnie d'Aerostiers (French Balloon Corps) had received orders on 22 June to deploy to the Plain of Fleurus, which fronted the city of Charleroi; the deployment was achieved by twenty soldiers, who dragged the balloon over thirty miles of ground. For the next three days, officers ascended to observe Austrian movements. On the day of the battle, the balloon was aloft for nine hours, manned by Commandant COUTELLE (the Commanding Officer), with General MORLOT (a Divisional Commander) also airborne.

26 June 1943: First RAAF Airborne Radar Intercept 'Kill' in the Pacific Theatre

A *Beaufort* bomber (A9-296) of 7 Squadron (Pilot – Flying Officer Peter Hopton) was on patrol over the Torres Strait, near Cape Valsch (Dutch New Guinea) when the ASV Radar Operator (Flight Sergeant Ronstoner) reported a contact at about 6nm to port. Flying Officer Hopton immediately executed a cut-off vector in the direction of the contact and spotted a Japanese 'Jake'



FLG OFF Peter Hopton and his crew.

float-plane flying at 4,000ft. He climbed towards it approaching from astern, and when within 200 yards, opened fire with the wing guns whilst the Observer, Flying Officer Basil Walters, opened fire with the nose guns. The 'Jakes' starboard main-plane caught fire at the wing-root, and the aircraft dived to port. The *Beaufort* followed it down and fired a further five-second burst; the enemy aircraft caught fire and crashed into the sea. This was the first 'kill' for 7

Squadron and the RAAF's first airborne radar kill in the Pacific Theatre.

5 August 2007: 41 WG Establishes a Control & Reporting Centre at Kandahar, Afghanistan

A RAAF Control & Reporting Centre (CRC), established at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, took over the provision of management of assigned airspace in support of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) battling the Taliban. Following the deployment of a small advance party from 41 Wing, the main group (comprising operations and maintenance personnel from 41WG units and elements from Combat Support Group) arrived in-country in June 2007, with personnel rotations occurring on a six-monthly basis. Over the two years of operations in-theatre, the CRC handled 196,000 coalition movements, including helicopters, transports, refuellers, surveillance, ground attack and close air support aircraft. With a deployed strength of approximately 75 personnel, the CRC directed combat aircraft in support of ground air and ground operations across Afghanistan, 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week.



41WG AN/TPS-77 radar at 'Radar Hill', Camp Palomino Kandahar, Afghanistan

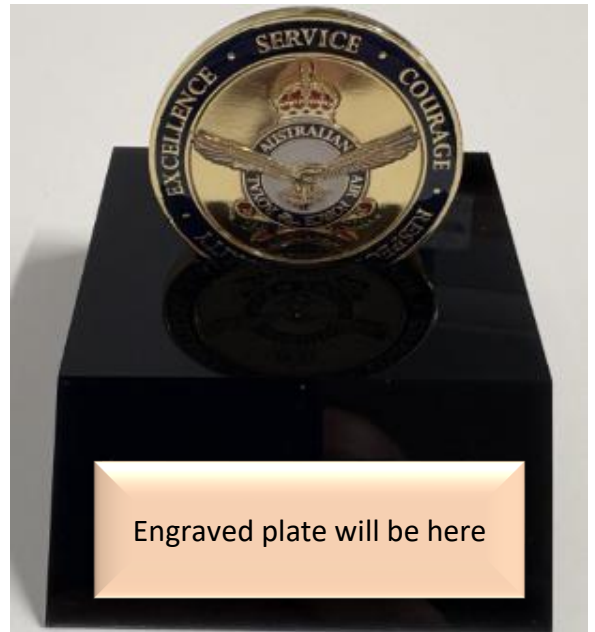
Editor's Note: During a recent (September 2026) visit to the new Afghanistan displays at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, there was no mention of the CRC in the list of units sited at Kandahar Airfield (KAF). On behalf of the several hundred personnel who deployed to the CRC over two years of operations, I will attempt to redress this important historical oversight with AWM staff.

15 August 1995: New Lambton Public School Granted Permission to use the RAAF Ensign

On this day, the Commanding Officer 3 CRU, Wing Commander Pete Smith and a group from the Radar Branch of the RAAF Association visited New Lambton Public School (NLPS), to present the school with a RAAF Ensign, and formal approval from ACPERS-AF for its use. This approval was in recognition of the role played by the school in the years 1942 – 1945, when NLPS was taken over by the RAAF to become 2 Fighter Sector Headquarters and the Fighter Sector Training School. NLPS students were then re-directed to other schools in the region. Despite constant pressure from the local P & C Association, the RAAF (2 FS / 102 FCU and the Central Training School) did not vacate NLPS until early 1945, when 102 FCU and the Training School re-located to Ash Island (Hexham) as lodger units with 131 Radar Station.

NLPS Update: In a testament to the continuing strength of the relationship between the RADAR Branch (now a chapter of FSB) and NLPS, the RADAR chapter is sponsoring an annual school leadership award based on the Defence values of Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity and Excellence. Each year, the winner chosen by the school, will be presented with a small engraved trophy from the RADAR chapter and have their name inscribed on an honour board at the school. In a generous example of collaboration, the board and signwriting will be jointly funded by the RADAR chapter and FSB.

 NEW LAMBTON PUBLIC SCHOOL 			
RADAR Branch Leadership Award Australian Defence Force Values Service • Courage • Respect • Integrity • Excellence			
YEAR	RECIPIENT	YEAR	RECIPIENT



Above is a photo of the individual award trophy and at left is the proposed honour board. (The white will become gold on the finished board.)



Punctuation is Powerful

An English teacher wrote the words 'a woman without her man is nothing' and asked the students to punctuate the sentence.

All of the male students wrote: A woman, without her man, is nothing.

All of the female students wrote: A woman: without her, man is nothing.

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Q: What do you call a book club that's been stuck on the same book for years?

A: Church



## 180 years of Combined Service

*From <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news> 6 August 2026*

**C**hief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell presented the Federation Star Award to four members of the Air Force Air Show Team (AST) at RAAF Base Darwin during Exercise Pitch Black.



**Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, centre, presents Federation Star awards to AST members during Exercise Pitch Black.**

Photos: Leading Aircraftman Ivan Smotrov

Air Marshal Chappell presented the awards to Air Commodore Michael Gray and Group Captain Roland Morscheck in recognition of serving 40 years. Warrant Officer Greg Krieger was awarded his Sixth Clasp to his Defence Long Service Medal in recognition of 45 years of service, and Warrant Officer Wayne Newman was awarded his fourth Federation Star in recognition of 55 years of service. This event not only recognised a combined total of 180 years of service, but also represented only the second time in Air Force history that a fourth Federation Star has been awarded.

Warrant Officer Newman enlisted as an apprentice in the Air Force in January 1971, before qualifying as an aviation technician and going on to work with multiple aircraft types. Over the course of his 55-year career, he has had over 40 postings and has served under 18 different Chiefs of Air Force. He has positively influenced so many of his fellow Air Force members over the years, including his son Flying Officer Ben Newman, who is currently serving as a P8-A Poseidon pilot with 11 Squadron.

Warrant Officer Krieger enlisted in October 1979 and graduated as a motor transport fitter in January 1981. Warrant Officer Krieger has had over 20 postings and served at a variety of different units, some of which no longer exist. One of these former units was 2SD detachment D in Dubbo, NSW – the only RAAF Base with a flock of sheep in an effort to keep the grass down!

Group Captain Morscheck enlisted in January 1986 and joined the first ever ADFA class before going on to complete his flying training in 1990, on the first ever PC9 course. Group Captain Morscheck has amassed 6682 flying hours on a variety of aircraft, including the Macchi, DHC4 Caribou, N24A Nomad and King Air 350. He also flew as a member of the Roulettes RAAF Aerobatic display team and subsequently served as Commanding Officer of the Central Flying School.

Last, but certainly not least, Air Commodore Gray enlisted in May 1985 and flew F-111s across 22 years as well as the Royal Air Force Tornado Strike/Reconnaissance aircraft in the UK and the F/A-18F Super Hornet. He has amassed over 3500 flying hours. Air Commodore Gray was the Commanding Officer of both 1 Squadron and 6 Squadron and was subsequently Officer Commanding 82 Wing. He has also served in a wide range of operational and HQ positions, both domestically and overseas. He is currently serving as the Head of the Air Force AST.

During the awards presentation, Air Marshal Chappell expressed his gratitude and respect to the four members for their long service and was keen to recognise the importance of the support from their families. In his presentation speech, Air Marshal Chappell said: 'A long and enduring commitment to service and time in uniform is a pretty amazing thing for folks to do – and also for the families that love and support us all through those journeys. Please pass on my real appreciation to all of your loved ones for their support of your service.' The Air Force AST that these members are part of is composed of mainly RAAF reservists, and brings together extensive experience and expertise from across the Air Force. 'This is a unique team. We drop in, plan and conduct the air shows at the different bases, so that base personnel can get on with their day jobs delivering air power,' Head of AST Air Commodore Gray said.

AST's events generate massive public interest and engagement, and deliver high reputational value. Air Commodore Gray expressed his pride in the team and what they deliver, and said: 'What we do here is probably the most public facing activity across the Air Force, so I'm very proud to be a part of that'. The AST conducts an Air Force air show at a different RAAF base every two years and is also responsible for the biennial Mindil Beach Flying Display and RAAF Base Darwin Open Day events that take place during each Exercise Pitch Black.



## Aircraft with Rich History Retires from Service

*From [www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news](http://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news) 8 July 2026*



Nearly five decades after introducing generations of military aviators to flight, the Air Force's CT4A trainer aircraft has completed its final flight. A19-077 operated the final display flight from Point Cook, marking what Defence described as "the end of an aircraft type that quietly shaped generations of military air power". On June 18, the iconic aircraft took to the skies above RAAF Base Point Cook one last time, closing a chapter in Australian military aviation history at the very place where both the Air Force and the CT4A's service journey began. Its retirement marked the end of an aircraft type that quietly shaped generations of military air power.

Introduced into Air Force service in 1975, the Australian-built CT4A became the first military aircraft thousands of aviators would fly. For decades, it provided the foundation upon which operational careers were built. Wing Commander David Chaplin, who piloted the final display flight, knows that legacy firsthand. 'There's a whole lot of air power that has come from this aircraft,' Wing Commander Chaplin said. 'It was the first powered aircraft I flew. I joined the Air Force here at Point Cook in January 1980, and when we arrived on base, all we could see were CT4s flying around.'

For many aviators, the distinctive silhouette and bright colours of the CT4A became synonymous with the beginning of a military flying career, with the aircraft being the catalyst for members to fly some of Australia's most advanced air combat, air mobility, maritime patrol and rotary-wing capabilities. 'Pretty much everybody who came through the services completed training on that aeroplane – Army, Navy and Air Force,' Wing Commander Chaplin said. 'When the commanding officer asked me to conduct the flying display for the CT4A's final day, it was a little emotional.' 'After the display, I started thinking about all the people who had trained on the aircraft and all those who had supported it over the years – engineers, administrators, air traffic controllers and instructors.'



Among those reflecting on the aircraft's legacy was reservist Squadron Leader Peter Grieves, who completed his own first military flight in the same aircraft now entering retirement. 'There'll be a lot of people catching up and sharing memories,' Squadron Leader Grieves said. 'Some of them were stressful memories but still fond memories, especially here at Point Cook which teaches you to fly in just about every type of weather you can get.'

As the CT4A passed overhead for its final time in service, it served as a reminder that the aircraft's greatest contribution was not the flying it performed itself, but the generations of military aviators it launched into service. Long after the CT4A's final landing, that legacy will continue to fly. Aside from its service at Point Cook, the CT4A was also employed at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit in Edinburgh, South Australia, and at the Central Flying School in East Sale.



## Operation 'Tropic Snow' - Irian Jaya 1970

*By Wing Commander Brian Dirou, DFC (Retired)*

### Background

Japan had signed an instrument of unconditional surrender on 2 September 1945. On 16Sep45, a No. 38 Squadron Dakota, A65-61, VH-CUT, departed Archerfield, Queensland for a 9,600 kilometre return courier journey to Morotai via Horn Island. On 18Sep45, the aircraft departed Morotai for Biak with 17 Army stretcher cases, including some wounded from Borneo, a RAAF Nursing Sister and a Medical Orderly, plus a deadheading 38SQN Dakota crew.

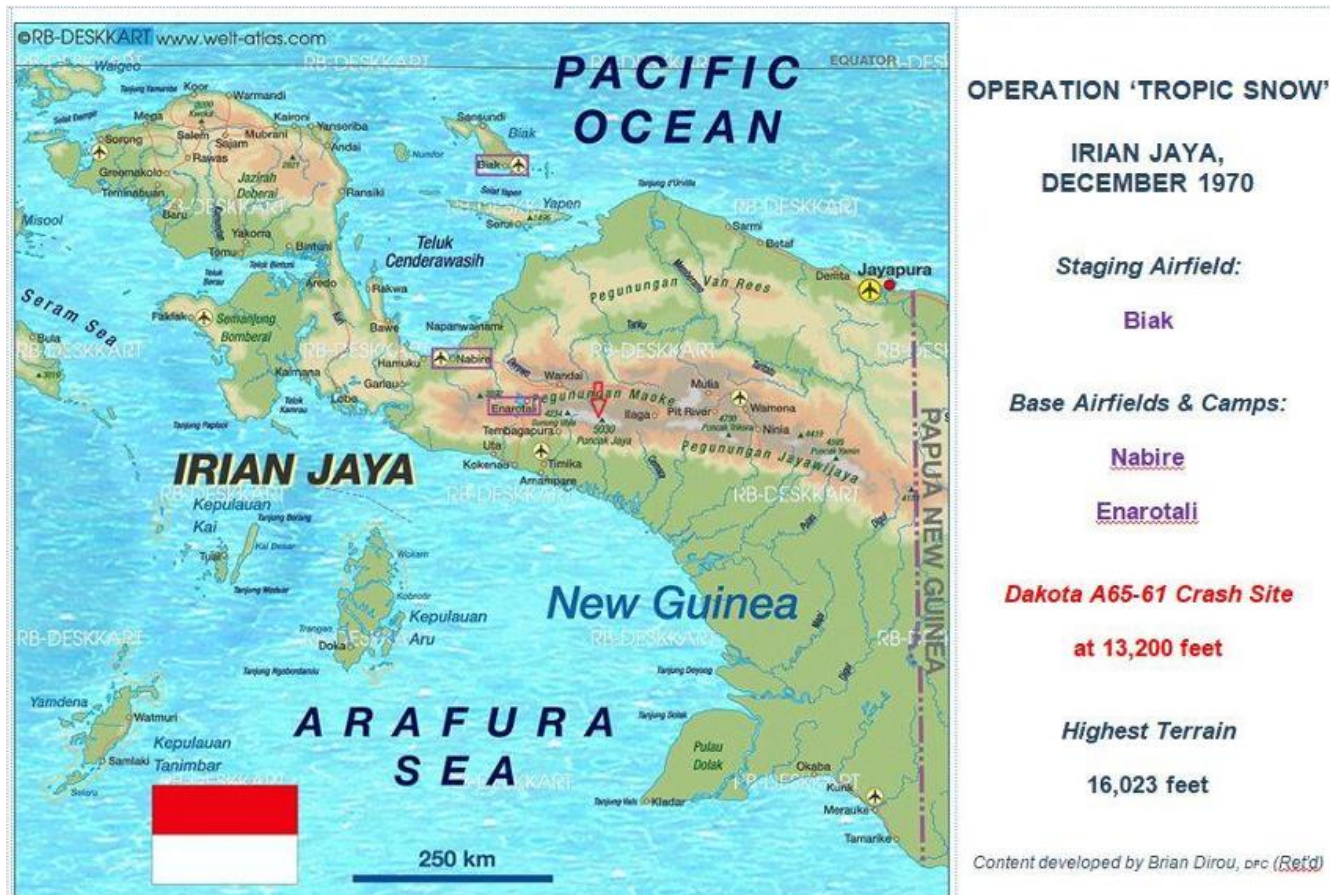
After arriving at Biak, another Army passenger embarked and the aircraft departed for Horn Island 40 minutes later, in fair local weather conditions with 28 souls on board. CUT did not comply with customary US regional air traffic radio procedures after departure and it was presumed that the aircraft would have tracked initially southwards to conform with 38SQN Standard Operating Procedures routing, which was mainly coastal to Horn Island. The aircraft was declared missing after non-arrival at Horn Island and 7 hours fuel duration expiry. The aircraft had just disappeared without any clues to whereabouts and subsequent searches were fruitless.

On 16Oct68, Missionary Aviation Fellowship pilot Jerry Reeder observed a sunlight glint in extremely high rugged terrain in Irian Jaya. Good visibility at the time enabled him to identify and pinpoint the wreckage of a large aircraft very close to the snow-capped peak of Mount Carstens/Puncak Jaya, the highest point on the whole rugged island. In mid-1970, Reeder and two fellow Americans were able to land near the crash site in a Bell 206 Jet Ranger helicopter. That was a special performance Bell 206 (Kiowa) version supporting mining operations in the area, which could have led those at Department of Air in Canberra driving the moral requirement to recover the remains of victims to assume that the Air Force Hotel model Iroquois could adequately accomplish the recovery mission. The American group identified the aircraft as a C-47 A65-61 CUT and also found a woman's shoe. They duly reported their findings to Australian authorities. At that time, Australia-Indonesian Government relations were sensitive so the matter was treated discreetly pending negotiations for access to Irian Jaya to attempt recovery of the remains of casualties.

### Pre-planning and Reconnaissance

Sometime during November 1970, I was informed I would be the helicopter detachment commander for a team to be tasked with recovery of human remains from a post-WW2 crash site of a Dakota in Irian Jaya.





I visited Headquarters Operational Command (HQOC) RAAF at Glenbrook, NSW for briefing by Staff Officer Operations, Group Captain 'Bay' Adams, CBE, DFC, AFC. We had an interesting incident when flying together in Vietnam in January 1969 when he was Task Force Air Commander and he was my idol as a leader (see 'The Big Show' by Pierre Clostermann, Pages 222-224).

Although unstated, I felt he had nominated me for the task and he said to me in his quiet way: 'You are going to find this difficult'. I presumed that he meant the mission organization was cumbersome and top heavy. The Air Force helicopter force in Australia was commanded from HQOC; but when deployed overseas, controlled through Department of Air in Canberra. There were three squadron leaders with roles in Operation TROPIC SNOW; Ron Raymond, a Caribou pilot from HQOC in overall command of elements to be deployed, myself as the Iroquois detachment commander and deputy mission leader and Peter Mahood representing the Directorate of Flying Safety at Department of Air in Canberra. Pete had recently undergone Iroquois conversion having been anointed for posting to command No. 9 Squadron in Vietnam from about mid-1971. A Medical Officer, an Intelligence Officer and the OC of Army Airborne Platoon at RAAF Base Williamtown were also in the group.

I was among a small party to be involved in the recovery mission that deployed to PNG/Irian Jaya for a reconnaissance of the crash site and related airfields via a chartered light aircraft operated by Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) and flown by Jerry Reeder. I recall that we slept on the floor of a house at Nabire by the sea in western Irian Jaya at some stage during the reconnaissance. It was an idyllic scenario with surf pounding in on black sand beaches while villagers in adjacent shacks near the foreshore bathed their protesting children at dusk to the accompaniment of music from transistor radios. Discussion with the Irian Jaya experienced MAF pilot revealed that the crash site about 13,200 feet above mean sea level and 2 degrees 30

minutes of Latitude south of the Equator had been enveloped in cloud for much of the past 2.5 years. The awesome nature of the high terrain, performance limitations of the Hotel model Iroquois and the persistent cloud in the area made me circumspect that we could successfully accomplish the task.



*Mount Carstens / Puncak Jaya - 16,023 feet AMSL*

High altitude performance data for the Hotel model aircraft was dubious and we anticipated no ability to be able to hover out of ground effect at the crash site, so it would be necessary to land to put very light loads on the ground, if a clear, reasonably level landing point was accessible. I was equally concerned re meteorology and sought out a couple of

the old Air Force Met men who had served in PNG. One of them emphasized to me that large air masses with differing temperature and moisture content swirl around in the mountainous regions. A temperature drop of only half a degree Celsius can rapidly transform clear sky to cloud and he advised: 'If you begin seeing spots before your eyes, cloud will form virtually in a blink so get out of there quick!'

By November 1970, the mission had gained substantial albeit unpublicized political momentum and halting planning and preparations for a helicopter capabilities review would have been unpalatable in Canberra, although prudent. Aircrew oxygen was mandatory for flying operations above 10,000 feet. At 5SQN in Canberra, we rounded up suitable aircrew communicable oxygen masks and as many portable oxygen bottles as possible, which only gave about



*Dakota A65-61 VH-CUT crash site*

20 minutes duration per bottle. Considering Dakota A65-61 had collided with a mountain range (now termed Controlled Flight Into Terrain), there was no merit in any cursory examination of the aircraft at the site and recovery of human remains was the principal objective.

### **Deployment and the Mission**

Several Indonesian agencies were present when we arrived at Biak via 2 RAAF C-130s. 3 Indonesian Air Force (AURI) people were somewhat surly and showed interest in our Iroquois when disembarked. One of them was furtively photographing so I opened a cockpit door to let him view the aircraft interior and he seemed peeved. As on the earlier reconnaissance, Indonesian Police were co-operative, but there seemed some animosity toward them from their

own military. Kopassus (their equivalent of the Australian SAS) drifted on and off the scene at all ports of call.

The sequence of events after deployment from Biak to Nabire then Enarotali and all aspects of exactly how we accomplished the recovery are somewhat foggy 50 plus years after the mission, but a few aspects have stuck in my mind. A base for operations was established at Enarotali on 3 December 1970 and Iroquois flying operations directed toward the recovery of human remains were conducted over the following 3 days (4, 5, 6 December 1970) involving between 6 and 7 hours flying for each of the 2 aircraft. We were venturing into a somewhat unknown realm for Iroquois operations at altitudes where the Hotel model of the aircraft was not designed to operate.

When the weather allowed, we climbed the aircraft to about 16,500 feet atop some small glaciers and the most awesome rugged terrain that I have ever seen anywhere in the world, including flight over Afghanistan. The Huey really did not want to be at that altitude with thumping from the 2 rotor blades quite frightening. Had we encountered engine failure, it may not have been possible to control the rotor RPM in autorotation with likely fatal consequences.

I cannot recall whether we were able to view the crash site on early recce flights although located a suitable landing area at about 10,800 feet within 15 kilometres to enable refuelling and oxygen replenishment as necessary. This staging area was above a distinct line where there was little vegetation with temperatures being below freezing level at times. While small glaciers were then viewable at the higher levels, there was little snow evident at about the beginning of the southern hemisphere summer season. The staging landing pad was covered with short-tufted grass and on touchdown, there was an almost overpowering smell of formic acid which emanates from some species of ants when squashed; but no insects were observed, so any nests were seemingly sub-surface. We trialled restarting the Iroquois at this high-level intermediate landing site. There was of course risk if we could not get it restarted then it may have had to be abandoned at the site and personnel recovered by the other aircraft.

Starting of the small engine powered aircraft refuelling rig was also accomplished and that was positioned at the landing site with some drums of AVTUR fuel and an oxygen trolley. At some stage on 4th and 5th December, we were able to view the crash site when breaks in cloud allowed and the forbidding nature of the task ahead was reinforced. The impact point was extremely rugged with wreckage scattered among fissures in rocks that would be extremely difficult to traverse on foot. Fragments of the aircraft and perhaps even human remains would likely have dropped into fissures/crevices that could not be easily accessed.

It seemed possible to airland individuals of a recovery team on a large flat rock maybe about 100 metres from the wreckage, but indirect access via about 200 metres of adjacent rugged uphill terrain would be difficult, slow and energy consuming to negotiate. After the earlier reconnaissance by light aircraft, it was concluded that a ground party could only be very lightly equipped due principally to aircraft performance limitations at high altitudes, but also the physically debilitating effects of movement with oxygen deprivation.

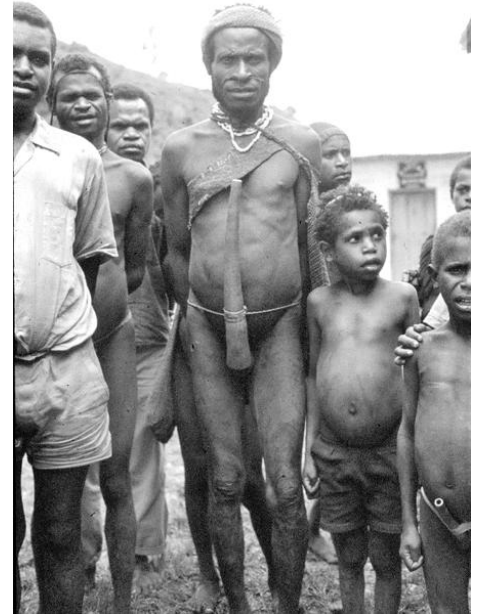


**5SQN maintenance crew recharging oxy bottles at the staging pad at 10,800 feet**

Weather was the principal restrictive variable concerning available time on the ground and whether the ground party could in fact be recovered or become marooned on the mountain. Beacon radios, spare batteries, pencil flares, space blankets and some water were essential needs for wearable survival kit, which of necessity had to be minimized for physical endurance considerations. Longer term survival without more comprehensive kit was problematic. Previously, the crash site had been virtually weathered in for about 2.5 years and if the ground party got marooned for that reason, there was very low probability that a Caribou or Army Porter aircraft in support would be able to accurately drop stores in cloud – the Australian military were not equipped with GPS in those days.

As previously mentioned, it was impractical and unnecessary in my view to attempt any degree of crash site investigation and recovery of human remains should be the sole objective. Foregoing considerations convinced me that we could only insert a 2-man party which should desirably involve smallish fit men who could cope with the physical exertion involved at high altitude.

Weather had precluded any attempt to lodge a ground party at the crash site on 4th and 5th December. The deployed forces were surviving mainly on combat rations because somebody overlooked loading a quantity of tinned foods on C-130s before departing Canberra; but they did remember to load some beer, so a limited social gathering transpired on the evening of 5 December. The tribal natives of the surrounding area were very primitive and almost naked, with many males sporting a penile gourd. A sizeable group of them were congregated on a slope maybe 50 metres from our socializing.



Since deploying to Enarotali on 3rd December, the very amiable 2Lt. Mick Mummery, OIC of the Army Airborne Platoon at RAAF Williamtown had done a good job in establishing base facilities, assisted of course by all deployed Air Force personnel. Some of us were to serve again with Mick in Vietnam in 1971 when he became a Platoon Commander with 9RAR. Mick, as the contingent 'Jester', decided to entertain the locals and marched into public view giving them a very pukka Army salute while wearing only a strategically positioned beer can secured with masking tape. The natives went almost hysterical with mirth and Canberra would have frowned at our 'diplomacy' efforts!

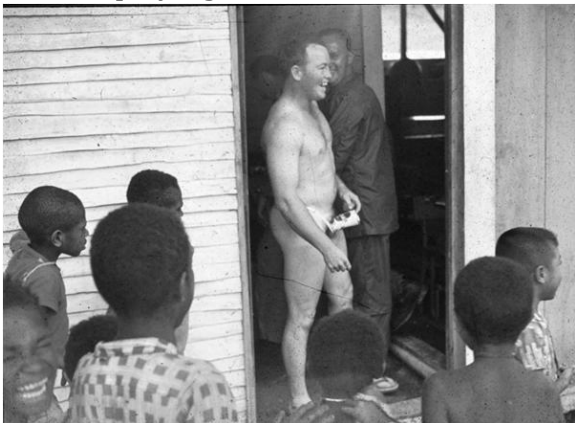


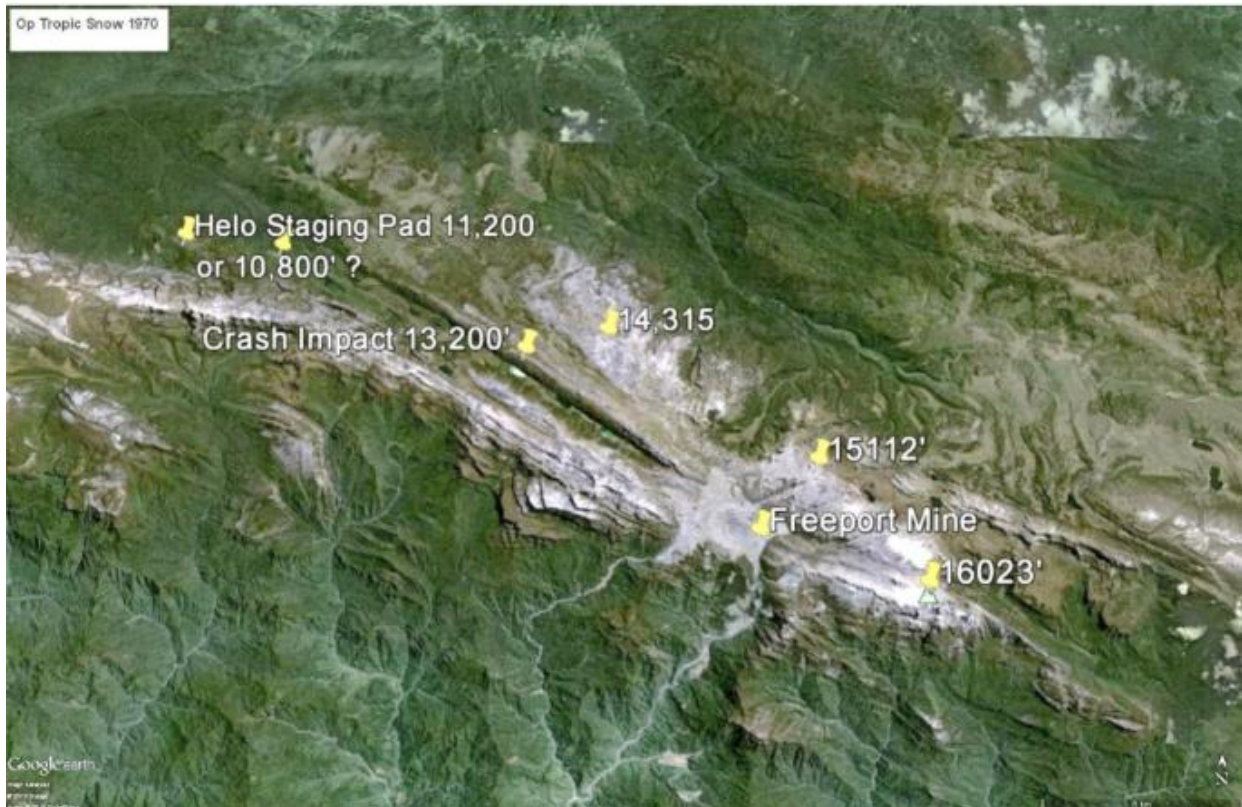
**Image published with consent of Mick Mummery**

Sometime later, Ron Raymond and Peter Mahood

jointly approached me seeking to involve in a ground party, if weather would permit insertion at the crash site the following day. There had been no prior discussion of this aspect that I recall, but my inclination was to involve Mick Mummery and possibly Bevin Pettitt (one of our pilots) who were both smaller fitter men. It was an unseemly discussion in the presence of other ranks with the other squadron leaders pushing for prominence. Pete Mahood was insistent that it was a Directorate of Flying Safety function for him, accompanied by Flight Sergeant Ken Maley (5SQN Engine Fitter) for technical guidance, albeit it could only be a somewhat limited recovery of

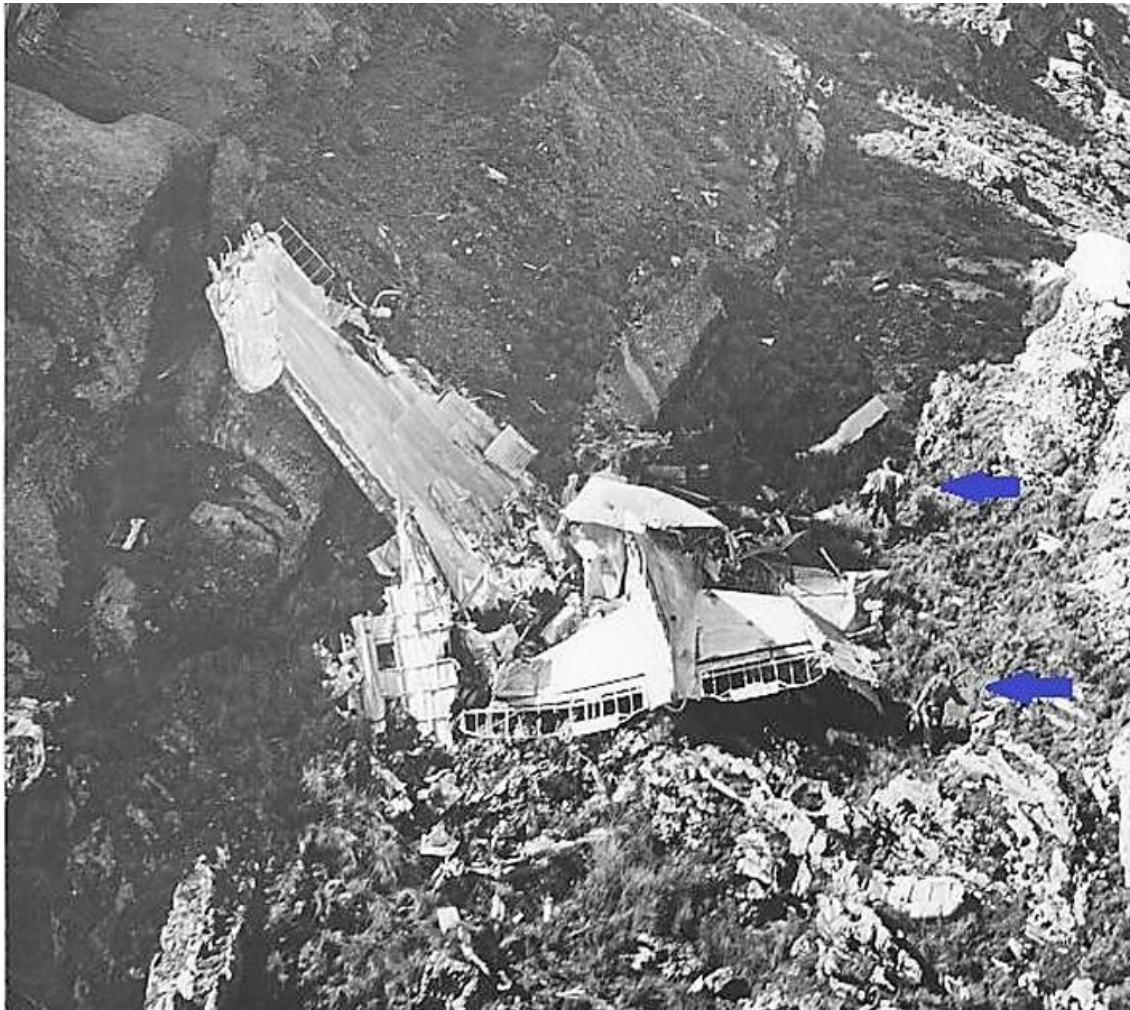
human remains operation with no accident investigation functions possible. I relented to his insistence to curtail the inappropriate public discussion, although was quietly concerned re the physical capacity of both men.

There was torrential rain overnight and Mick Mummery starred again with infantry engineering skills. A pit latrine had been dug a bit distant from where we were camped, but the toilet was now a dam! On the brighter side, it was largely a cloud free day enabling us to quickly deploy to the intermediate landing pad and recce the crash site.



We ascertained it seemed possible to airland in ground effect at minimized aircraft operating weight about 100 hundred metres directly from the crash site by flying the aircraft right onto a big flat rock. But take-off would be more problematic due to marginal aircraft performance. We may have deposited the 2-man recovery party singly and/or flown the aircraft single pilot. The crash site was not visible from the landing point and the ground party required alternate route navigation assistance from the air which was provided by the Army Porter pilot, who did not appreciate the ruggedness of the terrain that had to be traversed by the ground team.

For obvious considerations regarding physical exertion, oxygen lack and unpredictable weather, we had estimated between 90 minutes and 2 hours on the ground at maximum, and a fair amount of this time was taken up trekking to and from the crash site with bagged human remains. We were of course very closely monitoring any cloud development and informing the ground party as necessary to hasten their activities appropriately. I cannot definitively recall how extraction of the ground party developed, but think we first winched up bagged human remains from a very low hover in ground effect, being unable to land. It was then later in the day with higher temperatures and cloud developing more widely. Aircraft performance was more limited and we flew single pilot and recovered the ground party individuals by directing them to climb onto a large flat rock bordering a very steep gorge.



**Human remains recovery at crash site by Peter Mahood and Ken Maley**

I recall hovering just above a ground party member while he fitted the rescue sling. The control column (cyclic) was almost at full left travel and left tail rotor pedal virtually fully extended with rotor RPM bordering on bleeding. As power (collective) was increased to lift the 'survivor', rotor RPM bled down and we moved forward, dropping into a chasm to recover performance while reeling in the party on the rescue hoist, a nerve tingling exercise!

Frank Riley was flying the other Huey and he may have recovered the other ground party member beforehand. I vividly remember that as we departed the crash site location for the intermediate landing pad about 2,400 feet lower, I began seeing spots before my eyes precisely as the old Air Force Met man had described. We descended pretty rapidly to the staging pad, minimally refuelled and recovered remaining equipment before heading to base at Enarotali. On looking back toward the crash site, it was then completely enveloped in cloud.

### **Epilogue**

At Enarotali, we viewed the human remains that had been recovered, knowing that some remained behind for reasons already mentioned. Bones were all covered with a green moss and one bone which had been broken previously had been joined by a metal strip about a centimetre wide and around 70mm long, affixed with screws at either end. The metal strip and screws were as bright and shiny as the day they had been inserted by a surgeon, which was testimony to the quality of some of the medical componentry available during the WW2 years. Ground party members mentioned there may have been a survivor of the crash who had crawled under cover of some wreckage.

Subsequently, Pete Mahood twice tried to engage me regarding the recovery operation by saying 'I (meaning he) would have done it differently.' He had only minimal Iroquois operating savvy and I opted not to respond as I would have expressed the view it may have been better not to involve the RAAF Directorate of Flying Safety at all, considering no crash investigation was feasible. I felt it would have been more efficient to assign operational control of the entire task to 5SQN as the unit was accustomed to organizing and conducting detachment operations in remote areas.



Rear: John Parsons, Peter Amos Front: Ken Maley, Peter Mahood, Frank Riley, Brian Dirou, Joe Driver, Bevin Pettitt. At April 2025, all deceased except BD and Joe Driver

Operation TROPIC SNOW 1970 could be adjudged successful in that some human remains were recovered - although limited by weather, Iroquois Hotel model operating performance and physiological factors relating to the crash site altitude and ruggedness of the terrain. **The RAAF was morally committed to attempting recovery of casualty remains although the risks involved were extreme.**

December timing of the 1970 operation was seasonally fortuitous as snow covering the ground around mid-year would have made the task infinitely more difficult and hazardous. It would have been far wiser to charter higher performance civilian helicopters that were available at that time operating in support of foreign mining industry. This eventuated some years later in June 2005. The goal was to recover more human remains although had my advice been sought, I would have recommended later in the year when there was absence of snow covering.

Ironically, very cost-effective upgrade of Hotel model Iroquois to as new Huey II available from early 2008 has since made that platform far superior to Blackhawk helicopters for high density

altitude operations in remote areas of the northern archipelago; but the very versatile Iroquois were unwisely cast aside from ADF service in 2007.



Considering the Dakota A65-61 crash site had often been shrouded in cloud for around 2.5 years before and about 6 months after Operation TROPIC SNOW, it seemed there was Divine intervention facilitating favourable weather to attempt recovery of casualty remains on 6th of December 1970. That enabled our return to Fairbairn at Canberra on the 10th, a day later than planned; much to the relief of my waiting wife to be Diane, as we were to be wed on Saturday, 12th of December 1970!



## Fuel Initiative Boosts Defence Resilience

*From <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news> 25 August 2026*

**T**he Australian Defence Force has begun rolling out low carbon liquid fuel (LCLF) blends across its network in an effort to strengthen fuel resilience. The initiative introduces aviation and diesel fuels containing synthetic components to fuel installations nationwide and aligns with the 2026 National Defence Strategy to enhance energy security and operational readiness.



**Royal Australian Air Force KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport prepares to refuel a USAF F-15E Strike Eagle during trials at Eglin Air Base.**

Photo: United States Air Force

According to Director General Fuel Capability, Brigadier Mark Baldock, diversifying fuel sources is essential to enhancing Defence's energy security. 'Supporting domestic renewable fuel production strengthens Australia's sovereign capability. These demonstrations are an important step toward building a more resilient and sustainable energy future for Defence,' Brigadier Baldock said. Policy adviser from the Defence Energy Transition Office (DETO), Commander Steve Cole, said it was inevitable that Defence would start to use LCLF. 'Australia is increasingly looking to be self-sufficient, so the focus at DETO is making sure that Defence is prepared to use these fuels as they become available,' Commander Cole said.

Low carbon liquid fuels are made from a source other than crude oil – be it canola oil, sugar cane, waste oils or forestry residue. 'These demonstrations are an important step toward building a more resilient and sustainable energy future for Defence.' They are chemically indistinguishable from fossil fuels, allowing them to be used without modifications to ADF equipment. DETO has undertaken certification processes and platform demonstrations of renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuels, including during Exercise Talisman Sabre and the Avalon Air Show. 'A big part of these demonstrations has been taking maintainers and crews of the platforms, planners and decision-makers on a journey to understand we are talking about drop-in replacement fuels that meet the same specifications,' Commander Cole said. Since then, DETO has focused on adopting certification for ADF platforms to ensure internal assurance processes are met and to facilitate interoperability with partner nations that are also adopting LCLFs.

All ADF aviation and land assets are now certified to operate on LCLF, with RAAF Base East Sale and the Army Aviation Training Centre already using blended fuel. Certification of remaining maritime platforms is nearing completion. Joint Capabilities Group has established the Defence Fuels Qualification Centre in partnership with the Defence Science and Technology Group. The centre will promote fuel standards awareness, conduct qualification testing and strengthen collaboration with industry to enable sovereign fuel production.



## CAC Woomera – The Lethal Versatility of a Forgotten Prototype

*From <https://vintageaviationnews.com/warbird-articles/grounded-dreams/woomera.html>, by Kapil Kajal  
Published: March 25, 2026*

**T**he CAC Woomera was an Australian-designed twin-engine light bomber developed during World War II to meet local needs after supply shortages from the UK. First flown in 1941, the aircraft showed promising speed, range, and armament but suffered from technical issues, including engine overheating, weak control response, and structural vibration.

During the early years of World War II, the Australian aviation company Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) developed a twin-engine light bomber, named Woomera, that could be used as both a torpedo and a dive bomber. The CAC was formed in 1936 to establish a domestic aircraft industry under the leadership of Sir Lawrence Wackett.

In early 1939, the Australian government ordered Bristol Beaufort bombers to meet the Royal Australian Air Force's needs. The aircraft were intended to be assembled in Australia by the Department of Aircraft Production, with components imported from the UK. But as World War II began, the UK put an embargo on supplying parts to Australia to boost its own production. As a result, in June 1940, the Australian War Cabinet approved funding for CAC to develop Woomera.

The company built an initial prototype and designated it the CA-4 Wackett Bomber. It was a low-wing aircraft designed for a crew of three, including pilot, navigator/bomber, and wireless/air

gunner. The aircraft had a Sperry automatic pilot, stressed-skin wing, six fuel tanks in the center section of the wing, four nose-mounted .303-caliber machine guns, and two remotely controlled .303-caliber guns at the rear of both engine nacelles. The engine nacelles also served as bomb bays, each holding two 250-pound bombs. Additionally, the aircraft could carry two torpedoes under the center section and four 25-pound bombs under each outer wing. One of the torpedoes could be replaced with a 293-gallon drop tank or two 500 lb bombs.



**Three-quarter front view of the CA-4 A23-1001 CAC Woomera, prototype of a three-seat strike-reconnaissance and dive-bomber, completed and ready for testing at the CAC factories in Fishermans Bend, Victoria.**

*Image via State Library of South Australia PRG 247/143/33*

The first prototype, A23-1001, flew for the first time on September 19, 1941. In April 1942, the Royal Australian Air Force accepted the aircraft for further trials. Initial tests showed that the aircraft had good speed, range, and armament compared to other bombers of its time. However, it also had problems. The elevator response was weak, and the engines often overheated. Additionally, the remote gun system was too complicated. Moreover, on January 15, 1943, the prototype CA-4, A23-1001, crashed during a test flight due to issues with the engine.

The test flight was intended to check the engine's performance and the effects of a new fixed leading-edge slat. But while returning to the CAC airfield, the pilot, Squadron Leader Jim Harper, noticed a fuel leak from the aircraft's left engine. As the leak got worse, he tried to shut down the engine and feather the propeller. However, it caused an explosion and an uncontrollable fire. The crew of three tried to escape at 1,000 feet, but only Harper managed to parachute to safety. The other two crew members, CAC test pilot Jim Carter and power plant engineer Lionel Dudgeon, were killed. The wreckage was recovered and used for spare parts. Part of the cause of the crash was linked to the new design of the fuel tank.

Despite the accident, the Royal Australian Air Force was impressed by the aircraft and placed an order for 105 modified versions, designated CA-11 Woomera, which included changes to the cockpit, armament, and tail design. During testing, engineers discovered severe vibration in the tail section. The problem was due to airflow disturbances from the gun turrets mounted on the engine nacelles. The tailplane and fin were redesigned to correct the issue.

The CA-11 Woomera was powered by two Pratt & Whitney R-1830-S3C3-G Twin Wasp 14-cylinder air-cooled radial piston engines, each producing 1,200 horsepower. The aircraft was 39.7 feet long, 18.2 feet high, with a wingspan of nearly 59 feet and a wing area of 440 square feet. Equipped with 3-bladed constant-speed propellers, the aircraft's empty weight was 12,765 pounds with a maximum take-off weight of 22,885 pounds. The maximum speed of the aircraft was 282 mph, with a cruise speed of 184 mph. The range was 2,225 miles with external tanks and one torpedo. Its service ceiling was 23,500 feet, and the rate of climb was 2,090 feet per minute.



**The fuselage and engines of the CA-4 A23-1001 CAC Woomera, a three-seat strike-reconnaissance and dive-bomber, under construction at the CAC factories in Fishermans Bend.**

(Image via State Library of South Australia PRG 247/143/31)

The CA-11 was delivered to the Royal Australian Air Force for evaluation in November 1944. By that time, the operational situation had changed. Allied forces had access to large numbers of American-built aircraft, such as the Douglas Boston and the P-51 Mustang, reducing the need for local production of a new bomber. As a result, the order for 105 CA-11 Woomera was reduced to just 20. Later, the order for 20 was also cancelled, and the Woomera program was discontinued before entering full production, and its funding was shifted to procure P-51 Mustangs. In January 1946, the sole remaining prototype aircraft was scrapped, and its parts were used in other programs. The CAC shifted its focus to manufacturing the P-51 Mustang fighters. In the end, the Woomera was not a bad bomber, but was replaced by a lack of interest or confidence.



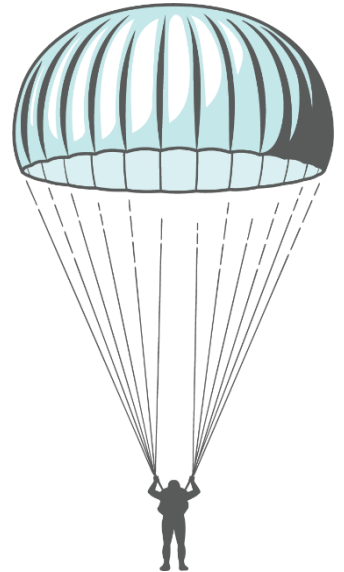
## Nearly Hit the Silk!

*From Ken Mitchell DFC, DFC (US), AM (US); Vietnam FAC*

During a joint training exercise at Shoalwater Bay, I experienced an incident which I had managed to avoid thus far in my flying career. It was during an air strike where I had just marked the target with a smoke grenade and I was pulling out of the dive when my engine started backfiring badly.

I was about 1000 feet above ground level (AGL) over rocky terrain with 100-foot-high gum trees. I didn't fancy having to hit the silk over this lot! I closed the throttle, eased it forward again until I was able to slowly climb, turning right heading for the ocean. At the same time, I called MAYDAY to Rockhampton tower because I thought I would have to bail out, hopefully over the ocean.

I continued a slow climb, with a constantly backfiring engine, turning south and heading towards Rocky, still over the ocean. When I estimated I was within gliding distance of Rocky, I cancelled my MAYDAY call. After landing safely at Rocky, the ground crew reported that I had spark plug problems, which they quickly fixed. This was my first and only MAYDAY call I ever made while flying with the RAAF.



## Happy 100<sup>th</sup> John A Century of Service, Learning and Community Spirit

*Reprinted and edited with permission from the Woopi News, September 2026*

There were plenty of reasons to celebrate in Woolgoolga recently as Red Rock resident and Royal Australian Air Force veteran John Imrie marked an extraordinary milestone – his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 31 August. John has been a member of the AFA since Sept 1945, initially at the Coffs Harbour branch, which is now closed. He remains an active member of Woolgoolga RSL.

John's remarkable life has been one of service, learning, family and community involvement. He joined the Royal Australian Air Force on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1944, completing basic training at Bradfield Park, Lindfield before proceeding to RAAF Base Wagga to train as a navigator on the De Havilland Mosquito multi-role combat aircraft. The second world war ended before John completed his training and he was discharged the following year with the rank of Leading Aircraftman. Although the timing meant he did not serve overseas, his contribution remained a valuable part of Australia's war effort. His recollections of the end of WWII have since been preserved on the NSW War Memorials Register.

After returning to civilian life, in 1949 John married Valerie, his beloved wife of 47 years, and together they raised two sons. Sadly, Valerie passed away in 1996. Today he is the proud grandfather of five grandchildren and great grandfather of six.



Gurmesh Singh, MP wishing John Imrie a Happy 100th Birthday

John's milestone birthday formed part of a very special Woolgoolga RSL Sub-Branch Wellbeing lunch at Woolgoolga Diggers in August, where three local veterans were recognised for their service. Commonwealth Certificates of Appreciation for Military Service were presented with Member for Coffs Harbour, Gurmeh Singh MP, making the presentations on behalf of Federal Member for Page, Kevin Hogan MP. Coffs Harbour Mayor Nikki Williams also attended.

John's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday provided another very good reason for those gathered to celebrate. A special letter of congratulations from the President of RSL NSW, Brigadier Vince Williams CSC, (Ret'd) that recognised not only John's service during WWII, but the remarkable service he has continued to give his country and community throughout his life. That contribution has taken many forms – from mentoring and coaching in sport to business and more than three decades educating others through his Australian History and Poetry classes with the University of the Third Age (U3A). More recently, John has also continued to share his knowledge and experiences with younger generations, delivering highly regarded ANZAC Assembly addresses at Corindi Public School for a number of years.



John's mosquito cake

And what sort of birthday cake do you make for a 100 year old former RAAF navigator? Well, a mosquito of course! Samantha from the Sugar Kitchen created an extraordinary cake in the shape of an Australian De Havilland Mosquito fighter/bomber; the very aircraft type that John trained on in 1945. It was a wonderfully personal tribute and a fitting centrepiece for such a special celebration.

As John celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the community was able to reflect not simply on a man who has witnessed a century of Australian history, but someone who has spent much of that century contributing to it.



## Red Sales Disaster

*from Rod Hutchings, Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans' Association, via Facebook*  
15 August 1962

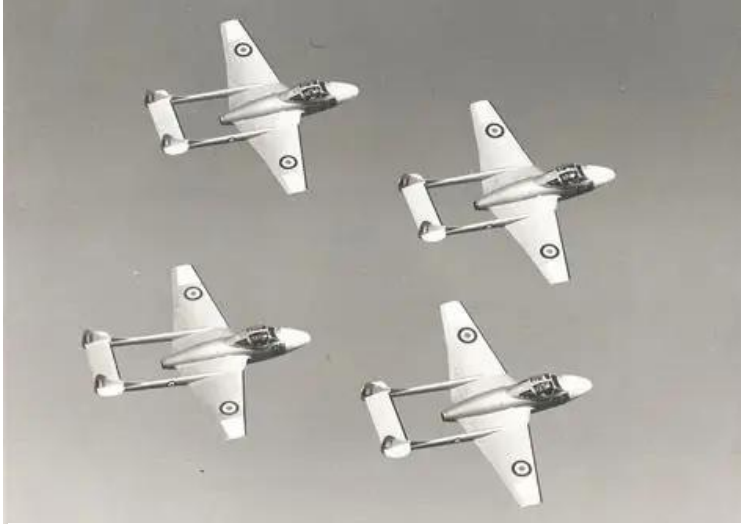
Sixty-four years ago today, four red-nosed Vampires were meant to be flying a display for Air Force Week. They never got there. They were the Red Sales, an aerobatic team flying Vampire jet trainers. The name came from the red paint on the jets' noses and from East Sale in Victoria, home of the RAAF's Central Flying School. The six men in the team were instructors at that school. Teaching new pilots was their day job, and the formation flying came on top of it. The Vampire trainer had two seats, so six men could fly in four jets.

Close formation runs on one rule. The leader watches where the formation is going. Everyone else keeps their eyes on the leader's jet and copies every move.

On the afternoon of 15 August 1962, a month before the display, the four jets took off from East Sale to practise. Noel Wadsley, a former wartime pilot, was driving on the Dutson Road when they flew over him a few hundred feet up. He thought they were very low, and he stopped his truck to watch. The team rolled the formation right over at low level and came out of it too close

to the ground. The jets flew into a gentle rise on a farm. At the last moment one pilot pulled away and tried to climb, but his jet hit the ground a short distance from the others. All six men were killed.

Flight Lieutenant Reg Jones led the team. With him were Flight Lieutenants Peter Hearnden, Alec Young, Mike Dunbar and Marty Burke, and Flying Officer Don Gow.



**RAAF Vampires RAAF Williamtown official photo**

That evening, families flooded RAAF headquarters in Melbourne with phone calls. It was nearly five hours before the names were released.

The official record holds their ranks and service numbers. It says little about where they grew up or who loved them. If you knew any of these men, or you're family, we'd be honoured to hear about them in the comments.

Later that year, the base put up a memorial cross beside its chapel. Since 1988 it has stood in Red Sales Memorial Park at East Sale. Rest easy, Reg. Rest easy, Peter, Alec, Mike, Marty and Don.

We remember you. Lest we forget.

These six men died in training, not in battle. They're not alone. Hundreds of Australian service men and women have been killed in training, and there's no national memorial to them. That's changing. The Australian Military Training Memorial now has a patron in Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston, and approval from the National Capital Authority for a site on Anzac Parade in Canberra. It will honour everyone the ADF has lost in training. It now needs funding and people to back it. If you're family or a mate of someone killed in training, please get in touch and help shape the design.



A pirate walks into a bar. The bartender says 'I haven't seen you in a while – you look terrible, what happened?' 'What do you mean?' said the pirate.

'Well, what about that wooden leg; you didn't have that before.'

'Well, we were in a battle and I got hit with a cannonball. But I'm fine now.'

Bartender says, 'Ok, what about the hook, what happened to your hand?'

'Well, we were in another battle and I boarded a ship, got into a sword fight and my hand got cut off, so I was fitted with a hook. But I'm fine now.'

The bartender then asks, 'Well, what about the eye patch?'

'Oh, well one day we were at sea and a flock of seagulls flew over. I looked up and one of them pooped in my eye.'

'You're kidding, you lost your eye from a bird poo?'

The pirate replied, 'No, it was my first day with the hook.'

