



Edition 74 - Oct 2023

Fly By



A Speck of Dust (or Two)

A Memorable Flight for a Novel Cause

Xray Lima 161

The Victor That Nearly Wasn't

The Fall & Rise of BlueBird

A Story of Resurrection and Conflict

Editorial

By M.C. Peake - Editor, 'FlyBy' Magazine



The big news this month is that **Steve Long** has volunteered to do for the Westland Wessex what **Peter Greenfield** and **David Prest** have done for the Skyhawk: that is, to write a book about them!

The Wessex was our fourth longest serving aircraft, giving over 28 years of faithful service. It replaced the Bristol Sycamore, the RAN's first experiment with rotary wing, and established itself as a modern, capable and reliable helicopter that lasted the pace: so much so that it carried out a National Security task almost to its very last days.

I flew the Wessex in various forms in both the RN and RAN, and enjoyed it. It was great to fly, solidly built and generally reliable. I was always conscious, however that every hour I spent having fun in one meant hours of work for our long-suffering maintainers in a stifling/freezing hangar trying to keep the old machinery working. They did a brilliant job, and kept me safe for many years.

Well, now's the time for all our Wessex veterans, whether you flew or fixed them, to remember those days and I've made a few suggestions on page 4 of the sort of things you might like to chip in with. There's a million Wally stories out there, so please help with yours. Your efforts can make this book as good as 'The Skyhawk Years', which is getting rave reviews and selling really well. You can send them to Steve at the link on page 4, or to me [here](#).

Another plea - I'm running out of material! Every day I scour books and the internet for things I think might interest our readers, but I'm only one person with one (increasingly dodgy) pair of eyes.

What I'd really like is for people to send in completed articles. I can do the brushing up and type-setting. If that isn't your scene then even suggestions about material would be useful. Please help if you can, or this magazine will wither on the vine.

The Voice Referendum is to be held in the next couple of weeks and it is unfortunate to see the degree of angst it is causing. The tragedy is that whichever way the vote goes, that anger is likely to stick around for a long time, too. It should have been better thought through and managed before we reached this point, but that's water under the bridge now.

Whichever way you vote - and we are fortunate that we all have that choice - make sure you are fully informed. Despite all that's going on in the wider world this is an important step in our nation's history and the result should not be skewed by ignorance or mis-information. There's lots of good material out there and, with only two weeks to go, now is the time to read it if you have not yet decided.

Finally, I'll be in the land of the long white cloud for two weeks in October, so next month's *FlyBy* may be a bit thinner. It will be my last visit for a while as my son, who is posted there as DA, returns to Oz at the end of the year. I see that Queenstown, where I'll be visiting, has been in a state of emergency due to floods, and you can't drink the water there. Another reason to stick to Gin and Tonics!

Stay safe...and Fly Navy! mp

THIS MONTH



REGULARS

02

Editorial

A few words and thoughts from the Editor.

02

Rest In Peace

We remember those who are no longer with us.

16

FAA Wall of Service Update

The status of orders for Wall of Service Plaques.

REGULARS

05

Letters to the Editor

This month's crop of correspondence from our Readers.

14

Mystery Photo

Last month's Mystery answered, and a new one presented for your puzzlement (p15).

18

Around The Traps

Bits and Pieces of Odd and Not-so-odd news and gossip.

GENERAL INTEREST

08

Xray Lima 161

The story of the Victor Bomber that nearly wasn't.

30

Resurrection

The Fall and Rise of Bluebird K7.

38

A Speck of Dust

Marcus Peake recalls a memorable flight for a very good cause.

THIS MONTH'S COVER PHOTO

Dan Parsons put his excellent drawing of Wessex 832 on Facebook recently, "for all you old Pussers out there," and has agreed we can use it. Dan resides in the UK and runs a wonderful little graphic design business. You can see some examples of his work [here](#).

REST IN PEACE

Since the last edition of FlyBy we have been advised that the following people have Crossed the Bar:

Dennis Stone, Frank Larter.

You can find further details by clicking on the image of the candle. →



FLYBY is a periodical of the Fleet Air Arm Association. The views expressed within it are not necessarily endorsed by the Association or any of its agents.

WALLY BOOK



Steve Long has held up his hand to capture the story of the RAN's Westland Wessex helicopters in a book, similar to "The Skyhawk Story" publication recently released.

Everyone who fixed or flew this magnificent (cantankerous?) old aircraft is asked to chip in with a few paragraphs about their experiences. What you write is up to you, but some suggested topics might be:

- Your favourite Wally, and why.
- The best/worst thing about the Wessex and why.
- Particular jobs that you did which were memorable.
- Learning your trade on the Wessex.
- Engine and gearbox changes.
- British engineering!
- Trying to keep the Wessex serviceable.
- Maintaining/flying Wessex off Sydney/Melbourne (or any other ship).
- Working in cold and draughty Albatross hangars.
- Looking for submarines.
- The accident you had, or nearly had (close shaves)
- How the Wessex compared to its predecessor/successor.
- Detachments you remember.
- Detachments you'd rather forget (but can't).
- Night engine-off landings.
- Navigation exercises you remember, or would rather forget.
- Operation Bursa maintenance.
- Operation Bursa operations.
- The mates you worked with on the Wessex.
- Anything else you'd like!

Send your input to Steve Long [here](#). →



Dear Editor,

The Distinction Between Ex-Military Pilots and Civil-Trained Pilots

When I first joined Trans Australian Airlines back in 1964 this was a question often bantered around by the two pilot groups.

There was no doubt that with the end of WW2 and the war in Korea, there were plenty of pilots available and the fledgling airlines had absorbed as many ex-service aviators as they needed. In the early sixties, they made up most of the serving captains who in some cases, had a very rank orientated and top-down approach to flight deck management.

However, by 1962 due to the increasing demand for air travel, the supply of pilots from the various branches of the military was no longer sufficient to meet the airline's expansion and to facilitate the increase numbers of civil trained pilots required, the Australian government offered a limited number of flying scholarships to suitably qualified and motivated budding aviators.

While both groups are skilled professionals responsible for safely navigating and operating aircraft, ensuring the safety and comfort of passengers and cargo and share fundamental flying skills, they possess distinct differences in training, experiences, and attitudes that set them apart.

Ex-military pilots begin their careers by joining the armed forces and enrolling in rigorous and highly specialised training programs. These programs are known for their intense physical and mental demands, which foster resilience, discipline, and adaptability. Military pilots undergo comprehensive flight training that often includes flying a wide range of aircraft, from basic trainers to advanced fighter jets and helicopters. Their training emphasises combat manoeuvres, aerial tactics, and coordination in high-pressure situations.

Civil trained pilots, on the other hand, follow a distinct route to aviation. They attend flight schools

and academies that focus on fulfilling the requirements set forth by civil aviation authorities. The training primarily emphasises safe commercial flying, precision navigation, and adherence to regulations. Civil trained pilots tend to specialise in specific aircraft types and receive training tailored to commercial airline operations or general aviation, such as cargo or flight instructing.

As for flying experience, the military pilots often accumulate substantial flying hours, especially if they have completed lengthy service terms. Their experiences are varied and challenging, ranging from combat missions in hostile environments to humanitarian missions and aerial reconnaissance. These diverse experiences shape their decision-making skills, ability to handle emergencies, and proficiency in flying under pressure.

After graduation civil-trained pilots typically start their careers flying for the smaller charter operators or as co-pilots for regional airlines. Their flight hours are predominantly related to commercial or general aviation, focusing on routine flights, passenger transport, and cargo operations. Although they gain extensive experience within their field, their exposure to high-stress scenarios is generally limited compared to ex-military pilots.

The mindset and attitude of those with a military background often a strong sense of duty, responsibility, and commitment, as they are conditioned to work as a cohesive team, prioritise mission success, and exhibit exceptional situational awareness. These attributes can manifest in a more assertive and decisive approach to flying, particularly during critical situations.

Civil trained pilots prioritise the safety and comfort of passengers and adherence to standardised procedures. Their training places significant emphasis on teamwork and communication, as the airline industry relies on effective collaboration between cockpit crew and cabin crew. Civil-trained pilots are generally more focused on ensuring a smooth, efficient, and predictable flight experience for passengers.

In conclusion both groups of pilots equally contribute significantly to the aviation industry, each bringing unique strengths and perspectives. While ex-military pilots possess the advantage of intense training, diverse flying experiences, and a mission-oriented mindset, civil-trained pilots excel in managing commercial operations, adhering to regulations, and maintaining a strong safety culture. Ultimately, the distinction between these two groups of pilots lies in their training

backgrounds, flying experiences, and attitudes, which collectively shape their approach to aviation and the skies they navigate.

The introduction by the airline's flight operations and training divisions of Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) courses went a long way to homogenising flight crews, so much so, that today after completion of airline induction training, it would be difficult to tell the two groups apart.

Anson E Goater. →

Dear Editor,

Lots of interesting material in the latest *FlyBy*. DC-3, Len Diprose the first Aussie to be endorsed on the aircraft was one of the folk that got me into aviation, was chief pilot of ANA in the '30's. Can forward the story of his early career if you're interested, broke the Perth to Adelaide speed record, in a DH Dragon would you believe, when it was introduced to airline service.

Interesting to see the book of **Winkle Brown** has made it out, upon finding Paul was authoring the book years ago I communicated with him and advised him to carefully check what Brown had to say about the US XS-1 and its use of British M.52 technology. Everything Brown has to say about the XS-1 is absolute nonsense, Brown wrote a book on the M.52 and it makes good fiction, I have a copy of the report written by the US Aerodynamicist who was briefed on the M.52 giving proof the Winkles story is bollox. Most interested to see what Paul has written.

Cheers, **Brian Abraham.** →

Dear Editor,

The Skyhawk Years - what a great book!

Regarding the Pre-Embarkation Workup memories on page 109, I believe one of those relate to my dad, Lt Len ("KD" or "K/Dine") Kenderdine.

The incident is included in some of Dad's recorded memories of 30 years in the RAN - copy attached.

Also attached is a photo of Dad in the Tower as a VF805 Skyhawk taxis back to the line following a display during an early 1970's Air Show.

Great memories! **Graeme Kenderdine.**

By Ed. Thanks, Graeme. See images to the right. Readers can read a bit about CPO Kenderdine (as he was then), on page 4 [here](#). →

Dear Editor,

For the benefit of those who, like me, have sight problems, a heads-up for access to items that will help them enormously.

My GP recently referred me to the Vision Australia website. As a result, I now have items worth up to \$5000. all covered by DVA, that are of considerable benefit to me. Amongst other things, I can now read small print on books and newspapers with which I have previously had trouble. What is available to those in need is absolutely amazing.

Hope this will be of benefit to anybody else in need.

Regards, **Peter McNay**

By Editor,

Thanks Peter, and glad to hear that you're getting some relief. I checked out the Vision Australia website and there is indeed some remarkable stuff there to assist a whole range of people - from those who are legally blind to others, like me, whose eyes are just old and knackered!

They also offer expert advice so even if you are not sure what you want, its worth a phone call or email to see what they think.

Readers should note that DVA sponsorship will depend on your circumstances.

Click [here](#) to access Vision Australia's website.



Caption Competition

Can you think of a witty caption for the photo below? Send you thoughts to the Editor [here](#).



A dark night with low cloud and I was manning the C.C.A. at Nowra. A Skyhawk returning from Amel Melbourne ~~to~~ asks at what point are aircraft breaking out of cloud on descent? The answer being right on minimums he then requested I talk him down to touchdown as he didn't have enough fuel for another circuit. It's times like this that you earn your keep!

Feel free to use the above in your flat-bus book if you think they are appropriate

Best wishes
R Kenderdine



X-RAY LIMA 161

The story of the Victor that nearly didn't make it.



The morning of 17 August 1962 was clear and bright in Adelaide, and the all-white paintwork of Handley-Page Victor bomber XL161 gleamed in the early morning sunshine as the test crew walked towards it.

The profile of the strikingly different airframe was altered by the Blue Steel stand-off bomb, which at nearly seven tons was too large to fit into the internal bay. It nestled tightly under the Victor's belly, almost all of its 34 feet visible.

As they approached the aircraft the six men noted the chain mail fencing enclosing the bomb loading bay had been removed, although the ground under the Victor was still awash with the distilled water used to protect refuellers from the Kerosine/High Test Peroxide cocktail used to power the weapon. It was a potent combination and was always treated with great respect.

They climbed aboard the aircraft and, after completing the lengthy pre-flight checks, fired up the four Rolls Royce Conway engines and, after a relatively short taxi, took off and climbed away to the south west.

The first navigational fix was over Kangaroo Island. The Victor climbed fairly rapidly, passing successive 10,000 ft climb points in short order on the way to its assigned altitude. All was well, as John Saxon, a civilian engineer, recalls:

"Despite being an aircraft weighing around 80 tons - and loaded with Blue Steel - the Victor was no slouch. I have been from sea level to 50,000 in around eight minutes, but it was probably a lot slower with Blue Steel loaded."

But things were about to go dramatically wrong, as Saxon recalls:

"The 10,000 climb points were passing rapidly until we got to 46,000 feet...and then all heck broke loose. It was the start of a real roller-coaster ride. The aircraft pitched up [and] rolled over, the engine noise doing wonderful things. Then what seemed to be one last wingover followed by increasingly violent positive and negative Gs"

Captain of the aircraft was John Baker, Avro's chief test pilot. He clearly understood the gravity of the situation as he wrestled to control the big bomber, but nothing seemed to work. With the aircraft rapidly losing altitude he activated the abandon aircraft sign and depressurised the aircraft.

Frank Longhurst, another Avro employee, was supposed to be first out of the door. He unstrapped his harness and tried to make his way to the escape hatch, but the extreme motion of the aircraft smashed him against the roof and he took no further part in the evacuation.

Saxon continued: *"In the nominal escape plan, I was next to get out, and I managed to half stand and hang onto the camera bracket in front of the navigation equipment. But I could get no further towards the side door as we were rotating fast and in what seemed to be a very steep dive."*

He, like the rest of the crew, was unable to abandon the Victor.

In the cockpit, the two pilots fought the aircraft. They believed the problem had been caused by a faulty reading on the right hand air speed indicator. It was reporting in excess of Mach 1, which was a critical flight envelope limit, so the aircraft system automatically initiated a pitch up manoeuvre. The pilots had compared the left and right in-

dicators and, as the pitch up had started, were inclined to believe the faulty right-hand one. They tried to further reduce air speed and were rewarded by a violent pitch-up, to an almost inverted attitude, before the aircraft flicked into a rapid uncontrolable vertical spin.

With the crew still aboard, no control inputs working and with the altimeter unwinding at an incredible rate, Baker tried a last-ditch action which had never been attempted in a fully loaded, operational Victor. He deployed the braking parachute normally only used for landing.

It was a desperate move, and the traumatised airmen recalled later what had happened. *"There was a loud bang" quoted one, "and much creaking and groaning from the airframe, which was suddenly filled with dust and all manner of loose things."*

The parachute tore loose after a few seconds, but it has it worked. The spin ceased as rapidly as it had started, and, with both pilots heaving on the controls, level flight was established. They had lost 30,000 feet in just a few terrifying seconds, and the airframe had been subjected to G forces of -3 to +5, which far exceeded its structural limits.

The flight data recorder also indicated the Victor had gone supersonic during



161 back on the ground after a successful launch. The refuelling probe was fitted after this particular incident. Photo: John Saxon



Impression of John Baker deploying XL161's parachute in the hope of stopping the uncontrollable, vertical plummet. Airwork by Anastasios Polychronis. →

its plunge, and with only 16,000 feet of remaining altitude was within a few seconds of spearing into the ground.

With control restored, the crew assessed the situation. There was still concern about which Air Speed Indicator was correct as nobody wanted a repeat performance, and there was the question of structural damage to the airframe. Baker asked for a chase aircraft to join them as quickly as possible to provide a visual inspection and an accurate air speed read out.

There was also the question of the Blue Steel, which was still strapped below the Victor's belly. It carried an inert warhead but was filled with highly volatile fuel whose temperature was rising. It also contained a TNT 'self destruct' charge. Nobody knew if the Victor's undercarriage had been damaged during its gyrations and the prospect of landing wheels up, with no braking parachute and with the bomb protruding from below the belly of the aircraft, was not appealing.

While they waited for the chase aircraft to arrive, the crew decided to jettison Blue Steel. It was an easy

decision to make but it had to be done safely. The crew aimed it for the bombing range near Port Wakefield, and, after a last second delay to ensure a nearby school was not endangered, the button was pressed.

They had informed the guards on the range to keep a look out for an impromptu weapon drop, but failed to mention that it was 35 feet long, weighed more than six tons and was full of explosive fuel. Later, they heard that the two guards had strolled outside to take a look and, on realising what it was, ran inside to get their hard hats. Fortunately the bomb struck the beach and there was only a relatively small explosion.

The first chase aircraft to arrive was a Meteor which had scrambled out of RAAF Edinburgh. The pilot, Flt Lt Alec Hollingsworth, put the old fighter close to the Victor and carefully examined it, but could find no apparent damage. He also gave an accurate speed check, and for the first time since the incident the bomber's crew were able to establish which of their air speed indicators was correct.

The crew were naturally keen to return as soon as possible, but even without the Blue Steel the Victor was still overweight for landing and, without a parachute to slow them down, Baker was taking no chances. They loitered for another 90 minutes to burn off fuel, watching as the short range Meteor was replaced by a Canberra bomber flown by Wg Cdr David Glenn. He stayed with them for the remainder of the flight.

Finally, with the weight below the acceptable maximum, the Victor made its approach to RAAF Edinburgh. On the ground the runway had been sprayed with foam and every emergency vehicle was deployed, but the landing was smooth and the bomber rolled to a stop. The flight was over.

The crew popped into the Mess for a couple of drinks to celebrate their safe return. The story goes that one of them, Jimmy Catlin, was well lubricated by the time he had to attend a church social that evening, and on arrival he loudly told the vicar 'that he had seen his boss today' before collapsing at his feet. A few days later the crew gathered again to have a celebratory dinner and group photograph. It had been as close a call as anyone of them ever wanted again.

Incredibly, although XL161 had far exceeded its design limits, the only damage was some wrinkling to the top mainplane skin above the engine intakes. The aircraft continued to fly and later returned to the UK, where it joined a reconnaissance squadron. →



Technicians fuel a Blue Steel Missile. The fuel mixture was highly volatile, requiring full protective clothing and water damping during the process. →

A Snapshot of Blue Steel

A study undertaken in 1954 predicted that within six years Soviet air defences would prevent any attack by aircraft using gravity bombs. The answer was 'stand off' weapons, of which Blue Steel was the first.

The concept was that the weapon would be dropped outside of the range of air defence system, where it would propel itself at up to Mach 3 to its designated target.

The size of Blue Steel was initially determined by the only thermo-nuclear warhead available to the Brits at the time which was code named "Green Bamboo". During development of the missile a more compact warhead became available, called "Red Snow". This determined the final size of the weapon.

Development of Blue Steel was plagued by problems, many of which were caused by the technology limits of the time. This included problems developing the fabrication techniques for stainless steel components, and the need to develop an inertial navigation system sufficiently accurate to guide the weapon to its target once released.

Blue Steel finally emerged as a pilotless aircraft with small delta wings and canard fore plane. It was powered by an Armstrong Siddeley rocket engine burning a mixture of kerosene and hydrogen peroxide - a potent and highly dangerous mixture.

The weapon finally entered service in early 1963 but was already obsolete as Soviet air defence systems had advanced by then, rendering the V-bombers which would drop the weapon highly vulnerable. It also proved to be a grossly unreliable weapon, taking up to seven hours to prepare and with about 50% subsequently failing to fire - which then required them to be gravity dropped on the target.

With little else on the drawing board, however, the British persevered with Blue Steel, including a change to the attack profile from high to low level.

Blue Steel was officially retired in 1970, when the UK's strategic nuclear capability was passed to the submarine fleet. →

What Happened to XL161?

"As a young J/T Airframe Fitter, RAF, I was posted to No.4 JSTU in OCT.1962.

I became a member of the servicing team that took over responsibility for XL-161 from the Manufacturer's Teams and WRE as part of the Blue Steel hot weather trials from out of Edinburgh Field.

This "spin" that 161 got into happened in the August of '62 and when we got to the aircraft, part of every inspection we had to do was satisfying the terms of the Flight Limitations Log redline entries to inspect the two big "wrinkles" in the top mainplanes skin above the intakes, running back for about 4 ft. These were created by John Saxon's episode. 161 ran and flew faultlessly after that. she went back to UK when the Harold Wilson Government of the day Axed the [Blue Steel] trials.

XL-161 went on to become a tanker after a major re-fit, and I serviced her again quite regularly at Goose Bay in 71-72. I saw her for the last time around 1986 when she arrived at Thumrait in The Oman as part of a big inter-Service exercise.

161 ended her days on the scrap heap at Lyneham around 1996, Apparently the crew that flew her in there immediately took souvenirs, including sawing off at least one Control Yoke. Then came a call saying that she had to be flown elsewhere for scrapping, so a lot of excuses must have been made I'm sure." →



LAST MONTH'S
MYSTERY PHOTO

For last month's Mystery Photo we asked for the name of the above aircraft, and, for a bonus point, which carrier it had landed on? As usual, **Ted Goater** was the first correct answer followed by two others.

It's a **Blackburn Firebrand TF5** which was a carrier-based strike fighter of the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm. Originally designed as a fighter, its low performance led to a redesign as a strike fighter. Deliveries to squadrons did not start until after World War 2 and only 220 aircraft plus three prototypes were built. It was withdrawn from service in 1953.

Winkle Brown, the RN's well known test pilot, described the Firebrand as *"...built like a battleship and flew like one. A deck landing horror."*

According to our information this particular aircraft came to grief onboard **HMS Eagle** on the 10th of June 1952 and is depicted being prepared for lifting by the crane to the left of the photo. (Eagle had Deck Code "J" until 1956 when she changed to "E", and J was reallocated to HMS Warrior). This was well after the above mishap. →



THIS MONTH'S
MYSTERY PHOTO

Image: Open Source. Attributed to Oleg Simanov.

This month's Mystery Photo has some interesting visual attributes. I've added a few pixels to the girls to avoid offending any PC-inclined readers, and taken away a few from the aircraft to make identification a little more difficult.

We would like to know the aircraft model and its location, and, for extra points, the names and phone numbers of the two human models. Answers [here](#). →

DO YOU GET PRINTED SLIPSTREAMS?

At the time of going to print, 372 of our members receive their quarterly Slipstream magazine in 'hard' copy - that is, printed on paper and sent through the post.

Over 80% of these members have valid email addresses, though, so could receive their magazine electronically. This would save work for our volunteer 'packers', reduce printing and postage costs and, of course, would spare a bunch of trees.

So, would you consider switching to 'soft' copy distribution? It will get emailed to you in 'flip page' format, will still be available on the website if you want it, and you can change back to hard copy if you find its not for you. There will always be that option for as long as Slipstream keeps going.

Simply click on the button below to access a request chit, and we'll do the rest. →

CHANGE TO SOFTCOPY



NOT JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL



Have you thought about getting your name put on the FAA Wall of Service?

It's a unique way to preserve the record of your Fleet Air Arm service in perpetuity, by means of a bronze plaque mounted on a custom-built wall just outside the FAA museum. The plaque has your name and brief details on it (see background of photo above right).

There are over 1000 names on the Wall to date and, as far as we know, it is a unique facility unmatched anywhere else in the world. It is a really great way to have your service to Australia recorded.

It is easy to apply for a plaque and the cost is reasonable, and far less than the retail price of a similar plaque elsewhere. And, although it is not a Memorial Wall, you can also do it for a loved one to remember both them and their time in the Navy.

Simply click [here](#) for all details, and for the application form. →

Current applications in Order No.53 are as follows:

- R.J. Cluley LS ATA S113325 Jul 72 - Jul 81.
- D.R. Hooper WO ATA S133260 Apr 82 - Apr 06.
- M.A. Sandberg ABATWL S125208 May78-May88.
- E.D. Sandberg LCDR(O) O1024 Apr50-Sep90.
- A. Clark CAF(A) R35828 Mar48-Mar63.

We have to wait for a minimum order size before we can submit to the Foundry, so there will be a delay.

September Slipstream Running Late

FAAAA members who receive "Slipstream" magazine are advised that the September edition is running a little late this year, as the Editor is overseas.

Anticipated printing date is 12 October, with posted hard copies arriving in your mailbox a few days after that. →

Naval History Quiz/Trivia Night in Canberra

Participants are invited to the inaugural Naval History Quiz/Trivia Night in Canberra on 4 October. It is being organised by **John Perryman**, the former Director of Naval History at the Sea Power Centre – Australia. The event will be held at EQ cafe, Equinox Building, 70 Kent Street, Deakin commencing at 1800. It will be an evening of questions and canapés (six courses, a mixture of hot and cold). A bar service will be available. Cost: The cost for the canapé meal, venue hire and entertainment is \$35.00 per head. 60 people are required to make the event viable, so let's hope that John gets the required number. Individuals or teams (6 people) can be nominated via email [here](#). →

Isn't A.I. wonderful? Well, not exactly AI in the true sense of the words, as that's what my wife calls what goes on in my brain. Whatever.

The photo on the right was one of **Ian Laidler's**, showing a flight of three Fireflies over the UK. No date, but guessing 1947.

The print was badly damaged but a little repair work by my Desktop Publishing software brought it up a treat, as you can see above. Anyone want a passport photo adjusted? →





Reports are emerging that Australia has abandoned the planned acquisition of the Schiebel CAMCOPTER S-100 some 16 months after selecting it as a 'sole source' contender without going through the normal acquisition process.

The Camcopter was selected in May 2022. At that time it was intended to procure nine airframes in partnership with Raytheon Australia.

Since then, however, the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) has occurred, and advice is that the Camcopter cancellation is one of the outcomes of that Review. Lessons on the changing face of warfare, which are emerging from the Ukraine conflict, may also be a factor in the shift in direction.

Like most things Defence, however, it is not clear whether this kills the project altogether, or whether it may be shifted to another project phase. Defence currently operates six Camcopter S-100 airframes and, according to reports, "Schiebel is awaiting the start of negotiations for a follow on sustainment contact".

As Defence continues to examine its options in the shadow of the DSR, and with particular focus on delivering capabilities quickly, it may also be that the RAN will look at Army's success with remote aerial vehicles such as the Integrator UAS. (Defence image). →

Our congratulations to 271 Pilots' Course which graduated at RAAF Base Pearce on 15 September.

From left to right are **Jim Bush**, **Bill Atthowe**, **Mike Keogh** (all FAAAA WA Division), **CMDR Andy Collard** (T-AVN), **LEUT Jack Williams***, **LEUT Zane Viljoen***, **CDRE David Frost** (COMFAA), **SBLT Fraser Jackson***, **SBLT Connor Russell***, **Brad Eaton** (SNO Pearce), **Andy Dakin** (visiting from the East) and **Brett Dowsing** (well known pyromanic).

Williams took out the best ground school award (academics) and the leadership award went to Viljoen. *Graduates. →



Phil Thompson has just updated his Big PDF file on all things FAA/Naval Aviation. At over 21,000 pages it is a treasure trove of information, stories and memories from across the years. The PDF file is stored on Microsoft OneDrive and GoogleDrive and its BIG. Too big to try and read off the cloud, so you are best downloading it to your computer where you can then peruse at your leisure.

You can access the link for the Big PDF and some detailed instructions on our website, [here](#). If you follow them carefully you shouldn't have any trouble. Our thanks (again) to Phil who has amassed this amazing trove of material, and who works diligently to maintain it. →



Skyhawk Book Launch



Words by **Peter Greenfield**

Friday the 1st of September was the date of the Book Launch at the Fleet Air Arm Museum at HMAS Albatross.

To arrive at that date was a complicated process that was a lot more difficult than writing the book. For a start, as one of the authors I live in happy retirement on the island of Penang in Malaysia. My co-author, **David Prest** was absent on a long postponed set of cruises on the other side of the world. **Peter Ingman**, the publisher, was hard at work mailing out the pre-ordered copies and the earliest date he could manage was the 01st of September. Luckily **CDRE John Da Costa** was not overly concerned with time, but desired that we look professional and appear in an agreed dress code.

So the date was set, but there were more arrangements to be completed, which fell to me. First after the date was set to seek Navy approval from Canberra to use the Museum for the function. That was immediately forthcoming, but we did not know the Museum was being managed by a volunteer co-ordinator, Ms **Ailsa Chittick**, who facilitated the venue. She also advised on a source of catering for the function.

Marcus Peake, who has been so supportive of our efforts, was not able to assist due a much needed holiday and then a necessary medical procedure,



The launch of the much lauded book "The Skyhawk Years" by Peter Greenfield and David Prest was held in the FAA Museum on Friday 01st September.

Shown to the left in the main picture are (L-R) **Peter Greenfield**, **CDRE John Da Costa**, who wrote the foreword, **David Prest** and **Terry Hetherington**, who made the Museum arrangements.

Below Centre. A view of the ceremony showing some of the attendees.

Bottom. **CDRE Da Costa** (left) signs a document authoring the publisher, **Avonmore Books**, to pay any royalties from sales of the book to the FAAM.

The book is selling exceptionally well and why wouldn't it! If you want a copy you'd better be quick. Click [here](#) to go to an order form to register your interest, before they are gone. ➔

ironically, on the very day of the book launch. However, **Marcus** wrote the notice for the book launch and handed over to **Terry Hetherington**. Terry undertook the organisation of the catering, and local liaison with the Museum. Terry and **Paul Norris** co-ordinated the gathering of names for the launch, while David and I took turns in guessing the numbers. The food must have been good, or we are a lot of seagulls, because it was all cleaned up when I eventually wandered upstairs.

On the day, the four of us met at the Museum at 1000 to set out the chairs assisted by a Museum volunteer. Peter set up his table for book sales, and the signing of books. Using his own credit card machine and a long extension cable to facilitate book sales. At 1100 we were ready to start with a total of 36 attendees all eager to hear out pitch.

I began with an introduction of the two of us authors, and John Da Costa who had very kindly written a foreword for the book, and contributed his own original material for the early chapters. After introducing Peter Ingman and his credit card machine and stack of books, I opened my pitch by explaining how the book came into being and pointed out **Joe Hattley** as being key to a dis-

cussion on the V805/VC724 Squadrons page on Facebook (Joe was also our official volunteer photographer and the photos that accompany this article are from his camera.)

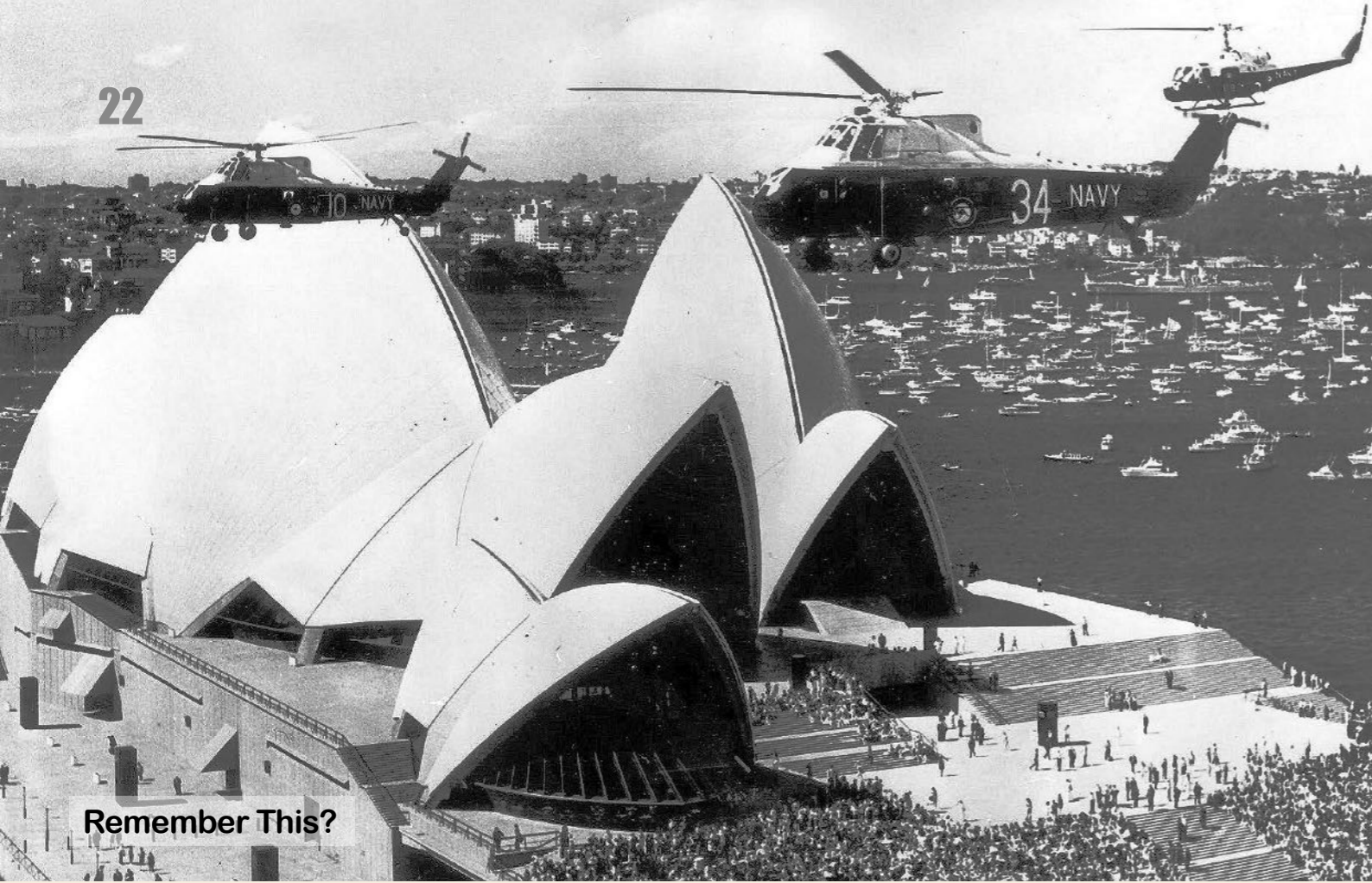
David continued on to explain the process of gathering the written memories and photos from flyers and fixers. From there he explained how there were constant emails flowing between us as we put the book together. (And we never knew each other in the Navy because when I made it to the Squadrons, David was in SAMR and did not return to VC724 until I had left the Navy. We first met in Port Macquarie when I made a brief stop on my way to Melbourne.

John Da Costa then gave us a reading from The Skyhawk Years which basically outlined the purpose of the book. We could see that he was physically pleased and proud that a record had been made of the Skyhawk Years, that told the stories of flyers and fixers and how each had contributed to the success of the squadrons.

The launch then opened to questions from the audience, and there were some curly ones, but David and I managed them I think. Subsequently, Peter Ingman was rushed for copies of the book, and while he did business, David and I signed approximately 50 copies. Finally, everyone wandered upstairs for a convivial snack and a cup of tea.

I would like to go on record to express my thanks to Terry Hetherington, Marcus Peake (in absentia), Peter Ingman and the volunteers who assisted us on the day. Peter sold every book he brought to the launch, and just a few days ago told me that he has now sold well over 400 books. He stated that they are flying off the shelf! And finally, my thanks to the people who came to the launch; you were clearly as enthusiastic as David and I. *Purps.* ➔





Remember This?



Tucked away in the Australian War Memorial's Annex, in Mitchell ACT, is Wessex 826 as photographed by **Dave Masterton** on 2 September 2023. Re-attach the rotor blades and it looks good enough to roll out onto the line.

This particular Wally undertook its first flight on 14 March 1963. Its claim to fame was in Jan 85, when, piloted by the late LCDR Clive Mayo and (then) LEUT Vince Di Pietro, it rescued a fisherman from rocks near Pt Perpendicular. It was withdrawn from Service at the end of '89 and spent many years hanging from the ceiling of the National Maritime Museum before being gazumped by a Seahawk in 2019. It's been in the AWM since then, waiting for its chance to be in the sunlight again. →



Seen recently on Facebook, this classic image of a Gannet travelling under the radar. Not something you saw every day, even in those days! So what's the story? Well, in 1968 the Moorabbin Air Museum acquired XG789, which the RAN kindly transported to Melbourne as deck cargo aboard HMAS Sydney.

It was left up to the museum how it would get the old bird from the docks to Moorabbin - a problem easily solved by simply towing it behind someone's old pickup truck, apparently driven by **Terry Ellis**. It was only for 15 miles, but the traffic looks pretty heavy. Try doing that today - you'd be tied up with paperwork and insurance requirements for the next ten years. →

\$25 per person

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Bowls GR8 for Brains Facebook page
www.facebook.com/BowlsGr8forBrains

Folk living on or near the Central Coast might be interested in attending **John Macartney's** Bowls and Brains function on Sunday 19th November, in beautiful Old Bar NSW. It's sure not only to be a fun day with mates of similar outlook and humour, but also an educational one - and at \$25 p/h, which includes lunch - it has to be the bargain of the century. Contact John on 0427 787 296 or email him [here](#) if you are interested in coming along. →

Proposed 11.2% PAY RISE FOR THE ADF

Under the terms of a new proposed Workplace Remuneration Arrangement (WRA), members of the ADF would receive an 11.2% increase to salary and salary-related allowances over three years. This would be as follows:

- 4% – from 9 Nov 23 (to take effect 23 Nov 23)
- 3.8% – from 7 Nov 24 (to take effect 21 Nov 24)
- 3.4% – from 6 Nov 25 (to take effect 20 Nov 25)

The Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) has been authorised by the Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal (DFRT) to make representations on behalf of Australian Defence Force members, separate to the chain of command.

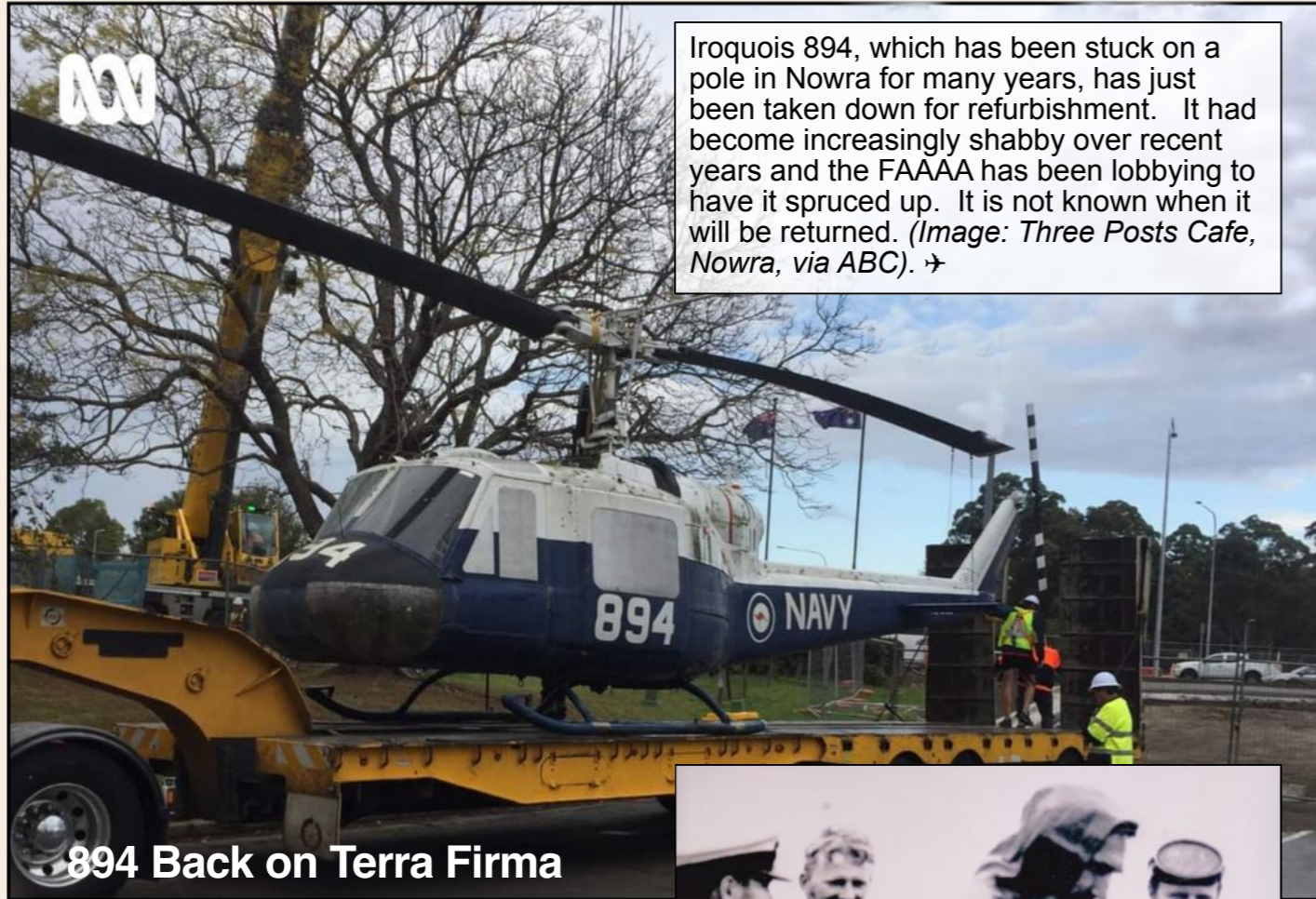
The DFWA has invited current and former ADF members and their families to submit their comments about the proposed salary increase, which they will take into account when intervening at the DFRT Hearing.

You can engage with the DFWA [here](#). →

In last month's *FlyBy* we missed wishing HMAS Albatross a happy birthday! It was a special one too, as she turned 75 years old. Constructed as a RAAF base in 1942, it was transferred to the Royal Navy as HMS Nabbington a couple of years later. The birth of the Fleet Air Arm in '47 demanded a home base, however, and Nabbington was recommissioned as HMAS Albatross. It's Navy's largest shore establishment and has served the FAA continuously since its very first day. →



CAPT Scott Palmer, CO of HMAS Albatross, cuts the birthday cake with the youngest sailor aboard, AB Casey Merriman.



Iroquois 894, which has been stuck on a pole in Nowra for many years, has just been taken down for refurbishment. It had become increasingly shabby over recent years and the FAAAA has been lobbying to have it spruced up. It is not known when it will be returned. (Image: Three Posts Cafe, Nowra, via ABC). →

894 Back on Terra Firma

Words by **John Macartney**.

I saw a video clip recently of Iroquois 894 being lifted by a crane to be taken away to be refurbished. This brought memories of 25th November 1970 when it ditched in Jervis Bay.

That night HMAS *Kimbla* steamed down from Sydney to recover 894 from the bottom of JB.

From memory it was a very cold, windy morning when we arrived at HMAS *Creswell* and boarded a pontoon to take us out to the crash site.

Two of our SAR Divers, Phil Peck and Rob McDermott dived down and attached the hook to 894 and the *Kimbla* lifted her onto the pontoon. We then ferried her to the wharf at *Creswell* where she was hosed down with fresh water, loaded onto a truck and sent off to be refurbished to fly again.

Middle photo: **John Macartney, Phil Peck, Arthur Sharland and Rob McDermott**. Photo provided by the late Rob McDermott.

By Ed. Our accident database reports that N9-3102 ditched in about 50ft of water following an over-pitch. The crew of LEUT Tingey, LACM Smith, ACM Law and ACM Parish were all rescued unhurt. Ken McDermott was subsequently given a Flag Officer's Commendation for his outstanding contribution to the salvage operation. →



Aussie Aviation Artist

Last month we mentioned the work of **Drew Harrison**, who is an Adelaide based fine and contemporary artist who specialises in highly detailed, meticulously researched, military and aviation art. Additionally, he has a keen interest in Australia's flying history and particularly the military era between 1920 and end of the Korean War.

The artist has completed many traditional paintings as commissions and commercial releases, however, his latest creations explore a dynamic and contemporary approach to the genre.

"The development of my new artistic direction stemmed from commercial project releases for Military and Air Force Shops including *Then, Now, Always* during the RAAF Centenary and *Black Hawk Sunset*, retirement of S-70A-9 Black Hawk in Australian service. Following success of these two projects I considered a montage style would adapt well to individual units."

First step in the artist's creative process is a digital sketch which helps to establish basic composition with balance of colours and forms. Pictured example is a concept 'rough' combining the unit heraldry with fixed and rotary wing aircraft of 808 SQN. This is one of several digital composites Drew has designed primarily relating to RAAF units. While he would enjoy developing these further, currently only two have reached completed form as self-funded painted artworks (11 SQN and 77 SQN RAAF). Each impressive canvas measures 120cm x 85cm and take approximately three weeks to complete in the artist's preferred medium of Acrylics.

The artist recently completed a traditional aviation art commission of Fairey Swordfish in action during 1940 and looks forward to sharing further details with the FAAAA in future.

More details about the described artworks, commissions and available print releases can be found at Drew's website.

- <https://www.drewharrison-art.com/aviation>
- <https://militaryshop.com.au/the-end-of-service-collection-s-70a-9-black-hawk/>
- <https://airforceshop.com.au/then-now-always-centenary-of-the-royal-australian-air-force-artwork/> →

First Drone Delivery for RN Ship



SEE VIDEO

HMS *Prince of Wales* has become the first British warship to fly a drone on and off its deck, when a W Autonomous Systems aircraft flew from the Lizard Peninsula to deliver supplies, before returning to its home base at Predannack.

The ship has experimented with pilotless technology before, notably small quadcopters and Banshee targets, but this evolution was in a different league involving a much larger (10 metre wing-span) aircraft.

W Autonomous Systems is a leading edge British firm based in Southampton, which is developing long range, heavy lift drones for Defence. The aircraft which landed on *Prince of Wales* was a twin-engine light alloy craft capable of carrying a 100 kg payload up to 1000 km. It can land on uneven ground and needs a runway only 150m long, which is a little over half the length of the flight deck of the UK's Queen Elizabeth class carriers. →



99 Years Old and Looking Young!

99 yo **Henry Young**, our most senior FAAAA member, was one of the most senior attendees at the Pacific Airshow Gold Coast in late August.

Born in Glenelg in Adelaide, Henry served in the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm with 805 Squadron as well as earlier in the Royal New Zealand Air Force Volunteer Reserve and later the RAN. During his time in service he flew a range of aircraft, from biplanes such as the Boeing Stearman to the naval variant of the Supermarine Seafire and the Hawker Sea Fury, and did flying training in the Vought F4U Corsair in the United States of America during WW2. A truly remarkable gentleman!

Defence image. →

A Very Expensive Mistake!

Sonar imagery of the F35-B resting on the sea bed in the Mediterranean. It was subsequently salvaged using remote underwater vehicles. (MOD). →

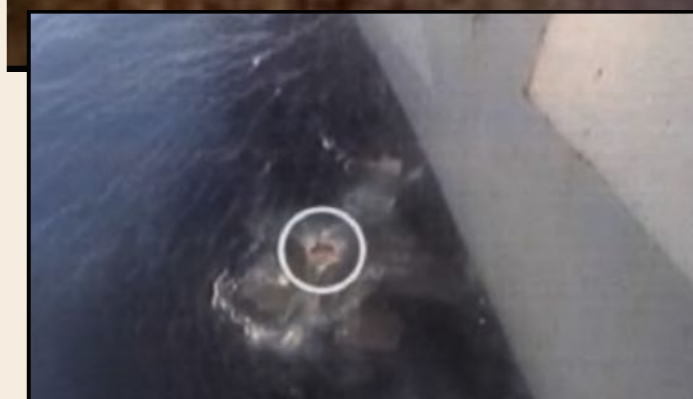
Report into loss of RAF F35-B Lightning finds overlooked engine intake blank was the cause of the accident.

Readers might remember news of a RAF 617 Squadron F35-B Lightning ditching in the eastern Mediterranean in November 2021, during a take-off from HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. The wreckage was subsequently salvaged from 2000 feet at a cost of £2.63m. A member of the ship's crew was subsequently sent home after releasing an unauthorised video of the accident.

The aircraft was engaged in a short take-off evolution and, at the direction of the Captain of the Flight Deck, the pilot conducted engine run-up checks, confirmed all indications, selected 97% engine thrust and released the brakes.

He reported initial acceleration felt normal, but then decreased. He observed that engine power was low (at only 74%). Attempts to demand 100% thrust were unsuccessful, and, with insufficient time to abort the take-off, the pilot successfully ejected. The aircraft struck the sea in a level attitude and floated past the ship before sinking, during which time an intake blank was seen to float free. It was recovered by a ship's boat.

The subsequent investigation found that the port engine blank had worked its way down into the intake, probably due to poor fitting, high wind and rain. It was not detected during any of the pre-flight inspections and checks. On starting the engine, it became lodged at the front face of the compressor, preventing the engine from delivering the required thrust.



The investigation identified 26 contributory, one aggravating and 25 other causal factors. These included organisational failures, undermanning and fatigue, inexperience, and a somewhat casual approach to understanding the criticality of "Red Gear" (blanks) as a threat to airworthiness. →

Joby On Track for 2025 Commercial Operations



SEE VIDEO

In past editions of *FlyBy* we have reported on the progress of various Air Mobility projects, but the projected date they will enter service is always elusive.

Getting new designs to fly is one thing, and many companies are now confident their flight trial programs have proven the concept of their designs. But the elephant in the room is Certification by the relevant Aviation body. It is a highly arduous process even for conventional projects, but for concepts that are new from the very first stroke on the drawing board, they are mind-bogglingly complex and time-consuming.

But Joby Aviation is confident that its commercial eVTOL aircraft will begin its Urban Air Mobility operations in 2025. The company has finished submitting its certification plans to the FAA, shortly before it rolled out its first production model at its manufacturing facility in Marina, California. This follows over 5000 hours of flight testing throughout the concept, prototype and pre-production designs.

The aircraft is a five seater (pilot plus four), and will initially be used for point-to-point on-demand air taxi services in major capitals - for example, from city landing pads to the nearest airport.

A feature of the aircraft is its almost silent operation, resulting from years of research. Eric Allison, Head of Product at Joby

Aviation, said: "One of the high-order drivers of noise is tip speed on propellers. You have to spin them relatively slowly to drive dramatic changes to the noise profile."

The problem eVTOL developers face is they must decide between efficiency and noise, both of which increase as the speed of the motor climbs.

The choice is between adding a complex gearbox that allows the propellers to spin slower, or increasing the torque on the motor while keeping the propellers at a speed that reduces noise. "We tried both and decided it's not worth it to take on the additional complexity of a gearbox," Allison said. "We decided to engineer the highest-performance torque class, and spin the propellers slowly." →

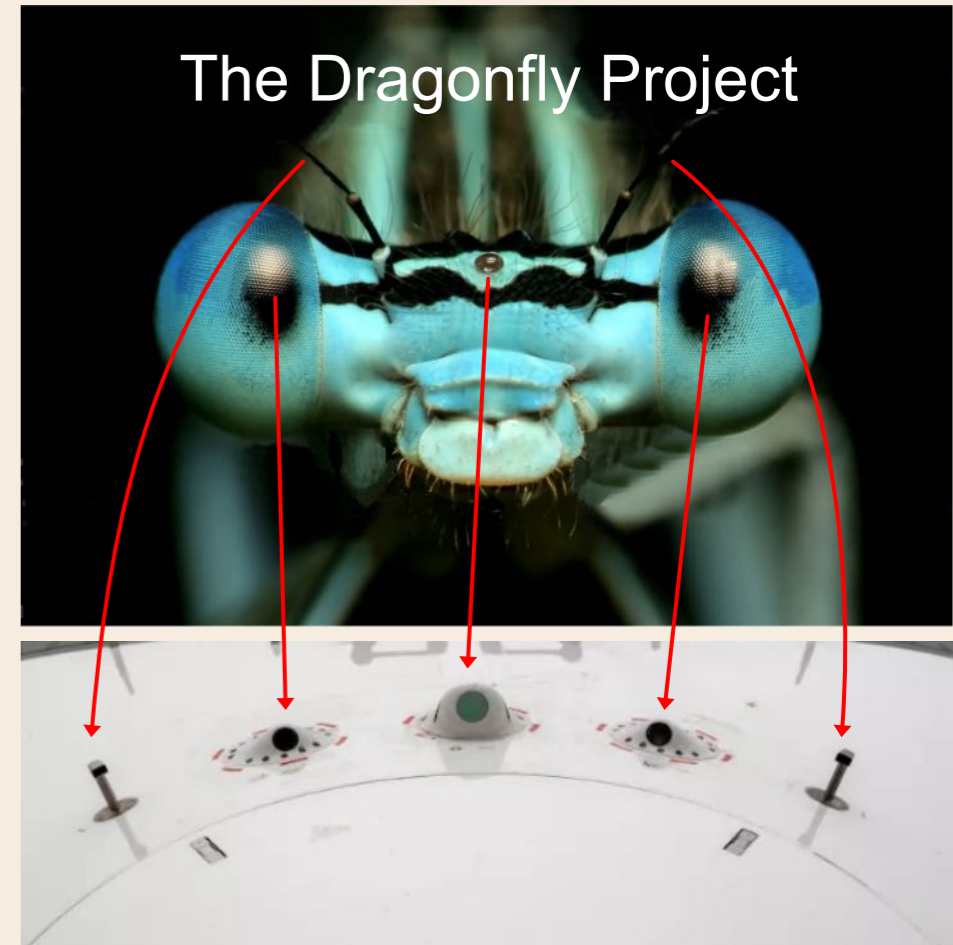
Oops! Amazing what you find when you're just flying around...



Dragonflies have phenomenal vision, the ability to see 360°, and can recognise landmarks which help them define territorial boundaries. It is therefore hard to imagine a better name for Airbus's current project to explore the boundaries of autonomous flight.

Project DragonFly, simply put, is the integration of systems into an aircraft that allows it to review and identify features around it. This will enable it to 'see' and safely manoeuvre within its surroundings, be they on the ground or in the air.

When fully operational, DragonFly will enable the aircraft to automatically taxi from its gate to the assigned take off runway (or vice versa after landing). It will take into account obstacles, other traffic, airport limits and restrictions. In flight it will monitor its position and situational awareness, and will then enable automatic landings to touch down at any airport in marginal weather, without the need for external navigational aids or approach systems such as RNAV or ILS. →



NAN Feb 1979



The AWOL Bomb

The AWOL Bomb grampaw pettibone

About 0830 one morning a practice bomb (Mk76) was found downtown, USA, inside an English muffin delivery truck belonging to a local bakery. Military ordnance personnel were quickly dispatched to investigate. They determined that the bomb was inert. The truck's roof was extensively torn where the bomb was reported to have entered. (A damage assessment to English muffins was not readily available.)

The muffin man refused to release the bomb to naval personnel because he needed it for insurance purposes. The identification numbers of the bomb were noted but could not be matched with any "lot" numbers assigned to nearby military bases. Local military and FAA authorities investigated all possible aircraft which could



have dropped the bomb - without success. Further investigation traced the bomb to its home base which was over 500 miles away. No connection

could be made between the subject Mk76 and any aircraft.



Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy bomb squad! Looks like a clear case of muffin' up! You could easily leap to the wrong conclusion on this one. Downtown yet! Well, some good investigating shed light on the mystery of whodun-it - and it wasn't an airplane. Allegedly, a young lad who was AWOL from the service and driving the muffin truck had misappropriated a practice Mk76. He had accidentally torn the truck's roof when he drove under an overhanging tree branch. He returned the vehicle without reporting the damage. Next time the truck was used, a different driver discovered the hole and found the Mk76 in the back. Understandably, the owner concluded that the bomb was dropped by an airplane.

Sometimes, what seems obvious at the outset disintegrates in the face of evidence. In this case, an airplane didn't assault English muffins. Nuff sed!

Resurrection

*The Fall and
Rise of
Bluebird K7*



"... Full nose up ... Pitching a bit down here ... coming through our own wash ... er getting straightened up now on track ... rather closer to Peel Island ... and we're tramping like mad ... and er ... FULL POWER ... er tramping like hell OVER. I can't see much and the water's very bad indeed ... I'm galloping over the top ... and she's giving a hell of a bloody row in here ... I can't see anything ... I've got the bows out ... I'm going ... U-hh ..."

Last words of Donald Campbell →

‘ One of my family is going to get the chop. I pray to God that it is not me ’

Donald Campbell 4th January 1967



The day before he was due to make yet another attempt to break his own record, the highly superstitious Donald Campbell played a form of patience which he used to fill the time waiting for conditions to become right. On one hand he turned up an ace of spades followed by the queen of spades.

Next day, when it looked as if an attempt was going to be possible, he told one of the journalists sharing his vigil that Mary Queen of Scots had turned up the same sequence of cards and knew she was going to be executed. "I know that one of my family is going to get the chop," he told the reporter. "I pray God it is not me."

Later that morning he boarded his record-breaking jet-powered boat Bluebird K7 and made a run through the measured mile towards the southern end of the lake, achieving a clocked speed of 297.6 mph (478.9 km/hr).

This was below his target, so Campbell decided to make the return run immediately, during which he reached a peak speed of 328 mph (528km/h). But Bluebird was now experiencing bouncing episodes of the starboard sponson of increasing magnitude. As he reached that peak speed, the longest lasting bounce caused a severe deceleration and, as she dropped back to the surface, the engine flamed out.

Suddenly denied her nose-down thrust, the craft immediately exceeded her static stability pitch-up angle of 5.2° and executed an almost complete backflip before plunging into the water about 230 metres short of the end of the mile. It cartwheeled across the water, its back broken, before disappearing from sight.

It was January 4th 1967, and Donald Campbell, the darling of the racing set, was dead.

Navy divers subsequently located the wreck but could not find Campbell's body, and, at the request of his widow, no further efforts were made to locate it.

Resurrection

In October 2000, more than thirty years after the accident, a new project team re-located the wreckage using specialised sonar equipment. The project leader was the modestly named Bill Smith, a salvage specialist, who had been inspired by the words of a song by British rock band Marillion:

*"Three hundred miles an hour on water
In your purpose-built machine
No one dared to call a boat
Screaming blue
Out of this world
Make history
This is your day
Blue Bird"*



Top. Bill Smith, the project leader, waves as the largest section of wreckage surfaces in Coniston Waters. Above. Campbell's widow, Tonia Bern-Campbell (right) was present as the wreckage was brought ashore (credit PA). Right. Campbell's headstone, erected 33 years after his death. →

There was a mixed reaction to the proposal to salvage the wreck. Tonia Bern-Campbell, Donald's widow, strongly believed that it should remain undisturbed, as did other members of the family. But the genie was out of the bottle and there were fears that if it was not properly recovered with reverence and respect, the carcass would be picked by the many opportunity divers who had been searching for it. Eventually, the family agreed.



Campbell's body was carried on a launch down the measured mile for one last time on 12 September 2001.

A funeral service was then held at St Andrew's church in Coniston, which was attended by his widow Tonia, daughter Gina and other members of his family, members of his former team and admirers.

His trademark mascot teddy bear, Mr Whoppit, was placed on his grave and the lead singer of the band Marillion, who had inspired the recovery process, sang "Out of This World." →

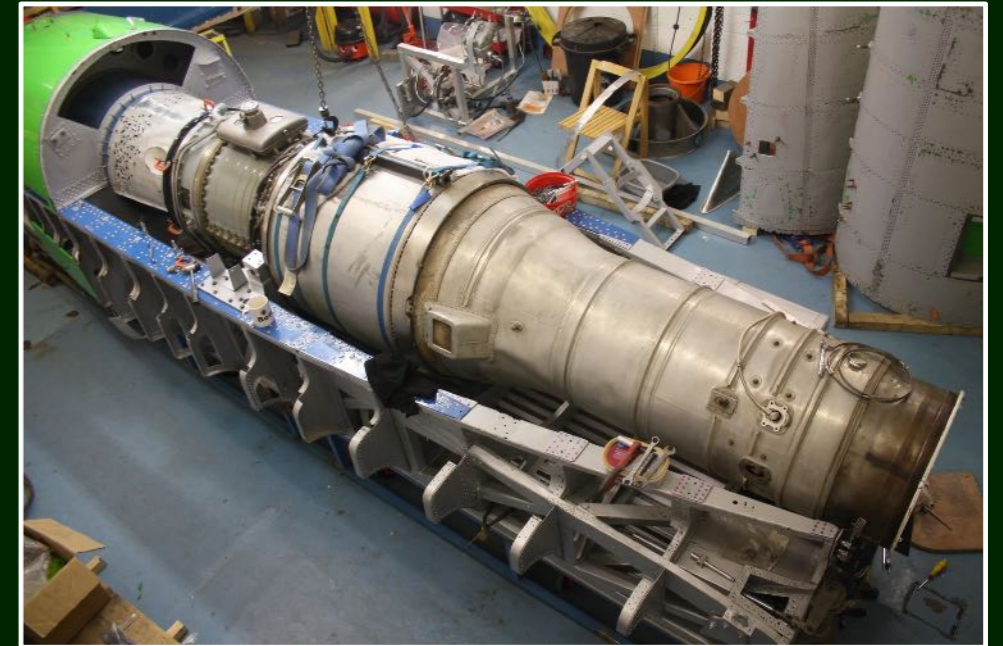


Restoration

Left. New parts of the steel frame are green:

- 1 The first of 23 frames.
2. Frame 15 where the boat snapped.
3. Air intake frame.
4. Yellow roll jig to spin the craft for welding.
5. Cockpit area.

Right. The new jet engine installed in Bluebird. →



The largest section of the vessel was raised in March 2001. The villagers of Coniston turned out in force to watch.

Hazel Nicholson, whose husband took the black and white film footage of the Bluebird crash, said the mood at the salvage was sombre. "Donald Campbell was hugely popular in the village. I wasn't sure whether or not to come today and I have mixed feelings. It is all very sad."

Vicky Stowe, curator of Coniston's Ruskin Museum which houses a Campbell exhibition, said people in Coniston opposed Bluebird's recovery.

"Some felt it was a grave and should be left sacrosanct. A lot of people knew the whereabouts of Bluebird all the time but they protected it in accordance with what we understood to be the family's wishes. But they have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it had to be raised, or unscrupulous divers could have plundered it."

Examination of the wreckage revealed there was still fuel in the engine lines, discounting the theory of fuel starvation. Impact appeared to have been from left to right, removing the whole forward section in that direction.

Campbell's remains were located and he was buried four months later after a positive DNA test confirmed it was indeed him.

The Rebuild

The question of what to do with the wreckage was not resolved quickly, but in 2006 Donald

Campbell's daughter, Gina, formally gifted it to the Ruskin Museum in Coniston. In a joint agreement between the family trust and the museum, Bill Smith was authorised to organise restoration of the boat, at no cost to the museum.

The job took 13 years of careful, painstaking work: cutting away the mangled fore-section, carefully dismantling the outer skin and then repairing or replacing parts of the rigid steel frame. Surprisingly, most of the aft section was still useable. The engine, of course, could not be saved - so another was found to replace it.



Great care was taken to use as many of the original parts as possible, and the vast majority of the boat is now exactly the same as it was. "New sponsons and replacement engine aside," read the project statement, "she'll be as near as makes no difference to the same machine as she was on the morning of January 4th, 1967."

The question of what to do with the rebuilt boat was also coming to the fore. "If you're going to rebuild it," Smith observed, "what excuse do you have for not putting the engine in? And if you put the engine in, what excuse do you have for not starting it? That's the natural progression." In his view, the inevitable outcome was that the boat should be run on the lake again.

The Run

And so it was. More than 50 years after she had died, Bluebird K7 was taken back to the water: not to Coniston, where the facilities to cater for her were considered inadequate, but at Loch Fad. There, she was carefully lifted into the water, where she promptly stuck in the mud - just as she had with her original owner all those years ago.



But it was a minor hitch, just as the loss of her canopy was on the very first, lower speed, run. "The vents we routed to prevent the intakes from imploding as per 1966 worked against us by pressuring the cockpit when Ted [the pilot]

came off the throttle, and the canopy blew to pieces," said one of the project team, "but we are building a new one as we speak."

Another remarked "In the workshops she fought us every inch of the way, and when we got her out here it was as if she was saying, 'I don't want to go, I don't want to go...I remember what happened last time. Don't make me do it.'"

Bill Smith shared a similar view. "Having worked on the boat for so long, it ceased to be a machine," he said. "She came across as a malevolent bad tempered old witch of a thing. You couldn't help but feel it."

But the sun came out, the Loch sparkled, and Bluebird rose to the occasion. On the last day of her tests she completed two fast runs but alarmed spectators by coming much closer to the shore than intended. Was that supposed to happen? Team members were of mixed feelings about it.

Smith was pragmatic about the incident. As Bluebird was secured he debriefed the team. "We've proved the point," he said, "The time has come - we stop. Let's walk away on a high."

So Bluebird, that most iconic of British engineering achievements, had risen from the dead and, for a day or two at least, had her moment in the sun. She brought pride and joy to all those who saw her, especially the older spectators who remembered that tragic day in the winter of 1967. It was, seemingly, a perfect end to a tale of tragedy.

But, sadly, the story is not to end on a high, as

Smith had wanted. Instead of basking in the astonishing achievement in resurrecting Bluebird, a bitter dispute broke out about the ownership of the rebuilt boat. The Ruskin museum has laid claim to it, citing that the Campbell family donated the wreckage to them in 2006 and they have been fundraising ever since to build a special wing to the museum to display her. Bill Smith, on the other hand, claims that fair compensation should be paid for his work in restoring the vessel.

At one point it seemed that the only solution would be break Bluebird into two pieces - the aft section to go to the museum and the repaired forward section to the Project. Indeed, in 2021 the Project Team started on that task. But, like Solomon's judgement to divide a baby to satisfy two claimants, such a solution brought little comfort to either party.

And so, inevitably, the matter is destined for the Courts. In February of this year the Ruskin

museum commenced legal proceedings to claim Bluebird. A spokesman said "The action only comes after several years of trying to persuade Mr Smith and his organisation to honour the original agreement and allow [Bluebird] K7 to be brought back to Coniston so that she can be displayed in the bespoke Bluebird Wing of the museum which cost in excess of £750,000 to build and equip," he said.

For his part, Bill Smith has vowed to 'fight to the death'. "We restored about half a boat," he said, "while the other half was built from scratch," and he was not prepared to go empty-handed for his work.

One day, perhaps, the dispute will be resolved and, hopefully, a piece of unique history will be saved. Perhaps we might even see her back on the water again - a tribute to her history and to the man who first took her there.

Perhaps...but as lawyers are now involved, not likely. →

Watch Video

References:

[Wikipedia](#)

[Across the Lake](#)

[The BlueBird Project](#)

[Magneto Magazine.](#)

[Bluebird: The Afterlife Sky News](#)

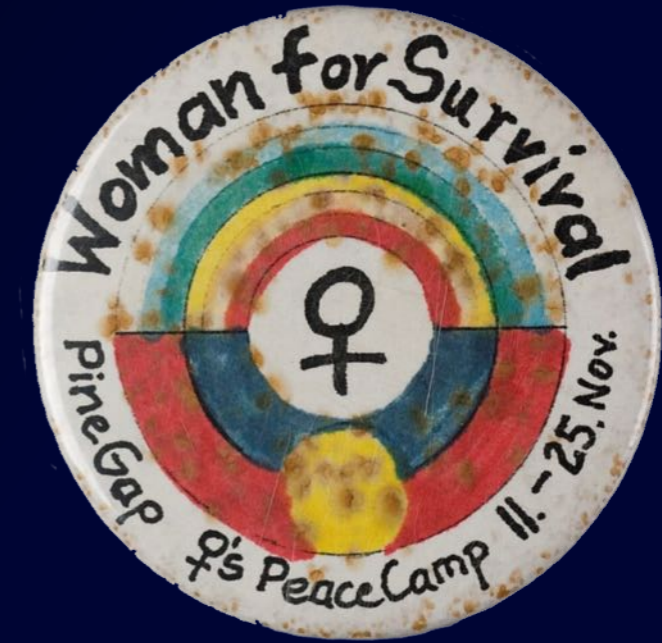
Right: Donald Campbell as many remember him: the only man to break the world land and water speed records in the same year.

Below. Her moment in the sun - Bluebird K7 makes a run at Loch Fad in 2018, more than 50 years after it crashed.



A Speck of Dust (or Two)

Words and drawing by Marcus Peake



When I got out of bed on the morning of the 10th November 1983 I had no idea that I'd be in Oodnadatta by the end of the day. I mean, like, its at the end of the world, right? It would have been a bit like saying I was off to Pluto, or Mars - you just wouldn't have believed it.

For those not familiar with the place, its a little outback town about 800 km from Adelaide as the crow flies...not that any self respecting crow would want to go there, of course. Even the meaning of its name is dodgy, as it apparently stems from Aboriginal word 'kudnadatta', which translates literally as 'dead man's poo.' Some would say that's entirely appropriate.

Oodnadatta first came about because it lay on the route of the Central Australian Railway - an oasis with a reliable source of water for the steam locomotives huffing and puffing their way to the Alice and back. That was a reasonable excuse for the town until diesel locos replaced them, with another nail in the coffin in 1980 when the railway track was moved to the west of the town. By then, however, tourism had taken over, mostly by grey nomads plying 'the Oodnadatta Track' with their four-wheel drives and overland caravans.

There's wasn't much in the town at the turn of the last century, and there's not much there now either. The Pink Roadhouse has a certain attraction, but it's fair to say that the town exists simply because its on the way to somewhere else.

And it was for this reason that I did indeed visit it, briefly, on that November night nearly forty years ago.

It came about like this.

Shortly after arriving at work on that Thursday morning I received a phone call from the Federal Police to ask if it would be possible for us, the National Safety Council of Australia, to position a Bell 212 helicopter at Pine Gap by sparrow fart on the coming Saturday.

Given that Pine Gap was over 2400 km away and we only had about 36 hours to plan and execute the request, it was a good question. I referred them to John Friedrich (my boss) to talk about money, whilst I unfurled the flight planning charts to work out how to do it. No on-line planning in those days!

Within a couple of hours we had it figured. Ray Dousett, the other P1, would ferry November Sierra Charlie from the Latrobe Valley to Oodnadatta, which was about eight hours' flying away. One of the company's Beech Kingairs would take me and a copilot to meet them, where I'd take over and ferry the 212 to Alice Springs. While we were doing that, Ray would leapfrog ahead in the Kingair to fly the Bell for the final leg from the Alice to Pine Gap, where he would then get on with the job the Feds wanted.

And so it was that at about 2300 on the 10th of

November 1983 I found myself peering through the windscreen of the Kingair as we made our approach into the desert town. There wasn't much to see, really: a few homestead lights scattered in the otherwise dark landscape, and, as we got closer, the beckoning strip of runway 31.

We made a smooth landing and taxied up to the terminal building, which was a modest structure adjacent to a small tarmac apron. The 212 was already there, its bright yellow paintwork gleaming in the arc lights. Surprisingly, there was a crowd of people at the fence line too - perhaps the entire population of the town - there to see what all the noise was about. I guess anything happening in Oodnadatta is worth getting out of bed for.

Less than an hour later I lifted off the tarmac and set course for Alice, some four hours to the north-north-east. The scattered lights of the town slipped away behind us and we were left with the darkness of a desert night. There was no moon.

We climbed to our cruising altitude of six and a half thousand feet - quite high for a helicopter. The lowest safe altitude was about a quarter of that, as the highest obstacle on our track would have been the termite mounds scattered over the dusty flat earth below, but I wanted maximum range for our scanty navigation aids and VHF coverage.

And so I climbed up into that stygian night, with just Rob Dickson, the copilot, for company. He'd not long completed his flying training and wasn't up to speed on instrument flying.

In my time flying Sea Kings over the Og I'd experienced a few black nights, but nothing like that one. The darkness was almost cloying in its embrace - not a single glimmer of light pierced its clutches. The instruments in the cockpit reported all was as it should be, but, as far as visual cues were concerned, I could have been at sixty feet or sixty thousand, any way up and at Mach 2 or in the hover.

The aircraft we were flying was the most basic of the 212s, with no stability augmentation, no autopilot and few aids. It was all manual, on the clocks. It felt like I was balanced on the head of a pin, with just us wobbling through that coal-black sky like a wayward speck of dust. But the trembling white needles on the gauges guided us well and the hands of the clock ticked away the long minutes.

Just over four hours later a faint aura began to penetrate the darkness ahead. It was hardly discernible at first, but slowly the black gave way to a sliver of grey, and then a thin yellow glow as the lights of Alice Springs crept above the horizon.

Suddenly everything was back in perspective, and we clattered our way to the airport, parking in a cloud of fine red dust not far from where our



Kingair stood silently. They had been there for three hours and were sleeping in soft beds in a nearby motel.

The trip had one final sting it in though - literally. We were catching a lift home at about eight and there wasn't time to find a bed, so we dossed down the back of the chopper as best we could - to be beset by mosquitos as big as houseflies. As the sun rose an hour or so later they finally relented, probably because there was no blood left in our veins.

I left Alice behind in the comfort of the Kingair, watching as the ochre landscape slid slowly beneath us. Its colour reminded me of the task that Ray had the next day, and I wondered how he would get on.

And what task was that? Well, Google "Pine

Gap Riots 1983" and you'll read about the 700 women who had gathered outside the base and, how, early on the morning of the 12th of November, they stormed its gates in a tidal wave of angry, hairy-armed Amazons.

A few got over the fence and were carted away, but the majority were defeated by the downwash of the 212, which whipped the desert dust into a blinding, impenetrable wall.

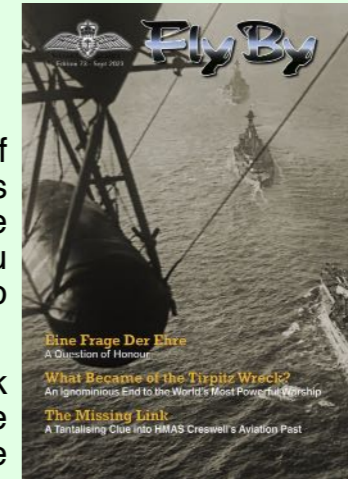
It was a novel way to use a helicopter - some would say uncharacteristically innovative - but I like to think the Commissioner of Police was a Shakespeare fan who, as he pondered how to deal with the riot, had remembered the words from King Lear:

"You are not worth the dust which the rude wind blows in your face". →

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