



Edition 75 - November 2023

FLY BY

A Sound For God To Make

The Story of the biggest man-made conventional explosion

The Crippled Giant

Putting down a myth and raising up a legend

Hijack!

The Taking of QantasLink 1737

Opinion

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



THIS MONTH

As I sit down to write this column, the news is still running hot on the decisive rejection of "The Voice" referendum.

The reason I mention it here is because the exercise impacted on every Australian of voting age, including every reader of this magazine. I don't know how you found it, but I think it was a bruising and bitter experience. Laced with vitriol and division, it cleaved the country in a way I have not seen before.

Ultimately, I believe the Referendum failed not because Australians don't want better for First Nations peoples, but because the concept of one minority seeking Constitutional recognition was unpalatable to the majority. This is particularly true of those doing it hard. Analysis of the vote by per-capita income, for example, showed that the three electorates with the highest income in the country delivered a 'yes' result above 70%. The three with the lowest were all below 40%. Struggling communities of any colour or creed are disadvantaged too.

There is no doubt that First Nations people are disadvantaged in terms of health, education, employment and life expectancy, and they feel dispossessed and isolated. The three pillars of "Voice, Treaty and Truth" arising from the Uluru Statement from the Heart (on which the Refer-

endum was built) sought to fix these problems by addressing wrongs of the past.

But history tells us that solutions seldom flow simply by righting grievances. For example, it's hard to name any country on earth that has not been invaded, stolen or suppressed at some point. Many, like colonies of Africa pilfered by Europeans, have been returned to their owners - and the majority have since become failed states. Fixing wrongs doesn't necessarily fix problems.

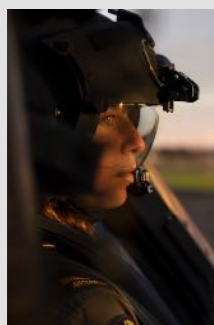
Brutal or not, right or not, the past is the past and, as the old saying goes, you can't unscramble an egg. Problems of dispossession and isolation can best be solved by looking to the future rather than striving to recapture what once was, six generations ago.

So, perhaps it would be better to double our efforts to ensure that every group of people in this wide brown land are given a hand up to ensure they are treated with fairness, equity and respect.

Wouldn't it be great if that could be our collective mandate from now on?

The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the FAAAA.

THIS MONTH'S COVER PHOTO



Aviation Warfare Officer Sub-Lieutenant Jessica Hudson prepares for a flight at 725 Squadron, HMAS Albatross, NSW.

(Defence Image).➔

REST IN PEACE

We are pleased to report that during the past month we have not been advised of any FAA veterans crossing the bar.



So, let's keep that record up! Stay safe and stay healthy. ➔



24



20



28

REGULARS

02

Opinion

A few words and thoughts from the Editor of this magazine.

10

FAA Wall of Service Update

The status of orders for Wall of Service Plaques.

11

Know Your Benefits

Jim Bush's snippets on what you may be entitled to.

02

Rest In Peace

We remember those who are no longer with us.

REGULARS

04

Letters to the Editor

This month's crop of correspondence from our Readers.

08

Mystery Photo

Last month's Mystery answered, and a new one presented for your puzzlement (p10).

14

Around The Traps

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

FEATURES

12

The Weary Willies

Fill an old bomber with explosives, point at target and jump out! What could possibly go wrong?

20

The Crippled Giant

Dispelling a myth and reinforcing a legend. The story of the *All American*.

24

Hijack!

The saga of the Qantas hijacking.

FEATURES

28

A Sound For God to Make

The story of the biggest conventional explosion.

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.



The following letter was sent to **John Macartney** and is reproduced here with the author's permission.

G'day Mac,

Long time no communication but I'm still alive and well and living in Brisbane.

I have just seen the story re. the ditching and subsequent recovery of Iroquois 894 on 25 November 1970. I can recall the recovery quite well and I think the picture only half tells how bloody cold it was that day! And, until now, I was unaware of any commendations awarded to **Bob McDermott**.

My involvement with the 894 incident has an added factor in that I was in the aircraft that rescued 894's crew.

I was in Iroquois 893 with **Carl Daley, Ken Alderman & Rick Reuter**. Both machines were on the way to JB for some diver drops and winching and we were only about half a mile behind 894 when they ditched.

Now here's where the plot thickens (and your memory might be better than mine here). The Ed's note says that the aircraft suffered an "overpitch" prior to ditching. My memory of the incident is that 894 suffered a loss of power possibly because of an engine bleed band malfunction which led to the ditching. I am pretty sure that we heard a "Mayday" call from 894 before we saw a big splash. We were overhead within seconds and winched the crew into our aircraft. During the winch our aircraft became very heavy because of the 4



soggy 894 crew, and Carl Daley had me stand on the left skid to add a bit of a counterweight for the winching and also to be ready to jump out in case our machine needed a bit of a load reduction.

As it turned out, 893 managed the load but it was a very slow transition forward to gain enough speed to be able to climb away for our trip back to Albatross. My log book shows a total time of only 20 minutes for that whole event, but the vivid stories and tall tales went on for years!!

One funny recollection is of **Dave Smith** telling how, as he exited 894, he tore open his dye marker pack (and I can distinctly recall seeing him floating in a bright green blob). Poor old Dave complained for days afterwards that he had bright green armpits and balls!

I hope this email finds you in good health, and even though I don't get involved with reunions and such, I do appreciate the work you have done over the years.

All the best Mac. **Phil Peck**.

By Editor,

The 'overpitch' factor was gleaned from our accident database put together (originally) by the late **Bob Geale** and others. Where they got that idea from is unknown.

Always happy to correct it, however. Can anybody else (**Ken Alderman**?) throw any light on the cause of the ditching? Ed. ➔

Dear Editor,

Thank you for another excellent 'FlyBy'.



The mystery Soviet maritime reconnaissance aircraft featured in this issue is a Beriev Be-6 located at Myrni in the Crimea part of

the Ukraine (now annexed by Russia). It is all metal gull-winged with two Shetsov 18-cylinder (each producing) 1715 Kw engines, cruise speed 224 Km/h, crew 8, with 40 passenger seats. Sorry no details re the lovely ladies. [photo attached above with US A4 nearby).

Interesting Donald Campbell story. FYI - On 31 December 1964 Campbell set a 276.33 mph speed record in Bluebird on Lake Dumbleyung, 160 miles SE of Perth, WA. The lake was chosen as it was noted for its very smooth surface water. The attached photo at Dumbleyung is from the Sydney Morning Herald collection off the web as it is over 50-years old it should be safe to reproduce with a SMH credit.

Cheers, **Kim Dunstan**.

P.S. Campbell did 283.6 mph on one run slightly less on the return run to average 276.33 mph.

By Editor,

Thanks Kim, and you are spot on about the Mystery Photo. See more in the following pages.

Thanks also for the advice/photo of Donald Campbell in Australia. It was actually in this country that he beat both world records (land and water) back in 1964 - a feat never matched by a single man before or after. His water record run occurred on Lake Dumbleyung on December 31st of that year. There is still evidence of his achievement there, most notably the Memorial on Pusycat Hill. ➔



Donald Campbell and his wife on Lake Dumbleyung, WA. SMH photo.

Dear Editor,

I would like to say thank you very much for enabling me to print copies of *FlyBy*. I really do appreciate it. Debbie has probably told you that I like to read at leisure, but it is much more than that.

Firstly I am a collector, having every copy of *Slipstream* published from 1957 when I was 19. I have every copy of *FlyBy* from issue 1, June/July 2017. Secondly, I very often find answers to questions (for others) by referring back through old issues and by re-reading I keep my memory fresh. Thirdly, the RSL prints me off a full colour copy which I use for a specific purpose and I make a black and white copy for my files.

The Association has a member named **John William Currie** (Jock). Jock was one of 58 recruit Naval Airmen who completed training in England in 1948. He was an Airframes Rating, and subsequently was commissioned as a number were, not as an AEO but as AirTraffic Controller before the RAAF took over. He retired as a Lt.Cdr.

I visit Jock in the Dementia Ward at Jonathan Rogers GC House in Nowra each month and leave with him the coloured copy of *FlyBy* after reading to him any articles which I think might strike a cord and bring a spark to his eyes. He also is delivered *Slipstream* which he loves to have.

Jock is now 95 and I hope I might bring some joy to an otherwise bleak existence. I do not have a computer, and that is deliberate, so it is important that I can add *Slipstream* and *FlyBy* to my Library and Encyclopaedias for reference etc.

When I enlisted in the RAN it was a computer-free environment until 1957/58, at which time 3 Master Stores computers were commissioned. One at Portsmouth, One in the Far East aboard RFA Fort Sandusky and a third at Garden Island Dockyard.

As you would know these early computers filled a descent sized building, and the head aches these computers caused for Stores Ratings was unbelievable.

In 1962 I discharged from the PNF. and joined Flemings/Woolworths as a Supermarket Manager. It also was computer free for the first year, and it took them a long time to sort out the glitches. Massive errors in ordering and stock control: i.e. large supermarket might sell six candles in a week so one ordered half dozen and received one gross. It took many years to overcome the problems.

By 1965. with our involvement in Vietnam I was now in the RANER and once again experiencing the difficulties with GI Stores computer. After ten years I left Woolworths and sought relief in the bush. No computers there.

In the mid eighties I became a Funeral Director

and once again was in a computer-free environment, for about a year and then it was on again. Funeral Directing and Bereavement being a sensitive situation computer errors created serious problems which I coped with for 20 years, making a promise on retirement. No more computers.

I note that on Friday 29 September Nowra Woolies was closed when I went to shop, the notice saying due to technological difficulty. They opened shortly after with the sign changed to cash sales only.

So once again thank you for enabling me to have a print copy of *FlyBy* and thank you also for a splendid production each month. A long way from the first issue of four pages.

Yours aye, **Fred Dawson.**

By Editor. Thank you, Fred. FlyBy is there for members to do with as they wish, so print away! It is worth noting that it's designed from the ground up to be an electronic publication, so probably loses something in the printing, but I'm glad you're happy with it.

I've been a computer nerd pretty much since the first affordable PCs came out in the early 80s, but looking back I do wonder if they have saved me one iota of time. Probably not, so I certainly understand your point of view.

I can say, however, that without them this publication would not exist, notwithstanding the effort it takes, so they do earn their keep. →

Dear Editor,

I'm just reading a recently published book from Allen & Unwin called "The Factory" by John Fahey which is 'The Official History of the Australian Signals Directorate, Vol 1, 1947 to 1972 – also incorporating the history of Australian signals intelligence from 1901 to 1947. This includes a good coverage of the RAN's involvement in signals intelligence over the years to 1947.

What caught my eye (on pages 50 to 53) was the mention of HMAS *Albatross* (1) which under the cover of her cruises to the islands North of Australia the ship had a dedicated (procedure Y) crew aboard to intercept and analyse Japanese communications. This interest in Japanese signals (diplomatic and other types) was in view of the Japanese changing their ciphers and codes and their ongoing territorial aggression and occupation in Korea and China.

Procedure Y was the code name for interception of radio signal traffic which the RAN introduced in 1926. But it was some time before RAN ships were tasked with tracking signals [this followed Lord Jel-

LAST MONTH'S CAPTION COMPETITION

Last month's caption competition drew a few responses, as follows:

John Brown: "These 'Top Gun' graduates are getting smaller all the time"

Graham Pring: "When he told me he was a better pilot than me I told him to pull the other leg!"

Owen Nicholls: "Which of you two monkeys landed this jet on board? I want to shake your hand". →

lico's 1919 report that Australia could be attacked by Japan in the future]. Crews were asked to check for signal traffic during spare time, however, *Albatross* was alone in having been assigned a full-time, dedicated radio intercept crew.

Following the end of WW1 Japan acquired mandated territories in the Pacific, so *Albatross* was tasked to check the Japanese radio station on Palau, also Japanese vessels in the Japanese mandated territories and those transiting close to Australian waters. Apparently this was successful - as *Albatross* cruised Papua New Guinea waters and called at Rabaul she was able to gather a variety of signals including cipher signals for interpretation. A very productive activity apart from Showing the Flag and conducting flying exercises.

I thought it was a very interesting and vital side-line activity for HMAS *Albatross*, our first aircraft carrier, and perhaps could help to direct 'FlyBy' readers to our story on the website about her.

Cheers, **Kim Dunstan.**

By Ed. Thanks Kim. Readers can see the story and photo history of our first aircraft carrier [here](#), plus a couple of freebies opposite! →





Identifying the models was a bit more difficult, but we cracked it, so to speak. Not 100% sure, but we think it's these two, although the one on the right seems to have had some gender alignment work done.

The **Beriev Aircraft Company**, formerly Beriev Design Bureau, is a Russian entity that specialises in the design and construction of amphibious aircraft.

It was founded in 1934 by Georgy Mikhailovich Beriev, and since then has produced more than 20 different models for both military and civilian use. Today the company employs more than 3000 specialists and has relatively modern products, as shown right.



SnapFact!

Be-12s, later models of the Mystery Photo Be-6, have just been mobilised in Russia to help protect the Black Sea Fleet from Ukrainian attacks. Harried by cruise missiles, drone boats and anticipating drone submarines, the beleaguered fleet is mobilising every asset it has.

This includes some very old Beriev Be-12, designed in the 50s and built in the 60s. None of them are under fifty years old.

With the task of patrolling waters around Crimea, particularly for approaching drones, the Be12 is not ideal. In theory it carries a Dustbin short range surface search radar in its nose and a MAD in its tails, but there's a good chance the sensors became unsupportable years ago. But eyeballs in the sky - even at only a couple of hundred knots - is arguably better than nothing...just.



Beriev Be-6

In last month's Mystery Photo (top right insert) we asked what the aircraft was and where, and the names of the two female models displaying, amongst other things, such close interest in its port propeller blades. We received three correct answers although none of them owned up to knowing the girls.

It is a Beriev Be-6 (Number 43) which was built between 1949 and 1957. The aircraft had 19 variants through its production cycle, and 123 aircraft were eventually built. Since requirements of Soviet naval aircraft did not change rapidly, the reliable Be-6 remained in service until the late 1960s.

Of all metal construction, except for fabric covering the rudders and ailerons, the Be-6 was a very large aircraft. It's distinctive gull-wing design kept the engines as far from the water as possible. Each float was divided into four watertight compartments to mitigate against damage.

It carried a crew of 8, had a maximum take off weight of 29,000 kg, and was originally powered by two Shvetsov 18 cylinder radial piston engines developing 2,400 hp each. Some aircraft were later re-engined with turboprop engines, particularly in China.

This particular aircraft was originally installed as a monument on a rock pedestal in the Ukraine, which was the setting of our Mystery Photo. The pedestal eventually collapsed, either due to either poor workmanship or old age (inset photo LH page above). The aircraft was taken down, refurbished, and now sits in an outdoor aircraft museum in Kyiv in Ukraine (bottom LH photo). →





THIS MONTH'S
MYSTERY PHOTO

This month's Mystery Photo takes us to a time when flying was leisurely, exciting and expensive! What aircraft had the flight deck pictured above, what was the astonishing story of its development and why was it ultimately regarded as a disaster? Answers to the Editor [here](#).



FAA Wall of Service Update

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.

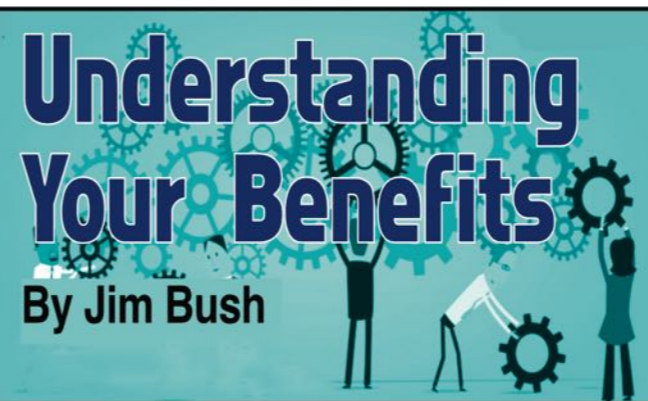
It is easy to apply for a plaque and the cost is reasonable, and far less than the retail price of a similar plaque elsewhere. And, although it is not a Memorial Wall, you can also do it for a loved one to remember both them and their time in the Navy.

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.
- A.Gillam CPO (ATWO/ETW) S118699 Jan76-Jan96

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



The British Government recently released a **Nuclear Test Medal** to recognise the United Kingdom's Nuclear Test Program over the period 1952 to 1967.

The medal can be awarded to eligible UK service and civilian personnel, including individuals from other nations, who served for any period of time at locations where the UK atmospheric nuclear tests were conducted. This includes the preparatory and clear up phases. The medals can be awarded posthumously to the legal next of kin of

eligible individuals who have died.

These tests would have included those in Australia at Maralinga and Monte Bello.

If you consider you are eligible for award of the medal or for someone who has since died, you should read the explanatory information [here](#), which will also give a link to the relevant Ministry of Defence medal form.

The form can be downloaded and, once completed, posted to the UK address given upon it. The form is straight forward and asks for the usual things like name, DOB, Service Number, period and place of service and so on. ➔



THIS MONTH'S CAPTION COMPETITION

This won't be a regular feature but this photo was too good to miss. I'll start the ball rolling with: "The Brits first attempt at a Force Element early warning system was underwhelming, to say the least". Please submit your thoughts [here](#). ➔



THE WEARY WILLIES

Military drones, which now feature so much in our news and particularly since the start of the war in Ukraine, are presented as a reasonably modern weapon.

But countries were experimenting with drones as early as WW1 with remotely piloted aircraft being tested as 'guided weapons'. The idea was they would be controlled visually by another pilot in a nearby aircraft. They were not particularly successful as the control aircraft still had to be in harm's way.

By the middle of the second world war television had matured, however, and tests were undertaken by the US. In 1942 a BG-1 drone was directed by TV towards a target in Chesapeake Bay. Shortly afterward a second, more successful test directed a remote aircraft from a distance of eleven miles into a raft being towed at a speed of eight knots.

In 1944 the technology was taken to the front line when General Doolittle approved Operation Aphrodite in Europe. Approximately 25 war weary US bombers (mainly B-17F Flying Fortresses) were converted into radio-controlled flying bombs



A B-17 being prepared as a robot aircraft in 1944.

under the designation BQ-7. Given the nick-name "The Weary Willies", they were to be employed against high value targets such as U-boat pens.

The B-17s were stripped of their normal military equipment and packed with up to 9 tons of explosives. Each pilotless bomber was fitted with a radio-controlled flight system known as Double-Azon. A television camera was placed on the flight deck so that an image of the main instrument panel could be sent back to a controlling aircraft.

A second TV camera was installed inside the Plexiglas nose which gave a television monitor in the controlling aircraft a view of the ground so that the robot machine could be directed onto the target.

The concept was that a volunteer two-man crew would man the aircraft during take-off and initial climb, turn the aircraft onto the general heading of the target, arm the explosives for an on-impact detonation, hand over control to the director aircraft and then parachute to safety while still over England. The cockpit roof was removed for easy egress.

The controlling aircraft would then direct the robot to the target, locking its controls in the final moments before itself turning to escape. Great plan! What could possibly go wrong?

Well, lots did. On the first mission took place on August 4, with two drones. One lost control shortly after the first crewman had bailed out. It crashed near the coastal village of Orford, destroying two acres of trees and blasting an enormous crater in the ground. The remains of the other crewman were never found.

The second drone was successfully dispatched toward France. Unfortunately, the view from television camera in the nose was obscured by weather just as the drone approached the target site, and it missed by 500 feet.

The second attack fared little better. One robot had a control malfunction before it could dive onto its target and was shot down by German flak. The other missed its target by 500 yards.

On August 6, another task force of two robots and four command ships was sent out. The crews parachuted clear of the aircraft

without incident, but control of one of the robots was lost and it crashed into the sea. The other developed a mind of its own and began to circle the industrial area of Ipswich before flying out to sea, where it ditched.

After a pause to improve the technology, an attack was made on Heligoland. Again, it started badly. One of the pilots was killed when his parachute failed to open when he exited the aircraft. Nevertheless, the robot made it all the way to Heligoland, but it crashed some 100 yards short of the target, most probably a victim of anti-aircraft fire.

On the next mission the first robot crashed short of its target because of distortion in the television monitor, and the second robot malfunctioned and had to be ditched at sea.

Further sorties against Germany took place in October, but yielded little success. One drone was shot down, and another refused to respond to commands and ended up over the North Sea where it finally ran out of fuel and crashed into the water. A

third robot failed to locate its target due to low visibility.

On October 27, the headquarters concluded that such attacks on high-value targets were not yielding much success, so switched to cities. The first of these sorties was on December 5, the target being a group of railway marshalling yards west of Hannover. Because of bad weather, the first robot could not find the primary target, and was then shot down. The second robot failed to explode when it crashed, bequeathing the enemy a relatively undamaged aircraft with a complete set of remote controls for analysis.

The last Aphrodite mission was on 20 January 1945, against a power station at Oldenberg. Both drones missed their targets by several miles.

After this last effort, the Aphrodite project was abandoned as being impracticable, which is another way of saying that the concept was an abject failure. →

Death of a Kennedy on Operation Aphrodite

Operation Aphrodite probably claimed more allied lives than enemy, including that of **Joe Kennedy**, brother of (later) **President John Kennedy**. He was one of two volunteer pilots killed on 12 August 1944 in a robot B-24 Liberator bound for France. Their job was to climb to 2000 ft, turn the aircraft onto the required heading, hand it over to the control aircraft and then bail out whilst still over England. Here is an eye witness account of his death by a Mr Mick Muttitt.



"The early evening of 12th August 1944 was typical of late summer, calm and warm after a very hot day. As I played with my elder brother in the garden of our house in Darsham... we heard aircraft approaching from the south. Although not yet ten, I was already fascinated by aircraft and I was very excited to see a loose formation led by a Liberator bomber passing close to the east, on a northerly heading.

I immediately identified two Venturas, two Lightnings, two Flying Fortresses and a Mosquito. Several Mustangs also flew at a discreet distance. As this unique assembly passed by at about 1,500 ft, a thin trail of smoke was discernible coming from the rear of the Liberator's weapons bay. Then I watched in horror as it exploded in a huge fireball. I vividly remember seeing burning wreckage falling earthwards while engines with propellers still turning, and leaving comet-like trails of smoke, continued along the direction of flight before plummeting down. A Ventura broke high to starboard and a Lightning spun away to port eventually to regain control at tree-top height over Blythburgh Hospital. While I watched spellbound, [the sound of] a terrific explosion reached Dresser's Cottage in the form of a loud double thunderclap. Then all was quiet except for the drone of the circling Venturas' engines, as they remained for a few more minutes in the vicinity. The fireball changed to an enormous black pall of smoke resembling a huge octopus, the tentacles below indicating the earthward paths of burning fragments.

A visit to the crash site next morning showed that most of the lighter wreckage had fallen directly below the point of detonation, where a fierce fire had burnt a large area of heathland. The heavier components were found over a mile to the north. A poignant reminder that lives had been lost was provided by the tattered fragments of parachute silk and cord entwined amongst brambles bordering the B1125 Westleton to Blythburgh road.

Back then, I had no idea what caused the disaster or the number of crew members involved. I assumed it had been carrying the ten persons usual for USAAF Liberators, unaware that the doomed aircraft belonged to the US Navy, although the colour schemes of both it and the Venturas were new to me. Sixteen years passed before the reading of a newspaper article began the process of piecing together the story of what had actually occurred on that day." →

Good to see that the FAA Museum is now open for business again.

In recent months the Museum hit a low spot with Navy Canteens pulling out of the front shop (and previously, the upstairs cafe), and then such significant staff shortages that it had to close its doors.

It sent a very poor message of Navy's commitment to its heritage, not to mention the lack of opportunity to showcase the FAA for potential recruiting opportunities.

However, we are pleased to see that, whilst its not out of the woods yet, improvements in resources have allowed the Museum to open its doors. Work is continuing to find a new Manager to replace Stu Harwood, and in time, it is hoped to replace the 'shop front' with something similar to what it was.

What is still required are willing volunteers to take groups around the museum and explain a little of the history behind each exhibit. If you'd like to devote some of your time to showcase our past, contact the collections curator [here](#). ➔



Around The Traps



How's this for long term recycling? The steel sheet you can see lying on the ground at these road works in Oslo was a part of the German battleship Tirpitz. The city's agency for Water and Sewerage Works acquired a substantial amount of steel from the warship, which it still uses for covers for trenches and holes in the street. *Facebook, forwarded by Ron Marsh.* ➔

Oh Poop! Traveller's Little Gems Seized

An air traveller inbound to Minneapolis had her box of Giraffe Faeces confiscated in September. She had been intending to make necklaces from it.

The woman, who declared the package, was astonished when customs officials took a dim view of her import. She explained that she'd previously made jewellery from Moose poop, and that Giraffe droppings would produce something extremely exotic.

The box of excrement was destroyed by steam sterilisation. A spokesperson explained that, had it been imported, any person wearing the jewellery could have contracted African Swine Fever, Classical Swine Fever, Newcastle disease, Foot and Mouth disease or Swine Vesicular disease.

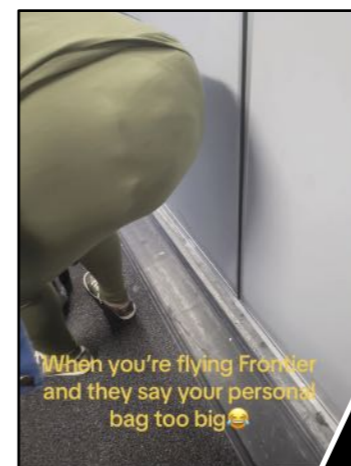
No fine or other penalty was imposed as the woman correctly declared her box of poop, and the agents were allegedly congratulated for not falling for her story hook, line and stinker. ➔



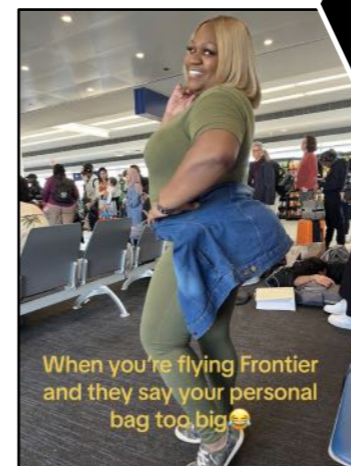
Peter Brown

John Bone is looking to track down **Captain Peter Brown** RAN Retired, who held the position of Superintendent SAMR back in the 70's.

Does anyone have any contact details for Peter? We think he may have been involved in Lane Cove Council for a while, but all help appreciated. Contact the webmaster [here](#). ➔



When you're flying Frontier and they say your personal bag too big 🤔



When you're flying Frontier and they say your personal bag too big 🤔

Left: Meanwhile, a passenger in the US has found a novel way of sneaking extra luggage onto a flight to avoid paying an excess baggage fee - stuff it down your pants!

Frontier Airlines, an ultra-low cost carrier in the United States, charges \$99 if you exceed the very strict baggage limits they impose. One woman posted her solution on TikTok, giving herself a self-proclaimed DIY Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL).

I guess it would work for soft baggage, but don't try it with power tools or similar. (Photos TikTok). ➔

Right. I know I keep bashing EVs, but I just don't get them! Anyone want to stand up for the concept? Happy to take your point of view. Email the editor [here](#). ➔

Welcome to Bowen and Albanese's wonderful world of net zero.

For just \$92,990, plus on-road costs you can drive away in a brand new, made in China, LDV eT60.

Dream of weekends away camping, caravanning or boating? Forget it, this beauty has a towing limit of 1,000kg and is only available in 2wd.

With a driving range of 330km (halved when towing or carrying a load), you better go without free floor mats and ask the salesman to throw in a diesel generator and a jerry can. You can just read a book (or 2) while you wait between 1 and 9 hours for a recharge.

Not convinced? Here's the kicker, it's 'carbon neutral'. As long as you ignore its 3,050kg of steel, copper, lithium, nickel, manganese, cobalt, graphite, zinc and rare earths etc. Don't forget to turn a blind eye to the coal fired power used in the factory, the diesel trains, trucks and ships used for transport and the fossil fuels you will use to charge it at night in the comfort of your own garage.

Virtue signalling sure is an expensive business.



Joby Delivers First eVTOL Aircraft to paying customer



Last month we reported that Joby Aviation was confident of having its eVTOL aircraft certified for flight by 2025, but events have speeded up considerably.

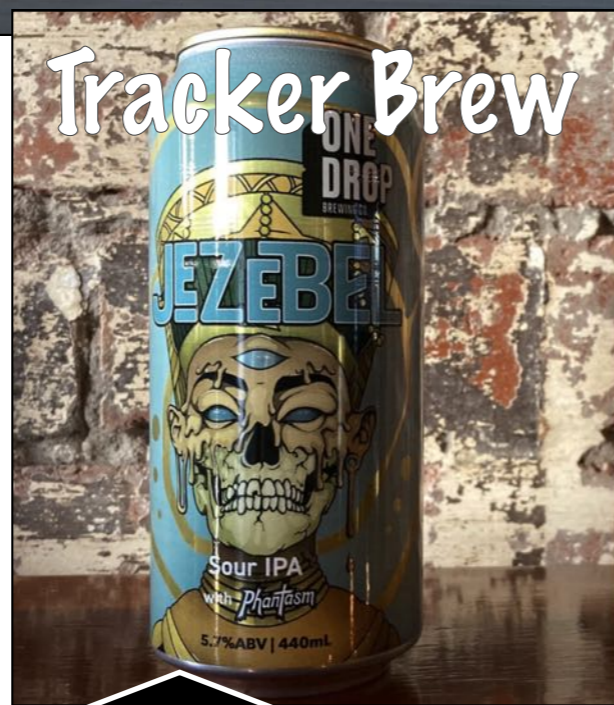
The company has just delivered its first air taxi aircraft to the US Air Force, which conducts its own (military) air certification. This is the first of nine aircraft that Joby intends to deliver to the USAF, with the second scheduled early next year.

The Air Force, which is exploring defence applications for the craft, will begin a flight testing regime for logistics missions including cargo and passenger transportation. It will also train air and maintenance crews on the type.

Other manufacturers are also working closely with the USAF, most notably Archer Aviation with its "Midnight" eVTOL aircraft. The company has not said when it will deliver its first aircraft.

The delivery of the Joby aircraft marks a huge step in the move to sustainable flight craft, and towards its eventual introduction into the commercial sector.

You can see a video of Joby's commercial production facility [here](#). ➔

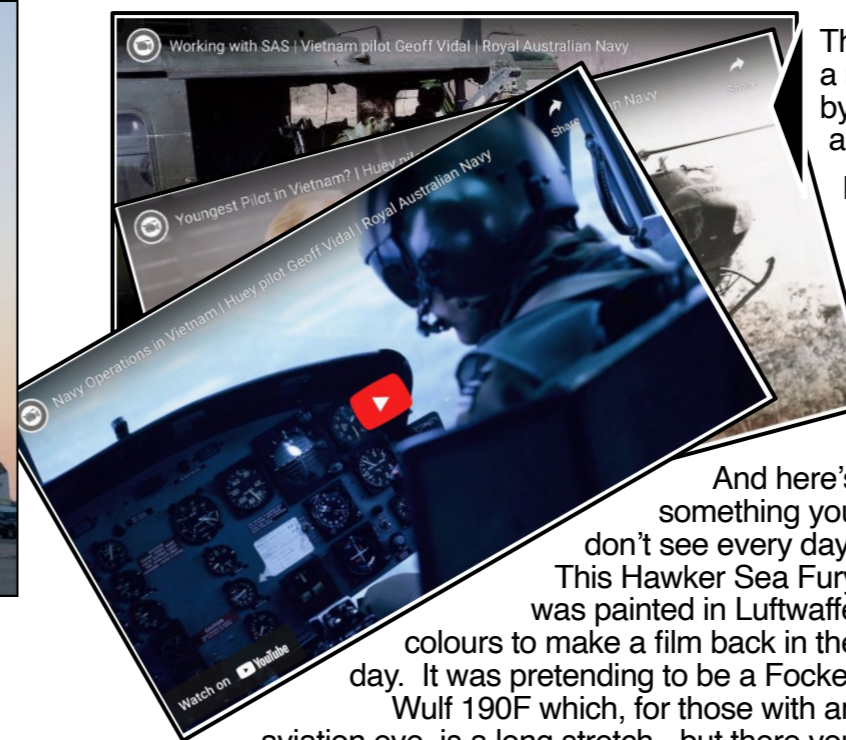


At last! A beer crafted for Traker crews - Jezebel Sour IPA.

Brewed with the demanding standards of S2 operators in mind, the beer combines a double-strain souring process with the oat, wheat, and spelt-laden malt base of beloved hazy IPAs. Featuring the Nelson Sauvignon hop combined with Trident Hop Blend, a healthy dose of Phantasm and a hybridised thiol-active hazy yeast strain, what more could you ask?

The brewer suggests a hint of immortality and a heap of immortality. Sounds just like a few of the Traker guys we remember.

Jezebel was the S2E acoustic processor and analysis system for the passive sonobuoys, in case you don't remember. She was the friend of Julie, the system for passive sonobuoy ranging. ➔



They've been available for some time, but it's worth a reminder that the terrific series of videos recorded by Geoff Vidal, ex 9 Squadron Vietnam Huey pilot, are available on YouTube.

In them he talks about his time there, the operations and procedures used, and the difficulties faced. Geoff is very good at explaining a complicated time in our history and the videos are well worth a watch. You can see the collection [here](#). ➔

And here's something you don't see every day! This Hawker Sea Fury was painted in Luftwaffe colours to make a film back in the day. It was pretending to be a Focke-Wulf 190F which, for those with an aviation eye, is a long stretch - but there you go. Nothing in the books says Hollywood has to be precise! ➔



Can You Help?

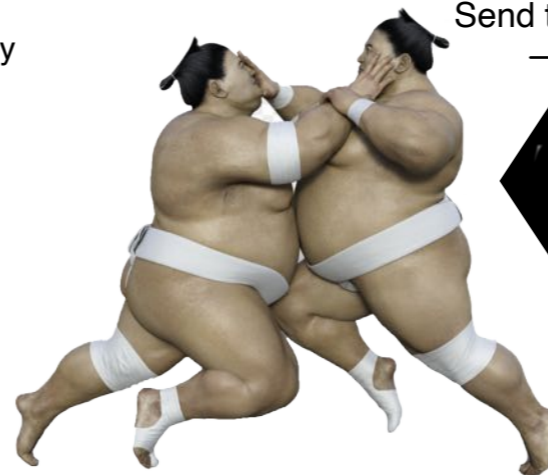
I'm sure there's a bunch of our readers who would remember **Neil Westphalen**, who served a couple of terms as SMO at the 'Tross in the mid 90s. Well, he's currently writing a PhD on the RAN's medical services from 1900 to 1975 and he's asking a few questions about the medivac capabilities of FAA aircraft up until then (particularly the Gannet, Iroquois, Wessex and Sea King).

Neil's questions about the possible stretcher fits on these aircraft have been answered, but we'd like to hear from anyone who actually carried stretcher cases.

What were the circumstances of your medivac? How many stretchers did you carry, and how were they secured in your aircraft? Did you have medical people aboard too, or did the crew manage them?

Any other details, such as the outcome of your flight, would be very welcome too.

If you can help out with answers to any of these questions it would be much appreciated. Send them to the Editor [here](#). ➔



Fat Passengers, Skinny Seats!

Next time you find yourself sitting next to a portly fellow traveller, spare a thought for Japan airlines. It recently took bookings for a large group of Sumo wrestlers attending a sports festival on the island of Amani Oshima, to the south. The airline quickly discovered that not only did the wrestlers have difficulty fitting in their seats, but they weighed in at 120kg instead of the 70kg of the average Japanese citizen.

The airline had to put on additional flights to allow for the extra weight and to carry adequate fuel. ➔

No link between fatal Queensland MRH90 and Jervis Bay crashes

Interim reports on the two MRH-90 crashes in Jervis Bay and the Whitsunday Islands have been released.

The report into the March Jervis Bay incident reveals one of its engines stopped because of a first stage high pressure turbine fan-blade failure.

"This was a known failure condition that had been previously identified to us as early as 2012, with a modification proposed to us by the original (engine) equipment manufacturer," a source familiar with the investigation said.

The engine that failed had not received the recommended, but non-mandatory modification, but it was still certified as airworthy by the Defence safety regulator.

The suggestion that software upgrades had not being completed on the army's entire Taipan fleet was also been ruled out as a contributing factor.

A final report and recommendations is expected in February next year.

Meanwhile, a preliminary 30-day report into July's fatal accident off the Queensland coast has indicated that both engines were operable at the time of the accident.

Four Army personnel lost their lives in the accident: Lieutenant Maxwell Nugent, Warrant Officer Class 2 Joseph Laycock, Corporal Alexander Naggs and Captain Dan Lyon.

Initial investigations have already examined known factors such as weather conditions, the planned route and the eventual route taken on the night of the tragedy, but detailed analysis and collection of evidence is continuing.

A more comprehensive report is not expected to be completed until mid-next year at the earliest, but other countries that fly the MRH-90 have been briefed by the Australian Army on the preliminary findings into the Whitsundays incident.

Unofficial sources have suggested that the use of night vision equipment would almost certainly be one focus of accident investigators. ➔



Shoalhaven Mayor Misses the Mark



Last month we reported on the refurbishment of Iroquois 894 which, after guarding the gates of Nowra for many years, has been taken down for refurbishment.

On October 24th Shoalhaven Mayor **Amanda Findley**, when questioned about the Iroquois, reportedly commented, "No-one today would say that the helicopter was a good looking piece of infrastructure that we could all be proud of, so the Navy has taken that piece of infrastructure away and they are doing their structural assessments".

She continued "At this point it's unknown whether the 'Chopper on a Stick' will return [but] what we have absolutely had... [is a] discussion with Navy about... a suitable memorial which also reflects what's been going on at HMAS Albatross and at HMAS Creswell."

Noting that Navy has had a proud relationship with Nowra since 1948, and brings millions of dollars into the local economy each year, Mayor Findley's alleged comments were, at best, ill-conceived.

Gilmore MP Ms Fiona Phillips moved to quell the subsequent community uproar over the comment, as did independent Kiama MP Gareth Ward who reported that "his office had been inundated with

concerns and complaints about the comment".

Mr Ward also reported that "the problem had been fixed", with the Huey set to return to its position once it has been refurbished.

"There is no doubting the enormous contribution made by Navy to the Shoalhaven," Mr Ward said. "Not only are we making a contribution to national and global security, but HMAS Albatross brings a very important economic boost to our local community."

Good to see that at least one office bearer has got his perspectives right. ➔

Bravo Zulu

The Editor has just learned that the amount of \$2,166.01 has so far been earned in royalties from the sale of "The Skyhawk Years" and has been set aside for the benefit of the FAA Museum. ➔



Wanted!

The Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia is in urgent need of a

SLIPSTREAM EDITOR

Terry Hetherington, the temporary Editor, has been holding the fort but has many other Association commitments. We are looking for a volunteer to take over the role. The selected person:

- can be located anywhere in Australia;
- will be supported;
- will be eligible for assistance with expenses, if required.

So, if you have a creative streak and are looking to 'give something back', why not contact us [here](#) for more information? ➔



THE CRIPPLED GIANT



There's an email that's been circulating for some time now, telling the story of a B-17 nicknamed "All American", which was involved in a mid air collision with a German fighter over France.

The story goes that after the collision the pilot continued with his mission, dropped his bombs and then made a very long, slow turn with the tail of the aircraft hanging on by a thread. It goes on to say the crew used their parachutes to retrieve a waist gunner, who had been blown into the tail section by the turbulence caused by opening the bomb doors, but the tail gunner elected to remain at his station as his weight was stabilising the aircraft. Apparently the crew also drove off further attacks by 'hanging out of the aircraft to fire their guns', and jury-rigged repairs in flight, using parts of the crashed fighter and their own parachute harnesses to hold the tail on. After a long harrowing flight the bomber made it back to England.

All stirring stuff but alas, the story has become grossly embellished with the telling. The real account was, however, just as extraordinary.

The B-17 was assigned to the 97th Bombardment Group, 414th Squadron US Eighth Air Force. It had been named *All American* by the pilot, Kenny Bragg, who had played football for Duke University before the war.

All American was one of a flight of bombers flying out of Biskra, in the Sahara, targeting axis sea ports in Tunisia. On 1st February 1943 it was engaged on such a mission, had dropped its bombs, and was returning home when it was attacked by two German fighters. One was driven off and retired damaged, but the other pressed home its attack.



When the fighter was about 300 yards away it was hit by fire from the bomber's guns which either disabled the aircraft or wounded or killed the pilot. It never completed its evasive roll and instead passed inches above the B-17's hull before striking its aft fuselage.

Navigator Lt. Harry Nuessle remembered: "About 300 yards out [the fighter] began a roll in order to be able to pull down and away after his attack – but somewhere about halfway around, either Burbidge's fire or fire from the lead ship must have gotten the pilot or disabled the plane because he never completed his intended roll and rapid pass under our ship – for one horrible instant he was right there inches in front and above us – I ducked instinctively, though God knows had he hit us head-on [then] no amount of ducking would have saved any of us. But he passed over us with distinctly audible swoosh followed by a tremendous jar and whoomp! Our plane began to dive, and I reached for my 'chute.'"

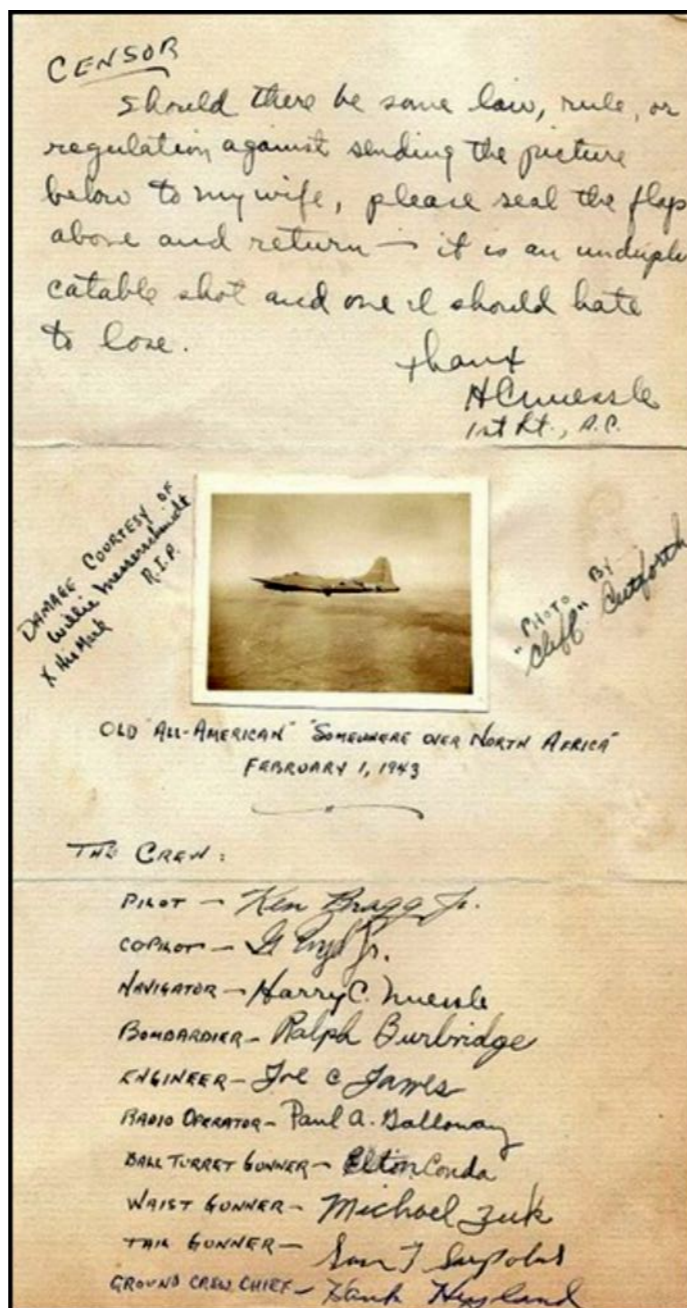
The pilot in command (Ken Bragg) recalls, "I rammed the controls forward in a violent attempt to avoid collision... I flinched as the fighter passed inches over my head and then I felt a slight thud like a coughing engine. I checked the engines and controls. The trim tabs were not working. I tried to level All American, but she insisted on climbing. It was only by the pressure from knees and hands that I was able to hold her in anything like a straight line." Lt Godfrey Engel tried his controls with the same result, but the pilots found that by throttling back the engines, they could keep her "on a fairly even keel."

The wing of the Me 109 (the pilot of which was reported as being 16-victory ace Erich Paczia of I/Jagdgeschwader 53) almost sliced through the B-17's fuselage, leaving the tail section hanging on by a few slender spars and a narrow strip of metal skin. Nevertheless, Bragg and his crew decided to try to bring their crippled bomber back home.

The crew quickly determined that none of the crew were injured, but their aircraft had a large hole torn in it from the upper turret all the way aft, and about one half the tail section including the port stabiliser was completely missing.

When other bombers saw the damage they closed up in formation, offering significant protection until they were out of enemy airspace. They then separated to return to base, leaving All American to proceed home more slowly.

Even though the control cables were severed, the crew was able to continue to fly the aircraft by using the autopilot system for the Norden bombsight, as it employed electric wires connecting to electric motor servos mounted next to the rudder and elevator.



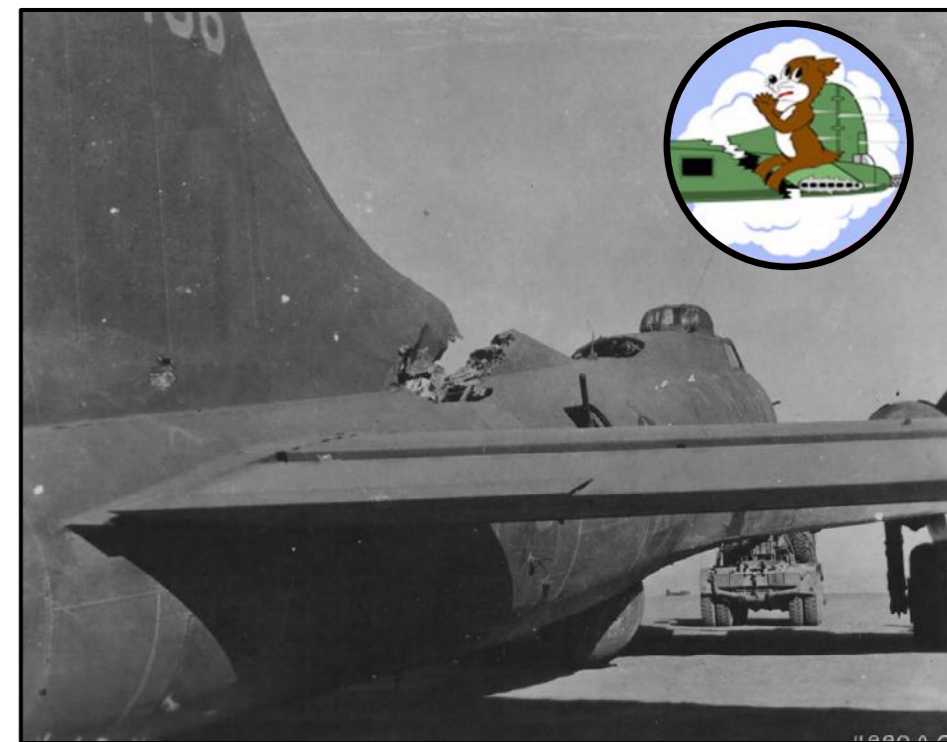
"As we neared the field we fired three emergency flares," Bragg recalled, "then we circled at 2000 feet while the other planes in our formation made their landings and cleared the runways... I lowered the landing gear and flaps to test the reaction of All American. They seemed to go reasonably well, considering," explains Bragg. "I made a long careful approach to the strip with partial power until the front wheels touched the levelled earth and I could feel the grating as she dragged without a tail wheel along the desert sands. She came to a stop and I ordered the co-pilot to cut the engines. We were home."

The All American was repaired and returned to service, but her flying characteristics were plagued with problems, and she was used as a utility aircraft until scrapped in March of 1945.



Above and right. Close ups of the damage caused by the German fighter's wing as it struck the aft fuselage of the B17. The structural spars supporting the tail assembly were sufficiently undamaged to hold together, but the entire port stabiliser was missing. Remarkably, none of the crew were injured.

- Crew:
- Pilot- Ken Bragg Jr.
 - Copilot- G. Boyd Jr.
 - Navigator- Harry C. Nuessle.
 - Bombardier- Ralph Burbidge.
 - Engineer- Joe C. James.
 - Radio Operator- Paul A. Galloway.
 - Ball Turret Gunner- Elton Conda.
 - Waist Gunner- Michael Zuk.
 - Tail Gunner- Sam T. Sarpolus.
 - Ground Crew Chief- Hank Hyland. →



HIJACK

The Taking of QantasLink 1737



It was just like any other scheduled flight for the crew of the Qantas Boeing 717 VH-NXN on a Thursday afternoon in May of 2003.

The flight was scheduled to make the short hop from Melbourne to Launceston. The aircraft requested push-back a little ahead of schedule, and shortly afterwards lifted from Tullamarine. It was 14:50 local time.

In the cockpit Captain Cory Purvis and First Officer John Morgan occupied themselves with turning onto their assigned track and settling into the climb. The cockpit door was closed, in accordance with Qantas security procedures.

In the cabin, Manager Greg Khan and Flight Attendant Denise Hickson waited for the seat belt sign to be extinguished before rising to their feet. There were only 47 passengers aboard, a light load, but refreshments were to be served and the short sector gave little time. They moved to the galley to prepare.

As they did, the passenger in row seven also abruptly stood up. Flight Attendants were alert for nervous passengers and Hickson moved to intercept him. "I thought he was just someone who freaked and wanted to get off the flight", she said later. Her intent was to settle him down.

But the passenger, British born David Mark Robinson, a brilliant young computer engineer, had other thoughts. He moved forward and, finding his way

blocked by Denise Hickson, he immediately attacked her using two sharpened wooden stakes he had hidden on his body.

Greg Khan rushed to her aid and was himself attacked.

"As he got, like, two steps away from me, both arms came up and he had me in like a bear hug," Khan reported later. "He was just stabbing the back of my head with, what I saw, it looked like one of those wooden doorstop things. At that stage, I just thought, 'well, you're not getting in there to the flight deck.'

Despite his injuries, Khan forced his head into his assailant's chest and drove him back down the aisle to row 6. All the while, Robinson kept up his frenzied attack on Khan's head.

By now, passengers were fully aware of what was happening and four of them jumped from their seats and tackled Robinson, pinning him down between two seats while the badly bleeding Hickson grabbed some plastic ties to restrain him.

In the cockpit, the pilots were blissfully unaware of the drama behind them. Speaking after the incident, Captain Purvis remarked:

"Approaching 8,000 feet there was a bump against the cockpit door, not a very significant one but there was one, and occasionally that can happen in the course of events because it's a very small galley area."

"John and myself did subsequently hear some secondary bumps and commotion down the aisle, but of course we were not to know what was taking place at the time. We thought maybe initially a service trolley had some loose."

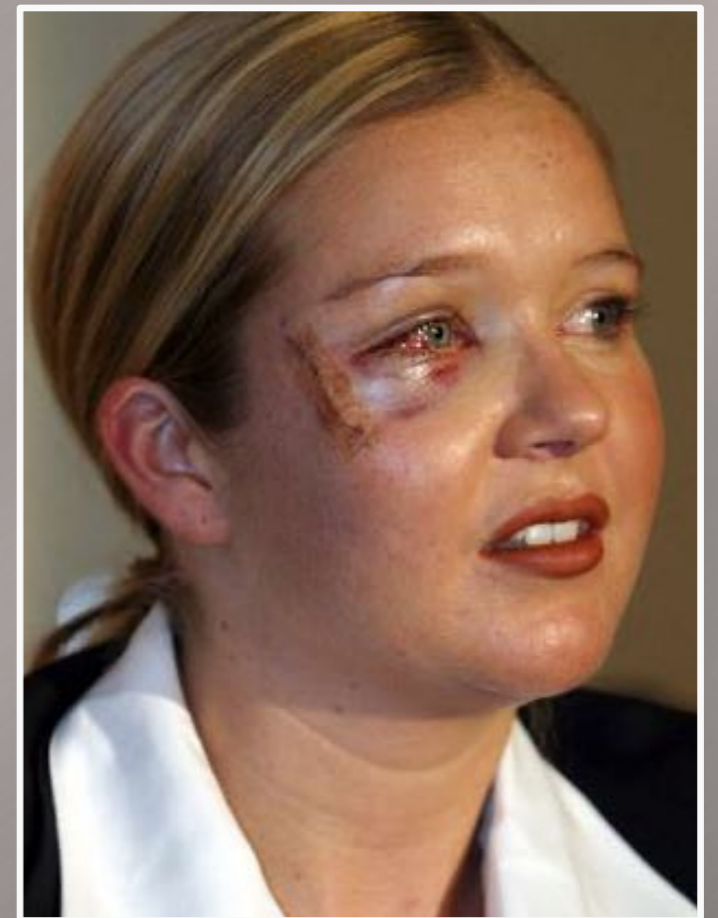
Within 40 seconds of the incident occurring, however, the flight deck received a call from the cabin advising them of the situation. The Captain immediately initiated a Pan call and turned the aircraft back to Tullamarine.

The aircraft landed safely and the Australian Federal Police were there to arrest Robinson. The two crew members were taken to hospital and two passengers were treated at the scene for minor injuries.

Both cabin crew members returned to flying within five weeks, still bearing the scars of the injuries they suffered. Khan later said: "if anyone wants to come to the front toilet, I'll be watching them like a hawk."

Hickson and Khan and the four passengers later received bravery awards during a ceremony at Government House in Melbourne. Khan would also receive the inaugural Air Transport Association International Aviation Security Award for Excellence in Athens in November 2011.

A subsequent search of Robinson's effects found several aerosols and a cigarette lighter in his hand luggage, which he intended to use as flame throwers.



Denise Hickson, one of the Flight Attendants attacked by Robinson, bearing the injuries he inflicted. ➔

It was also revealed that Robinson had attempted to seize an aircraft earlier that year. He had tried to open the cockpit door but it had been locked, and a Flight Attendant had spotted him and told him to sit down.

He was charged with attempting to hijack an aircraft - which carries a maximum term of life imprisonment - attempted murder and grievous bodily harm.

During his trial he told the court that he had to take control of the plane and crash it into the Walls of Jerusalem National Park (near Cradle Mountain in central Tasmania), to 'release the Devil from his lair and bring about Armageddon'.

He was ordered to undergo psychiatric testing and was found to be severely paranoid schizophrenic. A Victorian Supreme Court jury found him not guilty on the ground of insanity, and he was placed in indefinite retention in the Victorian mental health system.

The incident led to a review of Australian Security measures, which included bans on passengers carrying sharp objects in their hand luggage, and strengthening of cockpit doors on Qantas B717 aircraft.

Perhaps the most bizarre event of the hijacking was, however, not the behaviour of Robinson, but of a passenger, who complained that the aircraft was heading back to Melbourne despite the attempted hijacking. ✈



Above. David Robinson, the hijacker. He believed it was his mission to crash the aircraft into the Walls of Jerusalem National Park to release the Devil from his lair.

Below. Passengers finally made it to Launceston later that evening. ✈



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.

Our appeal last month for stories and photos only got a couple of respondents, so PLEASE, put fingers to keyboard and help Steve out with a few paragraphs. 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! ✈



Email Your Input Here



A SOUND FOR GOD TO MAKE

The Story of the Biggest Peacetime Explosion in History

By Marcus Peake



1. The Pieces

In 1917 the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, played an important role in the Great War raging on the far side of the Atlantic. It was North America's closest large city to Europe, boasting a secure deep water port and good rail and road links. Halifax was therefore not only a base for the Royal Canadian Navy, but an important mustering port for the convoys that made their way to Europe.

By 1917 the population of Halifax and neighbouring Dartmouth was around 65,000 people. Most lived in the city, which overlooked the narrow Strait dividing the two population centres. This thin channel, known as The Narrows, connected a large basin at its western end, known as the Bedford Basin, with the open sea to the east.

The Bedford Basin was where ships would moor as they gathered for successive convoys across the Atlantic, as it was a perfect natural harbour. It was sheltered by the land that almost completely surrounded it and further protected by anti-submarine nets that were deployed across The Narrows, the only waterway in and out.

On the fifth of December 1917 the Norwegian ship *SS Imo* was in the Basin, waiting impatiently to depart. She had arrived from the Netherlands two days earlier, enroute to New York where she was to load relief supplies for Belgium. She had been cleared to sail that day, but the coal needed for her journey had not yet arrived.

The *Imo* was not fuelled until late afternoon of the 5th. With her bunkers full and steam at the boilers she was ready to depart, but by then the subma-

rine nets had been raised across The Narrows and her passage to the Atlantic was blocked. Her captain, Haakon From, was forced to wait until morning, chafing impatiently at the unexpected delay.

On the seaward side of The Narrows the French cargo vessel *SS Mont Blanc* (Captain Aime Le Medec) had also been forced to wait overnight. She was inbound from New York, destined to anchor in the Basin for the next Atlantic convoy, but had arrived too late to get past the nets. She anchored off George's Island, not far from the narrowest part of the channel.

The *Mont Blanc* had been laid down in England in 1899 and was a typical three-island style cargo vessel of that era - what would perhaps be called 'a tramp steamer' today. She was not an especially old vessel and was seaworthy, but was slow. She was what most people would describe as 'unremarkable'.

But what she was carrying certainly was not. Below her decks the *Mont Blanc* was crammed to the gunnels with explosives, and barrels of benzine lined her decks. These were vital supplies for war-torn Europe and the urgency of the situation had caused normal safety measures to be relaxed. There was no guard-ship in company, and the nature of her cargo was known by only a few people.

And so the night of 5th December passed quietly with each of the pieces now in place, waiting for the disastrous circumstances of the following morning to fall into place.

2. The Circumstances

The *SS Imo* was finally given clearance to leave Bedford Basin on the morning of 6th December 1917, with pilot William Heyes on board. She entered the Narrows at about 0730, steaming well above the harbour's speed limit as she attempted to make up for lost time.

Not long into the narrow waterway she met the tramp steamer *SS Clara*, being piloted up the wrong side of the channel, but the two pilots agreed to pass starboard to starboard in contravention with normal practice.

Shortly afterwards she encountered the tugboat *Stella Maris*, which was travelling towards the Basin in mid channel. This forced *Imo* to head even closer to the Dartmouth side of The Narrows, but she did not reduce speed.

In the meantime the *SS Mont Blanc* with her cargo of explosives had also started moving at 0730 under the guidance of Francis Mackey, an experienced harbour pilot. Aware of the hazardous nature of his cargo he had requested an escorting guard ship, but none was provided. Accordingly, he proceeded alone towards Bedford Basin, also steaming on the Dartmouth side of the channel.

Mackey first spotted the *Imo* when she was a little less than a mile away and was immediately concerned as the ship seemed to be heading towards his starboard side, as if to cut him off. He sounded one blast on the ship's whistle to signal he had right of way, but was astonished to hear two blasts in return, indicating the approaching vessel would not surrender its position.

Noting that ships normally pass each other port to

"We turn out of our hammocks at 6.30am and lash up and stow in the usual way. We fall in on the upper deck at 7am and disperse to cleaning stations, busying ourselves scrubbing decks etc., until 8am when we 'cease fire' for breakfast."

Frank Baker Royal Navy HMCS Arcadia.
Diary entry December 6th 1917. →

port, the pilot of the *Mont Blanc* immediately stopped his engine and turned slightly to starboard, putting him even closer to the Dartmouth side of the channel. He again sounded one blast of his whistle, expecting the approaching vessel to also turn to starboard to provide clearance, but was again met with a double blast.

Observers ashore and on other ships heard the exchange of signals and, understanding the developing situation, gathered to watch. By now the two ships were close. Each had cut their engines, but their momentum carried them forward. Mackey, aboard the *Mont Blanc*, could not pass any closer to Dartmouth for fear of grounding his vessel, so at the last minute he ordered hard to port in an attempt to cross the bow to avoid a collision. For a few seconds it appeared his strategy would work.

The two ships were almost parallel to one another when *Imo* suddenly signalled three blasts, indicating she was going astern. The combination of the ship's high draught (she was under light ballast), and the torque effect of her reversing propeller swung her bow towards the other vessel. At 0845,



The city of Halifax, taken before the explosion. The Narrows can be seen to centre right, constricting as it approaches the Bedford Basin (not visible). The explosion occurred approximately adjacent to the tall building in the centre of the image. →



Imo's prow struck the hull of *Mont Blanc* abeam No.1 hold on the starboard side.

The damage to the *Mont Blanc* was not severe but the impact was sufficient to topple some barrels of Benzol, which burst open before flooding the deck and flowing into the hold. A few seconds later *Imo's* engines kicked in and she disengaged, creating sparks as the two hulls rubbed together. The Benzol immediately ignited at the waterline and flames travelled quickly up the side of the ship, engulfing the deck.

they could not be heard. As their lifeboats made their way to the Dartmouth shore, their abandoned vessel drifted south across the channel to beach herself at Pier 6, near the foot of Richmond Street in Halifax.

3. The Event

The city of Halifax slopes down to the harbour in such a way that most of it enjoys views of the Narrows, so it was unsurprising that on that December morning people soon noticed the thick column



Aboard *Mont Blanc* there was immediate consternation. Surrounded by thick black smoke and anticipating a catastrophic explosion, the captain ordered his crew to abandon ship. As they took to their boats the crew shouted warnings to other vessels and gathering bystanders, but in the noise and confusion

of smoke coming from the vicinity of Pier 6 they took to their windows or came into the streets to look, and a crowd gathered on the foreshore to watch the firefighting efforts.

The tug *Stella Maris*, which *Imo* had passed in the narrows some minutes earlier, was the first to respond. She anchored the barges she had been towing and rushed to the burning *Mont Blanc*, but her captain soon realised the fire was too intense for his single hose and backed off. He was met by two whalers from British and Canadian warships, who agreed between them they would attempt to tow the *Mont Blanc* clear of the jetty. It was while they were waiting for a suitable hawser that the inevitable occurred.

By any measure it was a titanic explosion. *Mont Blanc* was completely blown apart, with her hull and superstructure either reduced to molten particles or shards of steel.

In an instant the temperature at the centre of the blast reached over 5000°C, accompanied by pres-

What Was *Mont Blanc's* Cargo?

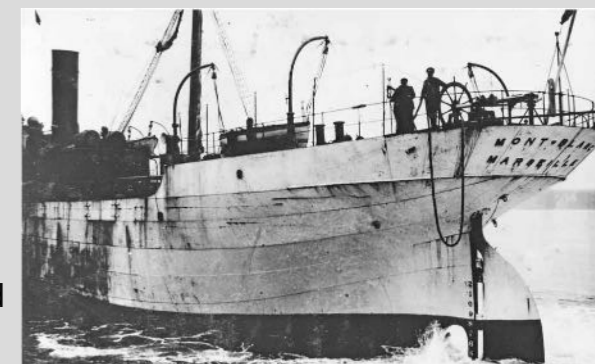
Gun Cotton - 68 short tons. A highly flammable compound used as a replacement for gunpowder as a propellant in firearms or as a low-order explosive.

Benzol/Benzene - 271 short tons. A colourless liquid with a low flash point and combustion threshold. It was primarily used for fuel and was highly inflammable.

Trinitrotoluene (TNT) - 276 short tons. A pale yellow solid organic compound used as an explosive. In normal circumstances it is relatively stable, requiring a trigger (such as a detonator) to cause it to explode. It was used extensively in munitions.

Trinitrophenol (TNP) - 2,609 short tons. More commonly known as Picric Acid. This was a highly explosive organic compound. In practical application it was more unstable and corrosive than TNT and would, in time, be phased out by the safer compound. During WW1, however, its use was still widespread.

In total, the ship carried 3,224 tons of highly flammable or explosive material. →



Far Left. A map of the waterway to the north of Halifax. The track of the *SS Imo*, under ballast and bound for New York, is shown in red. The track of the *SS Imo*, heavily laden with explosives and heading into Bedford Basin, in blue. The collision point is marked with a red cross. *Imo*, which was then on fire, drifted south and came to rest against Pier 6. →

Centre Left. Computer generated images of the collision and its immediate aftermath. **Top:** The larger *SS Imo* strikes the *SS Mont Blanc* a glancing blow abeam No.1 hold, just forward of the superstructure. It is sufficient to topple some drums of Benzol which were ignited by sparks from the collision. **Middle.** The *Mont Blanc*, now on fire and abandoned, drifts towards Halifax Harbour. **Bottom.** The burning vessel comes to rest abeam Pier 6, not far from Halifax's busy CBD. The tug to the left of the ship is the *Stella Maris*, which is rushing to the *Mont Blanc* to fight the fire. Her crew was unaware of the explosive nature of the burning ship's cargo. 21 of her 26 crew were to perish. →

tures of thousands of atmospheres that radiated away from the explosion at more than 1000 metres per second.

Larger items from the vessel were blasted upwards, with the shank of the anchor landing at Armdale, 3.2 km to the south, and the bent barrel of the forward 90mm gun nearly 6km north in Dartmouth.

About 1.6 square kilometres of the harbour and surrounding structures were utterly destroyed in an instant. Buildings were reduced to fragments and people either incinerated or their bodies torn to pieces. Outside this radius the damage was severe. Many people stood watching the drama were struck by the shock wave travelling at three times the speed of sound. It carried with it fragments of metal, wood, bricks and glass, spraying outwards in a deadly scythe that tore off their limbs or inflicted other dreadful injuries. A later report noted that it had been the most catastrophic mass blinding event in North America's history.

Some people were lifted bodily and carried though

““A shower of shrapnel passed over the Forecastle, shattering the glass in the engine room and chart room to smithereens, which came crashing down into the alleyways. The fires all burst out on to the floor of the stokehold and it was a marvel that the stokers were not burned to death”

Frank Baker Royal Navy HMCS Arcadia.
Diary entry December 6th 1917. →



Taken from the Dartmouth side of the Narrows not long after the blast, this image shows an unnamed ship aground, but surprisingly undamaged. →

the sky. Where and how they landed largely determined whether they lived or died. Charles Mayers, third officer of the vessel *Middleham Castle*, was picked up and dropped nearly 1 km from his ship, landing atop Fort Needham Hill in Richmond. "I was wet when I came down," Mayers said. "I had no clothes on when I came to, except my boots. There was a little girl near me and I asked her where we were. She was crying and said she did not know where we were. Some men gave me a pair of trousers and a rubber coat."

The explosion vaporised an enormous volume of water which momentarily exposed the floor of the harbour, and a tsunami was instantly formed by the sea surging in to fill the void. It rose as high as 18 metres above the high water mark on the Halifax side, pressing three blocks into the city. More than 1600 buildings were destroyed by water. In the confines of the harbour the effect of the tsunami was catastrophic. It battered ships, swept away boats and flung vessels ashore. It dragged bystanders to their deaths, and climbed up the foreshores carrying with it the detritus of small boats, fish and the bodies of those it had consumed.

Ironically, fire was also a killer. Overturned lamps and stoves ignited smashed houses, particularly in the north end of the city, where entire blocks burned with their residents trapped inside.

The enormous explosion was heard by the USS *Tacoma*, eighty kilometres out to sea. She recorded in her log: "At 0905 heard heavy explosion in general direction of Halifax, observed great clouds of smoke high in air."

The blast's concussive shock broke windows in Truro, 95 kilometres to the north, and was heard on Cape Breton island, more than 270 kilometres to the north east. As one observer later remarked "[it] was a sound for God to make, not man".

And then, in the wake of the tsunami, a great towering mass of noxious gas drifted over the city, and rain fell from the sky. It was oily and black, filled with the unconsumed carbon of the explosives, and it covered whatever it fell upon like liquid tar.

Nobody knows how many people died in the catastrophe. Official estimates suggest 1,600, with another 9,000 injured. Aston-

ishingly, all but one of the fleeing crew of the SS *Mont Blanc* survived, protected by distance after their frantic row from the ship.

The death toll could have been worse, though. Patrick Coleman was a railway worker who learned of *Mont Blanc's* cargo from a fleeing sailor. He also took to his heels but then remembered an incoming passenger train was due to arrive in a few minutes, so he returned to the office to send an urgent message: "*Hold up the train. Ammunition ship afire in harbor making for Pier 6 and will explode. Guess this will be my last message. Good-bye boys.*" His efforts brought all rail traffic to a halt at a safe distance, including the inbound passenger train with more than 300 people aboard. Coleman did not survive.

4. The Aftermath

Although Halifax's civilian administration was decimated by the disaster, the city took advantage of the many well-disciplined military personnel who were either there at the time or who arrived shortly afterwards.

The first rescue efforts came from survivors, who pulled victims from the wreckage with their bare hands. They were quickly joined by the many military personnel in the city, mostly off ships in the Basin. Ships diverted to the city of their own accord, including the USS *Tacoma*.

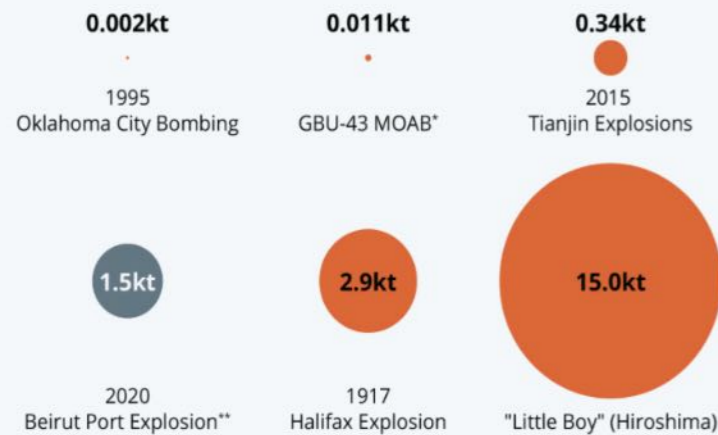
As people rushed to help there were fears of a second explosion, as Wellington Barracks with its store of explosives was on fire. A cloud of steam shot out of its magazine as the fire was extinguished, leading to rumours that another blast was imminent, but many rescuers ignored the threat and kept working.

Relief workers and supplies soon arrived from every community across Nova Scotia, and, within a short space of time, from Canada and the United States. By nightfall no less than a dozen trains had reached the stricken city, bringing relief crews and supplies, and taking away the injured.

The following morning the town was struck by a blizzard, bringing 16 inches of snow. It aided efforts to extinguish fires but blocked the railway and brought down hastily erected telegraph lines, and it added to the misery of the survivors.

How Powerful was the Halifax Explosion?

Estimated kiloton yield of selected explosions/weapons



* Most powerful conventional bomb ever used in combat

** Based on research from the University of Sheffield

Source: Statista Research

5. The Reckoning

In the aftermath of the disaster, a judicial inquiry laid the blame at the feet of three men: Aime Le Medec, the *Mont-Blanc's* captain; Francis Mackey, the harbour pilot aboard the *Mont-Blanc*, and Commander F. Evan Wyatt, the naval officer in command of the harbour. Everyone on *Imo's* open bridge, including her Captain and the pilot, had perished in the blast, so could not be questioned.

The inquiry found that it was the *Mont-Blanc's* responsibility alone to avoid a collision, given the nature of her cargo. Its decision might have been influenced by local opinion, which was strongly anti-French, as well as by the 'street fighter' style used by *Imo* lawyer Charles Burchell. Still, the ruling came as a great surprise to many people, who expected the *Imo* to be blamed for being on the wrong side of the channel.

Nevertheless, the three men were arrested and charged with manslaughter and criminal negligence, and were bound over for trial.

A Nova Scotia Supreme Court justice subsequently found there was no evidence to support the charges. Mackey was released and, because the other two men had been arrested on the same warrant, they too were discharged from custody.

A subsequent civil litigation trial similarly found *Mont-Blanc* entirely at fault, but subsequent appeals to the High Court determined each ship was equally to blame for the errors that resulted in the collision. Ultimately, no party was ever convicted of any crime, nor prosecuted for any actions that resulted in the disaster.

Le Medec, the captain of the *Mont-Blanc*, returned to France where he continued his career as a mariner. Wyatt remained in the Navy and was

posted elsewhere. Only Mackey remained in Halifax, where he continued his duties as Harbour Pilot despite public anger and suspicion making his life difficult.

The SS *Imo*, her superstructure wrecked, survived not only the explosion but also seafarers' superstition as an unlucky ship - for a while at least. She was repaired in 1918 and christened *Governøren* ("The Governor"), plying her trade as a whale oil tanker until 1921. Fate finally caught up with her, however, when a drunken helmsman fell asleep at her wheel and she ran aground near the Falkland Islands. She was never salvaged and the sea eventually consumed her.

6. The Memories

Nobody who survived the Halifax explosion is alive today. Many were to die earlier than they otherwise might, scarred mentally or physically by



Devastation near the epicentre of the explosion was complete, with hardly a building left upright. The hulk of the SS *Imo* can be seen on the far side of the channel. A heavy snowfall the morning after the disaster added to the misery of survivors.

the terrible events of that day. Others were able to shrug the experience aside and live relatively normal lives.

One of the last surviving eyewitnesses was Kay Chapman, only five years old when the explosion occurred. An intensely religious woman, she lived to be 105, and credited her survival to the fact that she was holding a Bible and christian prayerbook at the time of the explosion as she played at being at Sunday School with her dolls.

But although the survivors have all gone, the memories remain. Every year on December 6th Halifax people gather at Fort Needham Park, a grassy hill that overlooks the Narrows. They listen to the mournful ringing of the memorial's carillon bells and take pause to remember the victims.

And every year a large Christmas tree is cut from the Nova Scotia woods and erected in central Boston - a gift of thanks from Halifax to the city that helped them so much in the wake of that dreadful disaster. →

References

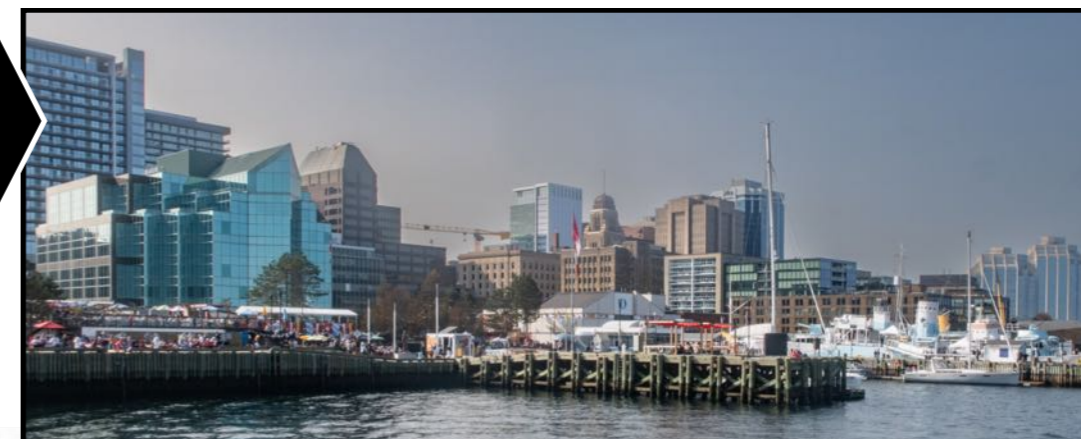
Legion - Canada's Military History Magazine. Link [here](#).

Wikipedia.

Canadian Encyclopaedia. Link [here](#).

Canada History. Link [here](#).

The waterfront in Halifax today, not far from where the explosion took place nearly 106 years ago.



"I have never seen anything on the battlefield equal to the scenes of destruction that I witnessed in Halifax today,"

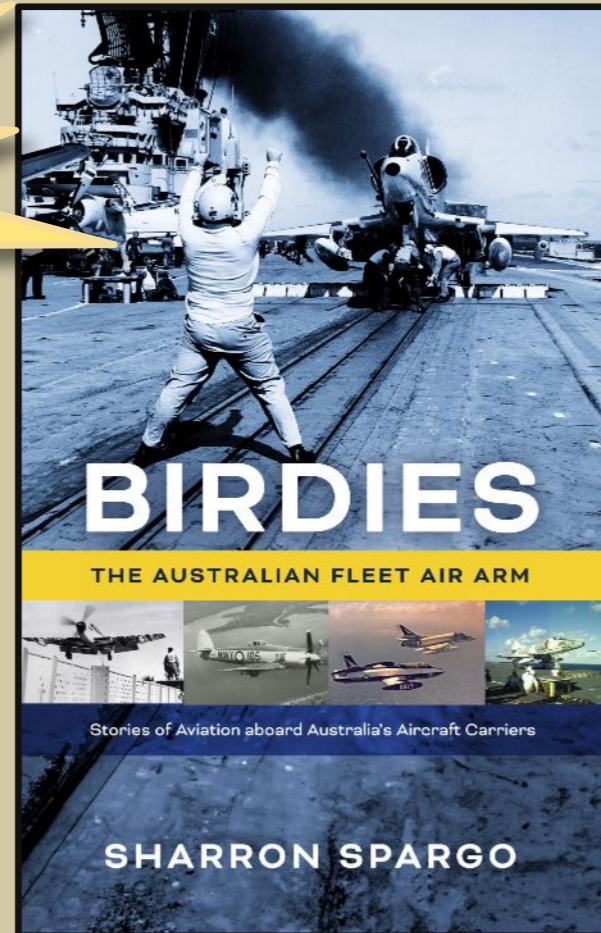
Lt.Col. Frank Bell, Assistant Director of Medical Services for Military District 9. →



Stop Press
**New Book
 Release**

Featured Book Release: "Birdies: The Australian Fleet Air Arm"
 Stories of Aviation aboard Australia's Aircraft Carriers
 Author: Sharron Spargo
 140mms X 216mms
 298 pages
 Australian History
 RRP \$35.00 plus Post & Packing

Order Your Copy Here



"Quiet achievers in the most dangerous workplace in the world..."

They are the 'Birdies' – the proud members of a unique fighting force unknown to the majority of Australians whose land and lives they have long protected.

Officially known as the Australian Fleet Air Arm, they have operated as an aviation component of the Royal Australian Navy since 1947.

Their "airfields" are the decks of purpose-built aircraft carriers, landing strips pitching and rolling in deep blue water, far from land.

From the early years of mostly seaborne activity the Birdies have evolved through search and rescue, anti-submarine warfare, and peacekeeping and humanitarian missions to global policing, anti-terrorism and anti-piracy.

Today's Birdies, as intrepid as ever, now operate squadrons of the most sophisticated helicopters in the world, often within multinational forces.

Researcher and author Sharron Spargo has close ties both to the veterans from those formative years and to those who are serving today. She has gathered their intensely personal accounts of front line action in the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Indonesian confrontation, the Cold War and the Gulf War; stories of a unique service that for too long has gone unheard and unacknowledged.

This fascinating book places these quiet achievers, the Birdies, in their rightful place in Australia's naval and aviation history." →

Sharron Spargo attained an honours degree from Murdoch University as a part-time mature aged student after spending three years recording Des Sullivan's memories of flying Lancaster bombers over Europe during World War II.

Her father was a member of the Australian Fleet Air Arm and served in the Korean War as an aircraft armorer aboard aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney*. He later became a founding member of the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia.

She and her husband also enjoy touring Australia on their Harley-Davidson, or simply finding an outback pub for a good lunch. She shares her life with "wonderful friends and family, usually over a bottle of wine and a great meal". →

FAAAA ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE AT THE END OF THE YEAR. PLEASE HELP US BY PAYING EARLY.

Payment varies depending on which Division you are in - please see details below. You can pay by Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT), by direct deposit at your local bank, or by sending a cheque. Sorry we don't do Credit Cards.

If you need any advice or assistance, please contact the webmaster [here](#).

NSW DIVISION

Amount: \$40.00 pa, regardless of Slipstream format.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 637 000

Account: 7168 19 388

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA NSW Division, PO Box 28, NOWRA 2541. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

VIC DIVISION

Amount: \$45.00 pa regardless of Slipstream format.
 (Associate Members - \$10.00)

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 083 961

Account: 3108 23 774.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA VIC Division, PO Box 2179 RMH Post Office, PARKVILLE 3050. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

ACT DIVISION

Amount: \$36.00 pa if you receive 'hard copy' Slipstream.
 \$24.00 pa if you receive Electronic Slipstream.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 032 719

Account: 374 093.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The President FAAAA Act Division, 41 Noarlunga Crescent, BONYTHON 2905. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

QLD DIVISION

Amount: \$40.00 pa regardless of Slipstream format.

Account Name: FAAAAQld

BSB: 034 611

Account: 171 277.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial.

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA QLD Divn, 6/74 Mattocks Rd., Varsity Lakes, QLD 4227. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

TAS DIVISION

Amount: \$35.00 pa regardless of Slipstream format.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 037 013

Account: 133 119.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA TAS Division, 7 Danbury Drive, LEGANA 7277. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

SA DIVISION

Amount: \$49.00 pa if you receive 'hard copy' Slipstream.
 \$37.00 pa if you receive Electronic Slipstream.

Account Name: FAAAA

BSB: 065 118

Account: 009 05 668.

Reference: Membership Number or your surname+initial

Cheques: The Treasurer FAAAA SA Division, 6 Somerset Avenue, CUMBERLAND PARK, SA 5041. Ensure you put your full name on the back!

WA DIVISION has declined to publish its payment details. If you have any queries please contact the Secretary, [Jim Bush](#).