

The Royal Australian Air Force

1972-1996

TAKING THE LEAD



Mark Lax

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TAKING THE LEAD



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FOREWORD

‘Taking the Lead 1972–96’

I am delighted to provide the foreword to this, the third in a new series of official histories of the Royal Australian Air Force. The preceding two volumes, *The Third Brother* and *Going Solo*, addressed the years before and after World War II, each covering a quarter of a century of challenges and development. *Taking the Lead* takes us from Air Force’s 50th anniversary in 1971 and looks at the next quarter of a century. It describes how Air Force came of age, such that by 1996 it was starting the journey towards becoming a fully-integrated fifth-generation air force, with the foundations of this distinction laid two-and-a-half decades ago.

Taking the Lead follows Dr Alan Stephen’s *Going Solo*, which covers the post-World War II period when Air Force was adjusting to a peacetime footing – only to find itself quickly embroiled in wars in Korea, Malaya, and Vietnam. These conflicts occurred while we as a nation were coming to terms with both the British withdrawal from South-East Asia, and the US pushing its allies, including Australia, to be increasingly responsible for their own defence. Air Force was expected to contribute, albeit as a junior partner, and this truly tested us.

It was a difficult time for Air Force, and my predecessors were acutely aware of this. *Taking the Lead* dispels the notion that at this time Air Force was doing little besides training and reacting to changing government policy. In reality we were at the forefront of operations that stretched from South-East Asia to the Sub-Continent, the Middle East and to Africa. We were also kept busy providing emergency assistance at home, and humanitarian and disaster response throughout the Pacific. Without Air Force the ADF could not have deployed, and clever restructuring for expeditionary operations ahead of the stress of significant downsizing ultimately laid the foundations for future operational success, including the 1999 deployment to East Timor.

In *Taking the Lead*, Air Commodore Mark Lax examines the major elements that contributed to Air Force’s application of air power in

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the defence of Australia, and in supporting our national interests. Consequently, it is not just a book about Air Force as an organisation, or our aircraft and our bases. It also looks closely at our personnel, including the integration of women into Air Force following the disbanding of the Women's Royal Australian Air Force in 1977. This was a time that saw the development of the Force Element Groups, greatly improved safety systems, and modernised training systems that anticipated future—now current—Air Force training needs.

This book is essential reading for anyone seeking to learn more about our Air Force journey. While our story continues to be written, understanding where we are in our centenary year requires us to truly understand where we have come from.

Taking the Lead covers an important part of Air Force's unfolding narrative—its successes and its failures—and illustrates how Air Force has remained true to its motto – *Per Ardua ad Astra* – Through Adversity to the Stars.

M.E.G. Hupfeld AO, DSC

Air Marshal

Chief of Air Force

Canberra, 2020

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Taking the Lead is the seventh volume in the series of RAAF official histories. The first, *The Third Brother: The Royal Australian Air Force 1921-1939* by Dr Chris Coulthard-Clark (now known as Dr Chris Clark), covered the RAAF from pre-inception to the start of World War II. Next are the four volumes by authors Herrington, Gillison and Odgers produced by the AWM covering the European and Pacific Theatres of World War II. The sixth volume by Dr Alan Stephens called *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force, 1946-1971* covers the post war years up to 1971, the RAAF's fiftieth Anniversary. This volume covers the period 1972 to 1996, the RAAF's third quarter century.

It is an honour to have been asked to write this volume covering the period in which I served. In developing the framework for the book, I was guided by the format and style of *Going Solo*, and consequently readers familiar with that work will note similarities in style and themes. As in *Going Solo*, at the start of some chapters, I have briefly covered the preceding history of the subject to place it in context.

This is not an operational history nor is it a chronology. Readers will find that each chapter generally stands alone, so they can easily skip those themes that do not interest them. Likewise, it is intended to be a reference for future researchers into how the RAAF developed, why and what impact that had. Consequently, I have structured the volume into four parts. The first covers the broader strategic environment, the RAAF's organisation and the myriad reviews. The second, is about personnel and training, the third covers logistics, bases and the operational groups, and the fourth the RAAF's operations.

I have deliberately included dates, places, units, positions held, outcomes of decisions, and, where appropriate, names of key individuals, for future reference purposes. I found it necessary to add extensive footnotes to denote sources or to clarify salient points and this style follows previous official history publications. I have avoided anecdotes and many readers may be disappointed that only the key decision-makers and change managers are mentioned.

Official records have been used where possible. Unfortunately, in society's rush to move to digital media, much material has been lost, destroyed or become inaccessible. Consequently, I am grateful to many RAAF members, past and present, and Defence officials who have assisted me in this work. They are too numerous to mention individually, but all have been mentioned in footnotes and in the bibliography. Many proofread

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chapters, corrected errors and highlighted missing information they deemed important. However, several deserve special attention. Foremost among them are Dr Alan Stephens and Air Vice-Marshal Dave Rogers (Retd) and Bob Richardson (Retd). Each guided me throughout. Air Marshals Evans, Newham, Funnell and Fisher were particularly helpful, adding much to the work. Mr Martin James and Steve Allan of the History and Heritage Branch—Air Force allowed me full access to RAAF historical records, as did the staff at the AWM, RAAF Museum and the National Archives of Australia. Mr Denny Neave and his staff at Big Sky Publishing deserve special thanks for the excellent job they did in producing this volume to a very high standard. My final thanks go to Wing Commander David Fredericks who's insightful editing made the work all the clearer, however any lasting errors remain mine.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAP	Australian Air Publication
AAR	Air-Air Refuelling
ACAUST	Air Commander Australia
ACG	Air Combat Group
AD	Aircraft Depot
ADFA	Australian Defence Force Academy
ADG	Airfield Defence Guard
AEW&C	Airborne Early Warning and Control
AFB	Air Force Base
AFHQ	Air Force Headquarters
ALG	Air Lift Group
AMTS	Air Member for Technical Services
ANZAM	Australia-New Zealand-Malaysia (Treaty)
ANZUK	Australia-New Zealand-UK (Treaty)
ANZUS	Australia-New Zealand-US (Treaty)
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APIN	Army Presence in the North
ARDU	Aircraft Research and Development Unit
ARL	Aeronautical Research Laboratories
ASADPO	Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASR	Air Staff Requirement
ATC	Air Traffic Control
AUP	Avionics Update Program
AWB	Air Worthiness Board
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BOI	Board of Inquiry
CABMIN	Cabinet Minute
CABSUB	Cabinet Submission
CAF	Chief of Air Force
CAFAC	Chief of Air Force Advisory Committee
CAFOP	Chief of Air Force Operations
CAFTS	Chief of Air Force Technical Services
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CASAC	Chief of Air Staff Advisory Committee
CDF	Chief of the Defence Force
CDFS	Chief of Defence Force Staff
CO	Commanding Officer

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COSC	Chiefs of Staff Committee
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
CRS	Commonwealth Record Series
CSP	Commercial Support Program
CSR	Commonwealth Strategic Reserve
DER	Defence Efficiency Review
DFDC	Defence Force Development Committee
DFRDB	Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits (superannuation scheme)
DHS-AF	Directorate of History Services – Air Force
DLRP	Defence Logistics Redevelopment Project
DRP	Defence Reform Program
DRSR	Defence Regional Support Review
DSTO	Defence Science and Technology Organisation
EWOSU	Electronic Warfare Operational Support Unit
FDA	Force Development and Analysis (Branch)
FEG	Force Element Group
FIC	Fundamental Inputs to Capability
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
FSC	Force Structure Committee
FSR	Force Structure Review
FYDP	Five-Year Defence Program
HQTC	Headquarters Training Command
IADS	Integrated Air Defence System
IDC	Inter-Departmental Committee
JCFAD	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
JCFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JORN	Jindalee Over the Horizon Radar Network
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
JSF	Joint Strike Fighter
LOT	Life of Type
MBP	Model Base Project
MINSUB	Ministerial Submission
MPG	Maritime Patrol Group
MRU	Manpower (later Members) Required in Uniform
MSBS	Military Superannuation Benefits Scheme
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

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NLA	National Library of Australia
NORCOM	Northern Command
NTTSR	Non-Technical Trade Structure Review
OC	Officer Commanding
OCSR	Officer Corps Structure Review
OCU	Operational Conversion Unit
ORBAT	Order of Battle
OSG	Operational Support Group
OTS	Officer Training School
PAF	Permanent Air Force (members)
PGM	Precision Guided Munition
PMB	Program Management and Budgeting
RABS	Review of Air Base Support
R&D	Research and Development
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAAFAR	RAAF Active Reserve
RAAFGR	RAAF General Reserve
RAAFM	RAAF Museum
RAAF(NS)	RAAF Nursing Service
RAAFSC	RAAF Staff College
RAAFSR	RAAF Specialist Reserve
RAF	Royal Air Force
RDT&E	Research, Development, Test and Evaluation
RFT	Request for Tender
RSG	Reserve Staff Group
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organisation
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald (newspaper)
SPO	System Program Office
SRG	Strike Reconnaissance Group
TFG	Tactical Fighter Group
TTG	Tactical Transport Group
TTSR	Technical Trade Structure Review
TYDP	Ten Year Defence Program
UNAMIC	UN Mission in Cambodia
UNAMIR	UN Mission in Rwanda
UNOSOM	UN Mission in Somalia
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	United States Navy
WRAAF	Women's Royal Australian Air Force

INTRODUCTION

The RAAF had gone solo, and done it well, but the challenge of reaching wings standard was still ahead.

Dr Alan Stephens¹

On 20 December 1972, a RAAF No 37 Squadron C-130E Hercules, A97-189, touched down at RAAF Richmond ending Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War. It was the last of two Hercules bringing the remaining few Army members home. It was the end of an era in RAAF history and the beginning of another.

During the period 1972 to 1996, the timeframe of this history, the RAAF arguably came of age after a slow but steady start. In using the analogy of a student learning to fly, Dr Alan Stephens in *Going solo*, the official history of the RAAF between 1946 and 1971, stated that by 1971 the Service had finally 'gone solo, and done it well, but the challenge of reaching wings standard was still ahead'. This is the story of the RAAF's third quarter century and how the RAAF finally earned its wings.

From 1945 to 1971 the RAAF had been fully engaged in the Cold War undertaking operations as far afield as Berlin and Malta in Western Europe to Korea and Vietnam in Asia. Throughout this post-World War II period, the RAAF had been expeditionary in nature, committed to supporting Australia's treaty and alliance obligations as part of a forward defence posture. The period 1972 to 1996 was one of changing strategic circumstances and from 1990, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of instability and uncertainty. However, it was also a period of maturity for the RAAF which had to finally shrug off the protective embrace of 'great and powerful friends'.

Between 1972 and 1996 the RAAF developed into a modern, technologically advanced, regional air force, able to prosecute air operations under its own command arrangements. The full spectrum of air power roles was finally developed, primarily for the defence of Australia, but also allowing the RAAF to contribute to regional stability, peacekeeping, wider defence exercises and assistance to the civil community. This period is characterised by independence, maturity and managing change. It was a period when the RAAF took the lead in many change initiatives.

Consequently, this work is primarily about change and how the RAAF developed because of it. In many cases, significant change for the better

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came from individuals who had to overcome entrenched attitudes and dogma. Examples include the establishment of the Force Element Groups, the introduction of Total Quality Management (TQM) into Logistics Command, the development of Members Required in Uniform (MRU) and the trade restructures. A broad study of history tells us that such upheavals in the way of doing business generally come about from three factors: economic forces, societal change and new ways of thinking. This is certainly the case for the RAAF as it approached the twenty-first Century.

When the RAAF celebrated its seventy-fifth Anniversary in 1996 as the world's second oldest air force, it could feel justifiably proud of its achievements.² In the preceding years, much had changed from beginnings in 1921 with just 21 officers and 130 other ranks. Its fleet of aircraft then consisted of 164 biplanes, most of which were a British Imperial Gift, leftovers from service in World War I and all of which were obsolete. Seventy-five years later, the RAAF could boast 3976 officers, 14 193 airmen and airwomen and eighteen fully operational squadrons of world standing.³



The year 1971 was the RAAF's fiftieth or Golden Anniversary, a milestone celebrated around the country in March and April with a series of spectacular air shows and other memorable events. VIPs including Marshal of the RAAF, His Royal Highness, The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, attended numerous functions and represented Her Majesty the Queen. The air show 'circus' (as it was colloquially called at the time) did wonders for recruiting as many enthralled young men and women sought to make the Air Force a career. All would wear the new lighter blue-grey uniform brought into service in 1972.

As well as making appearances at air shows, official dinners and civic receptions, Prince Philip was shown a model of the proposed RAAF Memorial to be erected on Anzac Parade in Canberra. He returned to Canberra two years later to officially unveil the memorial which depicted three stylised aluminium wings on a black granite plinth. According to the Victorian sculpture artist, Ms Inge King, the sculpture was 'symbolic of flight' but despite the *RAAF News* lauding its virtues, it was not liked by many RAAF members past and present.⁴ It would take until November 2002 when a series of interpretive granite panels were erected behind the sculptures before the memorial 'more fully portray[ed] the history of the RAAF and the contribution by former and current serving personnel...' ⁵ Nevertheless, the memorial recognised the service and sacrifice of the many thousands of men and women who wore the blue uniform.

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HRH the Prince Phillip, AIRMSHL Colin Hannah and AIRMSHL Sir Richard 'Dicky' Williams inspect the RAAF memorial model

In recognition of the RAAF's service to the Australian community, Australia Post issued a six-cent stamp in 1971 (the postage cost of a standard letter) depicting a flight of Mirages, and the RAAF produced a souvenir book entitled *The Golden Years*, which was part RAAF history and part recruitment material. Both were well received by the Australian public.

While much was made of the RAAF's traditions, history and success, as with all such celebrations controversy also existed. Perhaps the most controversial decision made as the RAAF approached its fiftieth Anniversary as far as airmen and airwomen were concerned was the introduction of a new 'all seasons' uniform. This was blue-grey in colour and made from a modern, lightweight material. The original dark blue uniform colour was chosen in the 1920s by the first RAAF chief, Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams. It was popular but the new colour not so. The idea was that it could be worn in 'all-seasons' but given the range of temperatures across Australia from Canberra's dry minus six Centigrade in winter to Darwin's humid plus 33 degrees in the wet season, the new material would never satisfy all conditions. The wool-polyester blend was the height of 1970's fashion, and was designed to overcome shortfalls in the old uniform and to modernise the RAAF in the public's eye.⁶ However, the RAAF's new uniform soon became common

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wear among other government employees such as public transport workers, police, customs officers and security guards as the uniforms were made by the Government Clothing Factory. Unfortunately, the RAAF did not have a trade mark on the colour or design. It would take another twenty-five years before the RAAF would change back to the original dark blue, with the choice of the most appropriate heavy or lightweight material left up to the member.

By late 1971 the Australian involvement in the Vietnam War was almost over and plans had already been laid for the inevitable final withdrawal of all RAAF forces. On 18 August that year, the McMahon Government (1971-1972) had announced in Parliament that all remaining Australian combat forces would be withdrawn from Vietnam with the majority 'home in Australia by Christmas'.⁷ No 2 Squadron's Canberra bombers had already departed in June 1971 and by December, No 9 Squadron and their Iroquois had also returned home. The Caribous of No 35 Squadron, which were first into Vietnam in 1964, were the last out so by February 1972 only a few small support elements remained. Their departure the following month ended the air force's commitment to what was at the time Australia's longest war. It would also usher in a period of relative peace, the result of the Cold War order enforced by the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The RAAF members who returned from the Vietnam War were mostly permanent air force, so their transition back into a peacetime Australian life was relatively straightforward as they resumed their usual base duties. Operational flying turned into training or exercises. The homecoming was certainly not as traumatic as that of many National Servicemen who went back to their previous civilian occupations, as Dr Chris Clark has written, into 'an unsympathetic and frequently hostile community'.⁸ RAAF Vietnam veterans quickly reintegrated without too much trauma, although several long-term issues remain to this day.⁹

Australia as a nation was also changing. The Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975) brought in major social changes to health, education, immigration and family law. Australia's international relations changed too. The 1971 Defence Report recorded that after the US and USSR, 'three new and major centres of power, in the broadest sense, have emerged'. The paper sited 'the Atlantic hemisphere', the Asian region and a rising economic power, Japan.¹⁰ Whitlam when Labor opposition leader, had recognised Communist China and now as Prime Minister formalised it, thus placing a new emphasis on regional engagement, particularly with nearer South-East Asian neighbours. Within a year, the policy had shifted towards Australia

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‘develop[ing] its own capability to serve its own strategic interests’ and the terms ‘self-reliance’ and ‘independence’ emerged in the strategic language of the day.¹¹ A response to the British withdrawal from Singapore, and revised defence arrangements with the US, were also foreshadowed. These changes would deeply affect the RAAF, its basing and its force structure in the coming years.

PART 1

ORGANISATION

CHAPTER 1

Strategy, Policy and the RAAF 1972-1996

The changing world order of the 1970s meant that Australia had to reassess its role in the world and in the Asia-Pacific in particular. For much of the previous two decades, Australia was preoccupied with the threat of communist expansion and took on a posture of 'forward defence' primarily against Communist China and North Vietnam, apart from the tracking Soviet and Chinese submarines as part of the western hemisphere's contribution to Cold War politics. The engagement of both Britain and the US in the region was critical to this equation. But British withdrawal 'from East of Suez' announced in their 1966 Defence White Paper, to be complete by the end of 1971, and a move towards the European Economic Community meant that British influence in the Asia-Pacific was very much on the wane.

Adding to the regional dynamic, the start of the British withdrawal began shortly after US President Richard Nixon's Guam Doctrine statement of 25 July 1969 in which he stated at a press conference that the US expected its allies to do more for their own defence. While targeted at US South-East Asian allies, the implication of Nixon's speech was not lost on Australian policy makers, especially while enjoying the benefits of the security blanket of the ANZUS treaty in place since 1951. In a similar vein, the US defeat in April 1975 by the relatively unsophisticated North Vietnamese armed forces clearly indicated that the American will to remain engaged was dependent on domestic policy and US public opinion. There would be no guarantees.

Likewise, the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), a collective regional security framework designed to counter communist expansion, was also on the wane. Although established in 1954 with much fanfare as a South-East Asian version of NATO without the assigned forces or command and control structure, it too would be phased out by 1977. As far as the RAAF was concerned, at least SEATO allowed for the deployment of No 79 Squadron's Sabres to Ubon from 1962 until 1968, which provided

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some valuable training with the USAF units deployed there for operations in Vietnam.

The establishment of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) on 1 November 1971 between Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Malaysia and Singapore at least kept the British engaged, if not in situ. The FPDA replaced the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve and terminated the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement, both of which had had their day. As a temporary measure to manage the transition, a tripartite agreement called ANZUK–Australia, New Zealand and the UK–also formed in November 1971, but this folded on 1 January 1975 once the FPDA organisation had established itself. Thus by the mid-1970s, Australians had come to realise that in future they would have to provide more for their own defence. A major part of the FPDA was the institution of an Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) which would be commanded by a RAAF Air Vice-Marshal (a two-star officer). Supporting IADS would become key to the RAAF's maintenance of a forward regional presence.

The combination of these announcements effectively meant that Australia would need to continue to operate in Asia and raise Defence expenditure accordingly. Consequently, from 1972, two Mirage fighter squadrons (No 3 and No 75) and a Transport Support Flight of Dakotas would continue to be permanently based in Butterworth, Malaysia, with the rotation of a flight of Mirages to the air base at Tengah in Singapore. Regular deployments of Canberra bombers, Neptune maritime patrol aircraft and, by 1976, F-111C strike aircraft also helped maintain that forward presence.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1970s the Air Force roles remained as they had since the end of World War II. In 1972 these were threefold. First, to organise, train and equip the Air Force for timely and sustained combat operations with an emphasis on 'defending Australia, its Territories and Australian forces against air attack'. Second, 'to provide close offensive and tactical transport air support for Army' and third, 'to provide strategic and other military air transport support for the Australian Armed Forces'.¹ In view of the apparent 'steady as she goes' approach, these priorities would remain over the coming decades, with only the language changing to suit the political environment.

The Changing Strategic Environment – 1973-1983

Post-Vietnam, the Gorton and later McMahon Governments began to consider a new strategic paradigm for Australian defence, beyond the dualistic approach of 'forward defence' and continuing alliance obligations with the US, UK and Singapore/Malaysia. The relationship with New Zealand under the Anzac tradition was seemingly taken for granted. Australia was

now expected to look after its own, without having to rely on the good graces of 'great and powerful friends'. Australia had to 'come of age' in a strategic sense and with that her defence forces had to mature as well. The West was warming to China, the Vietnam War had ended, and Indonesia was now seen as benign. Concomitant with this new regional reality was the emergence of the idea of 'no immediate threat', a pronouncement initially made by Minister for Defence Allen Fairhall and expanded upon in the 1971 Strategic Basis Paper. This concept would be developed further throughout the coming decade.

At the time of the RAAF's fiftieth Anniversary in March 1971, Australia's Prime Minister John Gorton began making public comments that he did not believe there was any prospect of an attack on the mainland of Australia within the next decade. He even specified the ten-year time frame. As well as the 'no threat for ten years' mantra, Defence planners began exploring the challenge of managing low-level contingencies with the extant force structure, and in 1973 produced a Services capability paper called the Environment of Future Australian Military Operations or EFAMO.² The Services were required to summarise their proposed force capabilities, which would then go through the Defence Force Development and Force Structure committees, and if approved, enter the Five Year Defence Program for investment between 1973 and 1978.

The 1972 Defence Report was released coincident with a prototype White Paper called *Australian Defence Review* which examined Australia's defence interests, the environment past and future, commitments and alliances, and the structure of the defence force as it stood. The brief thirty-eight-page public document was a departure from the usual Defence Report format as it provided additional analysis of Australia's strategic situation, with an emphasis on maritime defence.³ It finally put paid to the debates of both 'Fortress Australia' and 'Forward Defence' and preceded the 1976 White Paper in its consideration of the kind of forces Australia would need in the 1970s and 1980s. The paper recognised four broad 'influences' on force structure:

First, the geography of our environs and Australia's tangible interests located in our homeland and dependencies; Second, the expectations allies and friends have of us and we of them to contribute to collective security; Third, the degree of probability of a threat or resort to force in the area of Australian concern; and fourth, the options we would wish future governments to have as to the nature of our involvement in foreseeable or contingent situations of conflict.⁴

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The review paper also raised three important defence concepts: deterrence, power projection, and the protection of the maritime approaches. Australian forces would henceforth be focussed more on continental defence—this was a quantum shift. Already the planners were suggesting the new F-111Cs would ‘play an important part in this deterrence’ and ‘power projection’, and were thinking in terms of a new maritime strike role additional to the SP-2H Neptunes and P-3B Orions, noting ‘the maritime air capability can be supplemented by the F-111C aircraft when they come into service’. Most importantly for the RAAF, ‘a capability to project our strength beyond Australia’s continental boundaries’ was deemed necessary and was a clear departure from previous Defence consideration.⁵ Concurrently, the annual Defence Report also drifted towards the notion of ‘self-reliance’ with a greater emphasis on the maritime and archipelagic environment.⁶ The idea of power projection across the ‘air-sea’ gap had emerged.

With the election of the Whitlam Government in December 1972 after the Labor Party’s twenty-three years in opposition, Australia’s defence strategy was little changed. The 1973 Strategic Basis, the first under the new government, was similar to its predecessor, but extended the ‘no threat’ issue out to fifteen years and suggested that force structure planning should provide an adequate basis for expansion. It noted the global trend towards multi-polarity given the détente between the US and USSR, China’s increasing re-engagement with the international community, and the growing power of Western Europe and Japan. Economics was now seen as a more credible driver of international relations. Alliances such as FPDA were still important, but no longer force determinants. Specifically, FPDA did ‘not require that Australian personnel be stationed permanently abroad’, a notion echoed in the Defence Report released that same year and presaging a general drawdown of Australian forces overseas.⁷ As well as assess direct threats to Australia as low, it recognised the importance of timing and introduced the concept of *lead time*—the time required to develop a force structure ‘from when a Government decision to develop is given’.⁸ It signalled the start of what a later Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, termed the decade of ‘coming home’—out of Vietnam, out of Malaysia and Singapore, and generally, out of sight.⁹

According to academic Alan Dupont, for decades, there was ‘the long-established fear that a deterioration of relations with Indonesia could directly threaten Australia’s own security in its own backyard’.¹⁰ Whitlam took a more conciliatory stand on relations with Indonesia than his predecessors, realising Australia’s most populous neighbour was the gateway to Asia and that there could be significant trade benefits as Asia grew out of its colonial

past. In 1972, the Seabed Boundaries Agreement was signed, followed a year later by the resolution of the border between Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya.¹¹ Significantly, defence cooperation with Indonesia rapidly increased, including the donation by Australia of patrol boats, and Sabre and Nomad aircraft.¹²

The new Labor Government wasted no time in stamping its authority. Within a month, the Minister for Defence, Lance Barnard, announced a wide-ranging reorganisation and amalgamation of the Defence group of Departments—Defence, Navy, Army, Air Force, and Supply—into one consolidated Department of Defence. Foreshadowed in Barnard's reply to the 1972 Appropriations Bill,¹³ and largely arising from recommendations of the *Tange Review*, the new Department was to be in place by 1973 but would take till late 1975 for implementation to be complete.¹⁴

The 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor after the collapse of the Portuguese colonial government also precipitated a crisis in Canberra. The invasion created a political dilemma because it occurred as Australia entered its own constitutional crisis with the sacking of the Whitlam Government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr. In October 1974 under *Operasi Komodo* the Indonesian military began to plan the takeover of East Timor which came to fruition a year later. The whole affair should have come as no surprise. By February 1975, *The Age* newspaper was openly quoting 'Top Secret Intelligence Reports' reaching Canberra that Indonesian forces were preparing to invade.¹⁵ However, it took until early December that year for the full scale invasion, and then with tacit Australian and US blessing.¹⁶ Had Australia wanted, the RAAF could have responded quickly as it was given enough warning—but for political reasons, nothing was done.

The Whitlam Government faced huge public pressure to 'do something' in its dying days, particularly after claims of Indonesian atrocities began to emerge and allegations of the murder of five Western TV journalists became public knowledge.¹⁷ From July 1975, the diplomatic traffic became intense, with Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Richard Woolcott, sending cables on a weekly, then daily basis. After the border town of Batugarde was taken by Indonesian troops on 8 October, any Australian response was too late. The Government's position was influenced by a Minute from Bill Pritchett, the First Assistant Secretary of the Strategic and International Policy Division in the Department of Defence, to Secretary Tange and the Defence Minister, Bill Morrison. As *Realpolitik*, it pointed out the threefold policy option dilemma facing Australia—accede to an Indonesian take over without Australian involvement; persuade the Indonesians to accept the reality of Timor's opposition movement (called Fretlin), but be left with a

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poor and weak independent state of East Timor; or fight the invasion.¹⁸ The first option appealed as the neatest solution and was quickly accepted.

By 1976, the Government had changed and despite new Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock's condemnation of the Timor invasion, the new Government remained opposed to any Australian military involvement, and little was done. While Timor was within easy reach from Darwin, had the F-111Cs been called upon to strike, the RAAF faced the embarrassment that their aircraft had no precision weapons, no means of target discrimination, and no way of rescuing crews had an aircraft been lost.

The Strategic Basis Paper of 1975, a product developed under the guidance of Labor apparatchiks, was rejected by the incoming Fraser Government and sent for redraft. It returned to Cabinet in October as the Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives (ASADPO) 1976, but it kept most of the Strategic Basis 1975 observations, took on a clear Defence of Australia outlook, retained the 'force-in-being' concept now known as the 'core force', and presaged the White Paper released later the same year.¹⁹ With input from the Department of Foreign Affairs who had produced their own White Paper—'The Regional Outlook in South East Asia'—in October 1975, it considered the main regional competition would be between China and the USSR, particularly over the newly independent Vietnam. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries were no longer seen as 'fragile' and Australia would now focus more on looking after itself.²⁰ The ridiculous idea that there would still be ten to fifteen years warning before a threat emerged remained. Of this idea, incoming CAS Air Marshal James Rowland remarked: 'I could not recall a conflict in which there had been ten years' warning time – ten days was more like it – and since there had been some ninety [conflicts] this century, the prognostication seemed a little optimistic'. It simply suited the economic downturn Australia was in at the time and kept Defence expenditure to a minimum.²¹ However, the main critique from a Service point of view was that ASADPO '76 failed to provide guidance on what force structure should apply, how it should be developed or how it should be used.

Australia's first Defence White Paper, *Australian Defence*, was released in November 1976 by the Minister for Defence, Jim Killen. It was the first Government public document after the implementation of the Tange reforms and used the term Australian Defence Force (ADF) for the first time. The paper has been described as having a bet each way—'self-reliance within and alliance framework'. It also envisaged further 'jointery' in the language it used to describe changes to the force structure. The basis of the White Paper's chapter on military capabilities planned for the future was

a Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee report considered in April 1976.²² As a result, for the RAAF, the White Paper recognised the deficiencies in weapons, sensors, reconnaissance, early warning and air-to-air refuelling (AAR), and set about funding several projects to rectify the situation.²³ These would come piecemeal over the next ten years, but of them, the lack of an early warning aircraft and an AAR capability would remain problematic for the RAAF.

The 1976 White Paper was intended to have a five-year life; however, its failing was that there was to be no strategy, budget appropriation or concept of operations (CONOPS) flowing from it. The idea of simply responding to threats as they emerged was not a compelling strategy. It was up to the Services to examine potential or emerging threats and to propose response options—still as separate and competing entities. What was needed was an agreed CONOPS, a challenge taken up by Air Vice-Marshal David Evans when he was the Chief of Air Force Operations in Air Force Office.²⁴



Minister for Defence Jim Killen released Australia's first Defence White Paper

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Three years after the advent of ASADPO '76, a newer version was released as ASADPO '79. It was intended to fill the gaps in policy guidance, but it simply replaced its predecessor and was of little help to Air Force planners. It was overtly couched in terms of 'no identifiable threat' with the caveat of 'the need for insurance against uncertainty'²⁵, again, not valid policy for either force development or capability decisions. The Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (JCFAD) acknowledged the approach taken by successive governments as 'sound' but specifically highlighted the lack of precision guided munitions (PGMs or so called 'smart bombs') for the RAAF and noted that a 'high priority would need to be accorded to naval and air strike capabilities' for any strike force to have real deterrent value.²⁶ Clearly they had seen the Evans' CONOPS paper.

While ASADPO '79 was highly classified, Minister for Defence James Killen gave a speech in Parliament in March 1979 on 'Australia's new Defence program' where, among other issues, he announced a significant number of improvement projects across the portfolio. It drew upon the classified policy objectives and for the RAAF, these included upgrades to the P-3Bs, a reconnaissance capability for the F-111, and improved fuel storage at selected RAAF bases. Killen also foreshadowed a new tactical fighter project to replace the Mirage.²⁷ He made particular comment that the Government's 'core force' concept was still extant, the expectation being that a smaller, highly skilled workforce could quickly train up recruits if a threat emerged. This policy might have been adequate for the Army who could rapidly train infantry soldiers in a matter of weeks, but for the RAAF and the Navy, it was just not practical. As time went on and technology became more complex, even ten years warning was not sufficient to ensure full combat readiness.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 came as a shock as the Cold War was expected to remain 'cold'. This event suggested that Soviet expansion was on the rise. It triggered an urgent review of Australia's Western Alliance commitments and resulted in an unexpected budget increase of almost fifteen per cent for the RAAF over the previous year. It also led to the establishment in February 1981 of Operation *Gateway*, the forward deployment to Butterworth of No 92 Wing's P-3 Orions to monitor Soviet ships and submarines passing through the region. These *Gateway* patrols ended with cessation of the Cold War in 1989, whereupon Operation *Gateway* was refocused onto maintaining regional maritime security.

It was not until 1983 that the newly elected Hawke Labor Government undertook a more analytical policy review. The 1983 Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy (called Strat Basis '83) was crafted after the Soviet

invasion so, not surprisingly, it took a more 'superpower struggle' approach to the defence environment. Consideration of Asian and other regional issues were couched in terms of Cold War politics and the balance of global power. The British-Argentinian Falklands War experience in 1982 seems not to have made an impact, so expeditionary operations were virtually not considered. The 1983 Strategic Basis noted Soviet nuclear superiority over the US, at least in warhead numbers, and the emerging policy included tacit approval for a further build-up of the US joint facilities at Pine Gap, Nurrungar, Amberley and North-West Cape, and access to Australian airspace for USAF B-52 bombers on long-range training missions. Support for the US remained as strong as ever, with ANZUS commitments given priority.²⁸ The paper recognised Australia's treaty obligations and in the maritime environment noted: 'The US would probably look to Australia to assume control, under the Radford/Collins Agreement of allied shipping in nearby areas'.²⁹ Strat Basis '83 went further by suggesting that Indonesia would take ten years to become a serious threat, and that Australia would 'exploit [this] warning time to equip, supply and expand our defence force (and its infrastructure)'. The question no-one apparently asked was when do you start the countdown for year one?

Despite an embarrassing leak to the media of the entire Strat Basis '83 paper, Cabinet quietly 'endorsed' the document in late September 1983, a few hours after celebrating Australia's win in the 1983 America's Cup yacht race, and the document subsequently became the basis for further policy and force development.³⁰ The fallout from the leak was not just confined to the political arena. Strat Basis '83 was to be the last such document produced in that format, with future reviews of the strategic environment being conducted separately by the Departments of Prime Minister & Cabinet, Defence, and Foreign Affairs, each with input from the various intelligence organisations and overseas missions.

In summarising the changing strategic setting throughout this period, Hugh White, a former Deputy Secretary for Strategy in the Defence Department, stated:

Two separate operational concepts emerged in the 1970s. One was that we would respond to low level incursions onto Australia's territory by running around trying to round them up. This was the 'Kangaroo' series of exercises scenario. The other concept was deterrence. Right at the heart was the thought that the F-111s [and submarines] provided us the unique capacity to impose unacceptable levels of cost upon an enemy, all in the scenario of low-level incursions across the air and maritime approaches.³¹

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These concepts of defence self-reliance, defending the maritime approaches, and deterrence would soon emerge to dominate the defence debate.

The 1986 Dibb Review and the 1987 Defence White Paper

The year 1986 heralded the start of major changes to government policy regarding how the ADF was managed and developed. It would be remembered as the start of commercialisation and a redefining of Australia's strategic outlook. In February 1985, the Minister for Defence, Kim Beazley, commissioned Mr Paul Dibb, an academic and senior public servant of the Defence Department, to undertake a review of Australia's defence capabilities. It was the first major public review to be conducted since Vietnam and ushered in a new era in Defence planning. Dibb was not just to report on what he found, but 'to make judgements on the appropriate balances between equipment, personnel numbers, facilities and operating costs, between current readiness and long-term investment, and between the relative priority given to responding to various levels of possible threats'.³² This review had the potential to lead to large changes in force structure, beyond the control of the service chiefs.

The Dibb Review, as it became known, was presented to Parliament by Beazley on 3 June 1986.³³ It generated considerable debate.³⁴ Dibb was thorough in his coverage of the terms of reference and while the report began with the phrase: 'Australia is one of the most secure countries in the world', Dibb recognised that this would not always be the case.³⁵ Consequently, what was called 'low-level conflict' was seen as more credible and as such, a layered defence strategy within Australia's area of direct military interest was needed. It was a strategy of denial where the focus was clearly on what Dibb called 'the sea and air gap'. As far as force structure determinants went, Dibb recognised eight important layers which should receive attention (in order of importance):³⁶

- Intelligence and surveillance
- Strike and Interdiction
- Anti-submarine Warfare
- Surface Maritime Forces
- Mine Countermeasures
- Maritime Air Defence
- Continental Air Defence
- Ground Forces.



Mr Paul Dibb's capabilities review had a major impact on the RAAF's development

The inclusion at the end of Dibb's report of an azimuthal equidistant projection map of Australia's regional security interests with concentric 500 nautical mile distance rings emanating from Darwin like ripples in a pond also left the reader with the impression that we were back to 'Fortress Australia'—the further distant, the less the threat.

One immediate and unintended consequence of Dibb's report was the impact it had upon the US, who became fearful that Australia was becoming isolationist. Coincidentally, the Dibb report was tabled almost immediately after New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance led to a breakdown in the ANZUS alliance. The US had particular interest in their three joint intelligence bases in Australia and could not afford to have these threatened. It took a visit to the US by Beazley and a meeting with Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger to reassure the Americans that Australia was not becoming isolationist.³⁷

Dibb's report was hailed by some and derided by others. It became the source of much debate between the military, academia, Defence civilians and the media. Opposition Defence spokesman, Ian Sinclair, called the Dibb strategy, 'a modern Maginot Line'.³⁸ It caused the recently retired CDFS, Air Chief Marshal Sir Neville McNamara, to put pen to paper in critique, but unfortunately, his twenty-six-page rebuttal was never published.³⁹ McNamara argued that a strategy of 'denial' was too limiting and in terms of strike, 'there seems to be an underlying desire to restrict strike capability and keep it within certain bounds'. Furthermore, 'the emphasis is on maritime strike and interdiction because it is less offensive in character and likely to be subject to fewer constraints than attacks on the enemy's territory'.⁴⁰ While McNamara argued for greater flexibility in the use of air power, neither Dibb nor McNamara went so far as to raise the issue of power projection, nor the matter of deterrence as a reason why countries such as Australia acquire a strike force in the first place. The term 'expeditionary' became anathema and RAAF planners as well as Defence bureaucrats were forbidden to use the term; this despite Australia's long and successful history of such expeditionary operations.

Dibb's Report became a blueprint for the 1987 Defence White Paper. Its title, 'The Defence of Australia', forewarned of its contents being heavily biased towards a self-reliant defence force that would focus on defending continental Australia and its territories. Beazley had announced as much when Dibb's Report was tabled in Parliament.⁴¹ It clearly echoed Labor Party policy, so it came as no real surprise. Known as DOA87, the White Paper went further than Dibb in that it foresaw three levels of potential conflict for Australia: low-level; escalated low-level; and more substantial conflict.⁴² According to ANU academic Dr Stephan Frühling, DOA87 was 'the high watermark of the DOA strategic policy, as it provided the detailed conceptual framework and capability development priorities that its predecessor of 1976 had not addressed'.⁴³ The other subtle change was that the 'strategy of denial' had become 'defence in depth'. Clearly, northern Australia was the focal point of such conflict and as well as the establishment of RAAF Tindal as a major air defence base, the Army would progressively move forward under the Army Presence in the North (APIN) policy.

DOA87's release also came at a time when Australia was still grappling with New Zealand's effective withdrawal from ANZUS in 1986 over a disagreement with the Americans regarding nuclear (armed and/or powered) ship visits. It would mean that any regional contingency that involved the US might not include support from the New Zealand Defence Force.

Neither would information and intelligence be shared with New Zealand to any extent. However, the main question for RAAF planners was: given the RAAF's force structure, how would it fit into this new three levels of conflict paradigm? Another dilemma was how could the RAAF fully engage with one partner while isolating the other? Unfortunately for New Zealand, the larger partner won the debate.

Although the strategic analysis of the 1980s now clearly directed a focus on the defence of Australia, the RAAF CONOPS of 1977 could easily be adapted to suit. By the time of the release of Dibb's report, the CONOPS had been refined and was now based upon three inter-related missions: joint control of the air and sea approaches; counter force strikes against the enemy; and joint action to destroy any enemy that lands on Australian shores. Although this looked good on paper, the approach also had its limitations. To be successful, the RAAF had to avoid attrition, avoid personnel-intensive operations and implement a campaign to deny the enemy sanctuaries and bases from which an attack could be launched. It would be questionable if the first two could be managed and as to the third, whether the government would support such an approach. Fortunately, the question was never asked.⁴⁴

Into the 1990s

If the 1970s were the years of 'coming home', and the 1980s 'the years of introspection', the 1990s would be called the decade of 'going out'—out to Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, and various other UN deployments, and finally, East Timor.⁴⁵

Under DOA87, expeditionary operations were not to be countenanced, the very term excised from strategic planning documents and speeches given by politicians and senior military officers. Much emphasis was placed upon Australia's responsibilities regarding the US security commitment to the region, but by the late 1980s, few in Washington or in US Pacific Command had ever heard of Nixon's Guam Doctrine, let alone knew what it said. DOA87 did not predict the end of the Cold War, but it did foresee a changing regional dynamic—the days of the East-West balance of power were gone. It ushered in a series of new Defence reviews as planners grappled with the new world disorder, each of which would deeply affect the RAAF.⁴⁶

The end of the Cold War meant a huge change in Australia's strategic circumstances. Defence and Foreign Affairs policy staffs grappled with the implications and by the time the Defence Report 1988-89 had been tabled, DOA87 was still the government's position on defence priorities and force structure development. The letter of transmission appended to the Report, co-signed by the Secretary and CDF, noted the ongoing constrained

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economic climate and reported primarily on organisational changes that had been agreed previously.⁴⁷ It was not until late 1989 when Australia's Strategic Planning in the 1990s (ASP90) was endorsed by government that Defence had clearer direction for Australia's future defence development.⁴⁸

The release of ASP90 meant that force structure planners had to first and foremost think in terms of how capability could be used for the defence of the island continent, rather than continue with the equipment replacement mentality of the past. It was a first step to the development of a much tighter procurement process, where capability decisions had to satisfy a range of criteria, not just fill the equipment gap in a Service-perceived void. ASP90 also reprioritised the principal defence role, with intelligence collection and evaluation given priority. strategic strike was placed well down the order after surveillance, patrol and response, and air defence.⁴⁹

A Peacekeeping Policy

As well as reviewing the emerging strategic environment, by 1993 the Department of Defence was also considering the growing number of peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations to which it was expected to contribute. Western Sahara, a disintegrating Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Somalia had all recently involved the ADF to some extent and requests for Australia to provide forces to other trouble spots was expected. Provision of RAAF air transport support was thus placed high on the peacekeeping planning agenda. Consequently, on 4 November 1992, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, known as the COSC, endorsed a peacekeeping policy paper which placed peacekeeping in context and declared that peacekeeping was only a 'secondary activity' after DOA87 requirements had been satisfied.⁵⁰ After some changes, the paper received broad government agreement and was released to the public in June 1993.

The paper was only ten pages and espoused the benefits of assigning peacekeeping a higher profile as an ADF activity, but there was no case made to maintain units specifically for the peacekeeping role. It was Army centric in terms of what forces might be required but conceded 'a fixed wing SRT [short range transport] or MRT [medium range transport] air transport flight would be required'.⁵¹ Presumably, this would be provided by the RAAF, although commercially contracted air services were now possible. Now as official government policy, peacekeeping would influence ADF operational planning and deployments but not capability decisions. However, the paper's prediction that the 'average base of about 200 [personnel]' involved at any one time would be soon shown to be way short of the mark.⁵²

Although he signed off the document, Minister for Defence Robert Ray was not entirely happy with the thrust of the paper, so he referred the

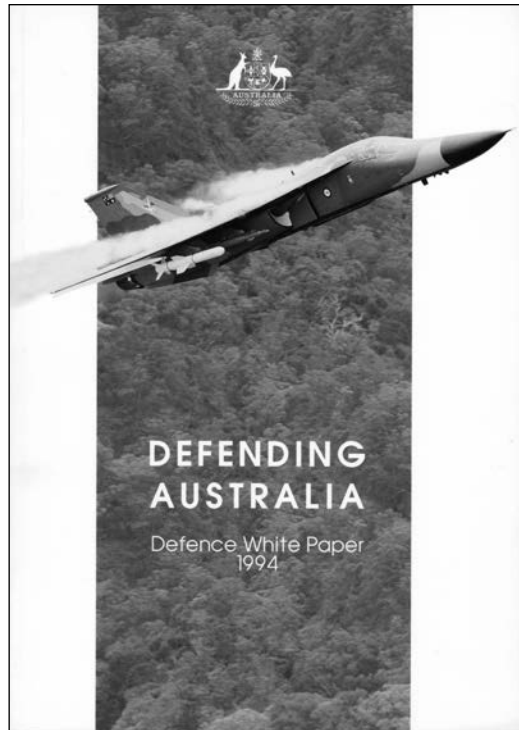
matter to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JCFADT) in July. Unfortunately, there was no RAAF submission to the Committee nor did any RAAF member appear before it—a distinct failing. The Committee’s report in December 1994 recognised that in the post-Cold War environment, the world had changed dramatically, and that Australia needed an integrated plan before peacekeeping missions were sent. Long-term strategic goals also had to be set regarding managing the eventual peace.⁵³ It offered little in terms of policy direction or capability development guidance, but the Committee agreed it was better than nothing.

Later reviews further reshaped the defence environment. Strategic Review 1993 (SR93) released in December that year was part of the new cycle of planning activities, prompted by the end of the Cold War and the emerging doctrine of how the Keating Labor Government saw Australia’s place in the world. The concept of defence in depth re-emerged, but this had few differences from the layered defence proposal proffered by Dibb, and the only ‘new’ idea was a regional or collective security community in South-East Asia being pushed by Minister for Foreign Affairs Gareth Evans, but this idea never got off the ground.⁵⁴

SR93 used the language of deterrence more forcefully yet still retained the previous priority of defence of Australia roles, with intelligence, surveillance, and maritime patrol and response being paramount. Air defence and strike were again afforded much lower priority and transport operations not mentioned at all.⁵⁵ Of all the Air Force’s force elements, the RAAF’s transport fleet had been the most effective and most often used but was simply taken for granted. Nevertheless, SR93 formed the basis of the third Defence White Paper, *Defending Australia 1994* (DA94) which maintained the defence self-reliance mantra together with no foreseeable threat for fifteen years taking the idea well into the future. Rather surprisingly considering its contents and the low priority placed upon offensive capabilities, the public released document had a photograph of an F-111C bomber emblazoned across the cover.

DA94 suggested that planning would now focus on ‘capability rather than threats’ and warning time now replaced levels of conflict. Major conflict was assessed as unlikely but ‘short-warning conflict’ could range from small raids to larger and protracted operations—a clear case of hedging one’s bets.⁵⁶ While geography was important, it was technological acumen and Australia’s national support base that would ensure Australia maintained a competitive edge.

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The 1994 Defence White Paper cover

Despite the rhetoric, little else changed in the order of force development priority. As far as the RAAF was concerned, DA94 offered nothing new. Priorities were set at intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, command and control (known as C²), key weapons and sensors, and electronic warfare. No new equipment would be forthcoming but upgrades to weapons and systems would be likely. However, as with past government white papers, there was no ten or fifteen-year budget allocation offered to support the force development guidance. Again, there were no guarantees.

The release of DA94 coincided with *Cooperating for Peace: The Global Agenda for the 1990s and Beyond*. Written by Foreign Minister Evans, it was launched at the forty-eighth United Nations General Assembly in September 1993. While not relating directly to Australia or the ADF in particular, it became defacto government policy regarding the type of peace operations the ADF would be expected to undertake in the 1990s, at least until the Howard Coalition Government came to office in 1996.⁵⁷ It was far more extensive than the ADF's *Peacekeeping Policy* and predicted that given global dynamics, it appeared peacekeeping operations would become

the new norm. The 'New World Order', promised by US President George H.W. Bush after Gulf War I, was already disintegrating and the UN was now firmly focussed on responding to global trouble spots.

The implications for the RAAF's third quarter century of these official and public policy documents were profound. They set budget and force structure priorities, and thus what the RAAF could and could not do. It meant that the RAAF had to structure for the defence of Australia and to defend the air-sea gap, not prepare force options that allowed for power projection or protection of Australia's interests further afield. This has been termed the 'on the beach looking out' policy with little ability to do anything but gaze to the horizon, symbolised by a cartoon of the time depicting a mouse somewhere on the coast of Northern Australia with its middle finger raised in the 'last great act of defiance'.



Apart from a series of humanitarian, peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions to Asia, Africa and to numerous Middle East trouble spots, this insular view of Australia's role in global affairs meant that when a serious war did happen in January 1991, the RAAF was not wanted—unable or unwilling to deploy even a modicum of offensive force. C-130 transports were all that could be offered, and these were limited in their intra-theatre contribution because of a lack of self-defence equipment. A B707 was placed on standby but spent the war comfortably in Cyprus. It would also mean that when East Timor again became a trouble spot in 1999, the ability of the RAAF to support this more substantial expeditionary operation once again would be a close-run thing.

Nevertheless, as the RAAF approached its seventy-fifth anniversary in 1996, its force structure had finally achieved some measure of balance, but many elements would still be immature or simply lacking. These had been recognised but had been stalled by various Defence committees or changing government priorities. At least the RAAF had finally issued its own indigenous air power doctrine and could act independently of 'great and powerful friends' if only in relatively minor or regional conflicts. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s the RAAF had become a more professional force; it had finally travelled the long journey from going solo to wings standard.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Dr Mark Lax is a former RAAF Air Commodore, educator and now, air historian. His 45 years of permanent and reserve service together with a Masters and PhD in military history has given him a unique insight into the RAAF and its achievements over the decades. At the time of publication, he is working as RAAF author with the AWM Official History Project team writing on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of his previous publications include *From Controversy to Cutting Edge: A History of the F-111 in Australian Service*; *Alamein to the Alps: 454 Squadron RAAF 1942-1945* and as editor, *Always Ready: A History of RAAF East Sale*. He has co-authored other books including *Wings Over Mesopotamia – Iraq 1914-1918* and *The Gestapo Hunters: 464 Squadron RAAF 1942-45*. He is currently writing a book on the RAAF in the Malayan Emergency for the RAAF's History and Heritage Branch.

As Australia withdrew from Vietnam in 1972, few in the Australian Defence Force, none the least those in the Royal Australian Air Force could foresee the immense change that would sweep across the Service. New and emerging international relationships, changing Australian social attitudes, and a growing sense of defence self-reliance would all impact how the RAAF contributed to the application of air power in the defence of the nation and in supporting Australia's wider national interests.

For the first time, *Taking the Lead* brings to the reader a comprehensive and authoritative study of how the RAAF matured over its third quarter century, how it met the challenges faced, and how it finally came of age, able to take the lead when asked. By 1996, plans were in place such that the RAAF was well on the way to becoming the world's first fifth generation air force, by making a remarkable transition.

This volume also dispels the myth that the RAAF did little in the latter part of the twentieth century but train. In fact, the RAAF was at the forefront of operations as wide afield as the Sub-Continent, the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia. Then there was aid to the civil community as well as aid to those nations seeking help in wider Asia-Pacific region. Clever force restructuring for expeditionary operations amid the stress of downsizing by almost a third, meant that future operations in the twenty-first century were to be a success.

Taking the Lead is not just about aircraft, bases and flying. It considers the strategic environment of the era, the factors that affected personnel and training, how the RAAF's force structure advanced and how the RAAF managed its successes and failures. For those seeking to learn more about their air force, then this book is essential reading. *Taking the Lead* covers this vital part of the RAAF's unfolding narrative, and perfectly illustrates how the RAAF remained true to its motto – *Per Ardua ad Astra* – Through Adversity to the Stars.



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