

## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force*

by RAAF History and Heritage Branch

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, NSW; 2021; 610 pp; ISBN 9781922488039 (hard cover);  
RRP \$43.75



*Aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force* was published by the Air Force's History and Heritage Branch, with input from 73 aviation and technological experts, to commemorate the centenary of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). It tells the story of the Royal Australian Air Force's first one hundred years describing the acquisition, operation, and service record of the multitude of aircraft types flown by the Royal Australian Air Force over that period.

Established in 2016, the History and Heritage Branch is part of the RAAF Headquarters. Its role is to collect, study, preserve and manage records, artefacts and estate from the Australian Flying Corps to today's Air Force.

Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld, endorses the book and invites the reader to embark on a journey through Air Force history. He notes that the evolution of air and space technology in a relatively short time has shaped both the nature of the battlespace and the skills demanded by those who sustain, control and fly the aircraft.

*Aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force* tells a story beyond the airframes. It is a history of force evolution; charting Australia's response to changing strategic circumstances through the harnessing of technology and the innovative skills of Air Force personnel.

It contains the service history of 154 aircraft types, from the flimsy wood and fabric of the D.H. 9a biplane donated to Australia by Great Britain as part of the *Imperial Gift* to form the Royal Australian Air Force in 1921 through to the modern, lethal, 5<sup>th</sup> generation, F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter and the MQ-4C Triton Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.

Aircraft are presented in Series Order using the A-number system. Over the century there have been three A-number series of registered aircraft types: Series 1 from 1921 to 1934; Series 2 from 1934 to 1961; and Series 3 from 1961 onwards. Each aircraft type is identified with the prefix A and a numeral. Use of the A-number system rather than by role – fighter, bomber or transport aircraft – provides the reader with a logical and historical perspective with an ordered presentation of the development and the increasing sophistication of aircraft types used by the Air Force.

Each aircraft type features a narrative that varies in length although most are three to four pages long, which are informative, interesting and easy to read. They address the means of production or acquisition of the aircraft type; its service life and operational employment; and where appropriate, retirement from service. Each tells its own story and will undoubtedly

hold the reader's interest. A table of technical data of description, power plants, dimensions, weight, armament and performance accompanies each narrative. There are some wonderful photographs of aircraft and often the personnel who maintained and flew them.

There are some interesting insights. For instance, during the 1920s when the Air Force was suffering high accident rates, a D.H.9a aircraft crashed on Flemington Racecourse during an aerial display. The crowd of onlookers jeered and laughed derisively prompting the clearly frustrated pilot to challenge any takers to a fight! A tribute to Service loyalty.

During World War II, Lancaster *Q for Queenie* was flown to Australia to participate in a war-bonds drive and to promote recruitment in the Air Force. It was famously flown under Sydney Harbour Bridge. The ill-fated Hawker jet aircraft, which was intended to replace the Royal Australian Air Force's Mustang and Vampire aircraft, crashed during an inadvertent supersonic dive, resulting in the F-86 Sabre becoming the eventual replacement.

The book has an excellent index, including a Quick Reference Guide by aircraft role, and the narratives are well cross-referenced between aircraft types. They provide easy access to much little-known information and as expected, the variety of aircraft that have been used by the Royal Australian Air Force is most impressive. The multitude of aircraft include those in the *Imperial Gift*; Australian designed and built aircraft; aircraft built under licence; aircraft impressed from the civilian sector and from foreign air forces during the Second World War; leased aircraft; towed target aircraft; and aircraft purchased from abroad by the Australian Government.

While the services and sacrifices of Air Force personnel are mentioned on occasion, the aircraft are the clear focus – evident from the index which lists only aircraft types.

The book has been published to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RAAF but it offers much more. It is an excellent research and reference source and has the presentation of a beautiful coffee table book.

I thoroughly recommend *Aircraft of the Royal Australian Air Force* to all who have a keen interest in the history of military aviation and the evolving capability of the RAAF. It will be of particular interest to those who have served in the Air Force, and will readily capture the interest of those who wish to gain an appreciation of the Royal Australian Air Force in its centenary year.

**Bob Treloar**