

BOOK REVIEW:

the *Classic: F/A-18A/B Hornet aircraft in Australian service*

by John Quaife

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The F/A-18A/B Hornet was introduced into Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) service in May 1985 to replace the French Mirage IIIO, a short-range interceptor. The Hornet was a tactical fighter aircraft, designed to fight and survive in the air combat arena, while with a simple cockpit switch change, it was a very capable ground attack aircraft. Australia's frontline fighter aircraft for over 35 years, it became known as the "Classic Hornet" with the arrival of the F/A-18F Super Hornet in 2010, a two-seat attack aircraft, and the EA-18G Growler, an electronic warfare variant of the Super Hornet.

In *the Classic*, John Quaife has meticulously covered the history of the aircraft and its development, its operations, the aircrew who flew these planes and the technical personnel who maintained them. Woven into the history is the story of those people who took the aircraft to war several times at the direction of our government.

John Quaife is a former Classic Hornet pilot with more than 2000-hours' experience flying fast jet aircraft. He was the Director of Combined Air Operations in the Middle East Theatre and served as Air Commander Australia before retirement. He is the author of *Viking Boys: Beaufighters, bravery and lost airmen*; and *Battle of the Atlantic: Royal Australian Air Force in Coastal Command 1939-1945*; soon to be joined by a companion title *ANZAC Strike Wing*. He is also a contributing author to the RAAF's Australian air campaign series.

For the Classic Hornet, it was a case of humble beginnings when 65 personnel were posted to the United States to accept delivery and ferry of the first two Hornets, with little support from the government at home. At the direction of the Chief of Air Staff, the ferry flight of two aircraft to Australia was non-stop from Naval Air Station Lemoor, California, to RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales. It was supported by a United States (U.S.) Air National Guard KC-10 tanker, organised on the "buddy" system between the Australian Air Force chief-of-staff and his American counterpart. It was a risky, but uneventful, venture.

An early decision to tie the configuration and operating systems of the Classic Hornet to that of the U.S. Navy was fundamental to the prolonged success of the aircraft in Australian service. It was subjected to the largest and most complex systems and weapons upgrade programme ever attempted, anywhere, achieved at a time when Defence was undergoing an aggressive downsizing of its uniformed workforce.

Operating an aircraft designed for carrier operations in a land-based environment resulted in an entirely different fatigue accrual spectrum. This required significant

support from Australia's Defence Science and Technology Organisation and an innovative approach to aircraft usage by the Air Force to enable the aircraft to reach its required life-of-type.

Following the terrorist strike on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001, RAAF Hornets were deployed to Diego Garcia to provide air defence cover for the U.S. base on the island.

The Hornet also would lead the way in two of the most significant applications of combat air power by Australian forces since the Vietnam War. The author describes the full spectrum of air combat operations flown by Australian F/A-18 pilots during the short, sharp campaign against Iraq's Saddam Hussein regime in 2003; and the tedium of delivering smart weapons on an airborne 'conveyor-belt' system established by the Coalition for more than three years (2014 – 2017) of strike operations against ISIS¹ in Iraq and Syria.

Associated with the normal airborne challenges faced by the pilots [demanding rules of engagement and the difficulties of operating in a foreign environment amongst a multitude of foreign aircraft operating in a cramped airspace], he captures the concerns, tension and excitement experienced by the aircrew in combat.

The reader is provided with an excellent description of the aircraft, its systems and its capabilities in an easy-to-follow narrative, aligning the reader with a cockpit perspective. As with the rest of the book, the explanations are straight forward, catering for those not familiar with the aircraft or its systems.

The author has provided an excellent, detailed history of the Classic Hornet, while capturing the human endeavour: the professionalism of the people who flew and supported the aircraft, their insights and their personal stories. The book is very well written with superb colour plates of the aircraft throughout. It has a good index system and a comprehensive set of endnotes. It provides a broad glossary of military terminology and lists of interviews conducted by the author. A listing of individual aircraft, their involvement in major operations and disposal is also included.

the Classic will stand the test of time as a hallmark publication of the RAAF Hornet. It will appeal to aviation enthusiasts and those with an interest in Air Force operational history and the employment of air power.

Bob Treloar

¹ISIS = Islamic State of Iraq and Syria