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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
AUSTRALIAN AIR OPERATIONS IN
KOREA**

by

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ABSTRACT

From June 1950 until July 1953, Australian air power was involved in the Korean War, primarily through the fighter/ground attack aircraft of No 77 Squadron. Although the RAAF's commitment was relatively small, it produced important operational, strategic and political benefits.

Operationally, the RAAF relearned the lessons from World War II of the need to match aircraft capabilities to their specific roles and the value of versatility and flexibility. The commitment also provided a core of combat-experienced officers who would lead the Air Force for the next 30 years.

Before the fighting in Korea, Australian defence strategy and force structure planning was based essentially on the belief that any future conflict was likely to be global. The air involvement in Korea clearly demonstrated that need not be the case, and that Australia needed to look to its own immediate defence needs.

Finally, the RAAF's performance in Korea made an important contribution to the Government's political objective of building strong security ties with the United States. The high regard with which No 77 Squadron was held in Washington was a significant factor in the conclusion of the ANZUS Treaty

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUSTRALIAN AIR OPERATIONS IN KOREA

INTRODUCTION

On 25 June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea. Almost immediately Australia committed Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) fighter aircraft, based in Japan, to the support of South Korean forces. For the next three years Australian aircraft were to fight an air war in a tactical environment rather than in the collective, strategic role for which it had been planned and designed. There is therefore a tendency to dismiss the involvement of the RAAF in the Korean War as being of minor operational importance. That the Korean war is often labelled the “Forgotten War” also suggests that it is considered of little importance from a political point of view. However the commitment of the fighter squadron heralded the beginning of a new era of thinking, by the Government and the RAAF, in the application of Australian air power.

The genesis of Australian involvement in Korea can be found in the closing years of World War Two. In August 1945 two atomic explosions over Japan signalled the end of the Second World War. On 2 September the Japanese surrender was signed on the battleship USS Missouri. Almost immediately the allied armed forces began the demobilisation of their personnel and weapons. Australia, with many of its service personnel overseas, was also quick to reduce its commitments in men and machines to foreign theatres. However, with some acrimony directed at its former enemy, Australia retained a number of military personnel in occupied Japan. Their function was twofold. They would help police this devastated nation while also ensuring Australia was able to influence the shape of the Japan Peace Treaty. Australia was not sympathetic to a rearmed Japan.

The ability of Japan to penetrate so far into South East Asia and overcome the British naval base at Singapore had created justifiable fright in Australia for the defence of

the nation had relied on the continued integrity of the base. Great Britain had assured Australia that, in times of emergency, elements of the Royal Navy would be despatched to Singapore. In spite of these assurances Japan, in a few short months, had overrun Singapore and dealt a significant blow to the US Navy at Pearl Harbor. The two ships sent by Great Britain to the Far East, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, had been sunk off the east coast of peninsula Malaysia. These Japanese achievements caused considerable alarm in Australia. That Australia found itself with so little protection, in spite of imperial promises that such a situation would never arise, helped to shape Australia's strategic thinking in the immediate post-war period. In future Australia would do what it could to prevent an enemy striking so far south and posing a threat to the mainland.

The means by which an enemy might be so prevented had been realised through the significant development of air power in World War Two. By 1945 strategic bombers had proved capable of carrying large bomb loads over vast distances. Amongst other achievements aircraft had proved effective in interdicting merchant and naval shipping across the vast expanses of the Pacific and the North Atlantic oceans. For Australia, so geographically isolated, such airborne capabilities offered particular attractions. An enemy might be prevented from reaching Australia if Australia struck first from the safety of the continent. Unlike ground forces, aircraft were capable of quick response and were not manpower intensive. They promised returns in excess of the relatively minimal input which was required to maintain and fly them. Long range aircraft therefore came to play a significant role in Australia's post-war strategic thinking and planning.

Australia's post-war strategic thinking continued to advocate collective security and, in spite of the fall of Singapore in February 1942, Australia sought a continuation of imperial defence with Great Britain after 1945 which came to be expressed in the ANZAM¹ agreement. Australia was also seeking to align itself with the United States, a search motivated in part by the United States military capabilities demonstrated in the Pacific war, and in part by the conviction that in

future the United States would be more committed to the region than Great Britain.

Australia's collective security planning in this period was made in the light of the cold war. As such it had a global perspective and tended to reflect the priorities of the United Kingdom, particularly those priorities placed on the Middle East. The United Kingdom assessed that the Soviet Union posed a potential destabilising influence in this area of oil resources and inter-dominion trade routes and Australia's force structure was designed to meet these imperial perceptions. Naval units would continue to protect Commonwealth sea lines of communication, the Army would contribute land units to the Middle East and aircraft would be sent to contribute to RAF operations.

Accordingly the RAAF, between 1945 and 1950, was to be equipped with suitable long range bombers and fighters intended to fulfil the worldwide demands which collective security placed on Australia. The principal bomber of these years was the *Lincoln*, later replaced by the British *Canberra*. Fighter escort was provided by the *Mustang* although design effort had been dedicated to a project aimed at providing Australia with a locally produced, superior, long-range fighter. The intended aircraft was known as the CA.23.

This paper seeks to show two ideas. First, to demonstrate the political utility which air power afforded Australia at a time when it was attempting to secure a

¹ Australia, New Zealand, and Malaya (i.e. The Malayan States).

meaningful regional post-war presence and to formally align itself with the United States. Second, to show how this involvement of Australian air power influenced the operational doctrine of the RAAF. In these it will show this period of Australian air power to be of more significance than has previously been assumed.

Chapter 1 of the paper examines the pre-Korean War RAAF, in particular its doctrine and plans, and how the RAAF was to fit into the national defence strategy.

This strategy placed little emphasis on the tactical use of air power. Chapter 2 goes on to address why and how the RAAF came to be committed to a tactical theatre in Korea. Even though being involved in a tactical theatre such as the Korean War was not anticipated, Australia learned some significant lessons. They included the political utility of air power and the obvious need to plan for a tactical air environment. Perhaps one of the most pertinent lessons was the need to have the correct aircraft for the types of operations to be flown. In Chapter 3 the background to the purchase of the new Meteor jet aircraft is discussed while the experience gained in flying that aircraft, and the catalyst which this proved to be in the development of Australian air power, is also examined.

THE PRE-KOREAN WAR RAAF

Prior to World War Two Australia had been content to place the greater part of its foreign and defence responsibilities upon the British Empire. The Singapore strategy would keep any potential aggressor from Australia's shores through the power of the Royal Navy. Despite some misgivings about this plan, reassurances from Great Britain, combined with a simple faith in Empire, meant the fall of Singapore was not simply a surprise but a shock.

The structure of the RAAF in 1939 reflected the defence thinking of forward defence as grounded in the Singapore strategy and the faith which Australia had placed in it. As has been noted,

By June 1940, most of the fighting ships of the Royal Australian Navy were serving outside Australian waters. At the same time the small permanent Royal Australian Air Force was quickly becoming a training organisation mainly committed to providing aircrew for the Royal Air Force.²

In the light of the Singapore strategy, and the careful negotiations necessary to gain the scarce funding for the Air Force, Richard Williams, as Chief of the Air Staff, advocated the RAAF be structured to deal only with raids. Though not the only contributory factor, by 1941 Australia was woefully short of suitable defensive and offensive air cover. McCarthy argues

In 1939 it would have been difficult to argue that the RAAF possessed even the appearance of an effective fighting service. Its long planned strength of eighteen first-line squadrons had not been

² McCarthy, John, *A Last Call Of Empire: Australian Aircrew, Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme 1939-45*, AWM, 1988, p. 2.

reached and the operational squadrons it did have were equipped with obsolete aircraft.³

However the Second World War provided the stimulus necessary for the development of the RAAF. It also gave Australia an insight into the vital necessity of having a flexible and offensive means of combating an enemy before it reached Australia's shores. John Latham, Ambassador to Japan, wrote from Tokyo in August 1941 to the Prime Minister, stating

We have to shock ourselves and our people into realising what air power means as an element in attack overcoming all resistance, and also what it may be made as the first and most important element in defending a continent which is also an island.⁴

Clearly impressed by the nature of the blitzkrieg war waged in Europe, Latham went on to recommend how Australia might defeat this sort of onslaught. Warning against fighting pedestrian wars in an age of tanks and aircraft, he recommended Australia increase and maintain an air force capable of long distant operations based from the "northern parts of Australia". The difficulty for the defence planners in Australia, 1941, was the critical lack of suitable modern aircraft with which to equip a force such as Latham envisaged. This debilitating lack of modern aircraft was to influence post-war air defence thinking, as the government decided Australia should design and build its own front line aircraft.

By 1945 the stimulus and shock, deemed necessary to equip Australia with an efficient and capable air force had resulted in an unprecedented air force expansion. It has been noted that

³ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴ AA A461/2 A337/1/11 Pt2 22 August 1941.

With 53 operational squadrons it might be argued that Australia possessed the fourth largest air force in the world. Its 3187 front line aircraft consisted of 1100 fighters, 439 strike aircraft and 256 heavy bombers.⁵

It seemed that, by 1945, Australia had learned the value air power gave an isolated continent. The lesson, that an enemy, even at great distances from one's own shores, could apparently be defeated by air power, seemed clear enough.

However, during the years 1945 to 1950 the RAAF did not gain the ascendancy which it might have assumed was its place after 1945. By 1946, following demobilisation, the RAAF was equipped and manned, not to meet the defence needs of Australia within Far and South East Asia, but to meet the needs of British defence planning. Moreover, there were assumptions that the RAAF would retain doctrinal, organisational and equipment commonality with the Royal Air Force (RAF),⁶ with a view of simply dovetailing into Britain's force structure in time of global war.⁷ The Joint Planning Committee, in its appreciation of the strategic situation of Australia, dated 25 January 1946, expressed the opinion that the role of the armed forces in the next war would be the fulfilment of Australia's obligations in a worldwide strategic plan.⁸ Post war thinking envisaged future wars "long drawn out struggles in which all of the resources of the nations involved would be used."⁹ To best endure such a struggle the Air Staff adopted the concept of a mobile task force ready to move for strategic purposes on the grounds "that it is necessary to maintain a highly

⁵ McCarthy, John, *Defence in Transition: Australian Defence and the Role of Air Power 1945–1954*, Defence Paper Number 2, Australian Defence Studies Centre, University College, Canberra, March 1991, p. 1.

⁶ McCarthy, John, *A Last Call Of Empire*, AWM, 1988, p. 120.

⁷ AA A4940/1 C290 RAAF *Purchase and Manufacture of Sabre Fighters 1950*.⁸ *Post War RAAF (Plan C)*, 1946, AWM 51 164.

⁹ A14 Jones, Foreword to *Post War RAAF (Plan 0)*, AWM 51, 164A.

trained and up to date permanent air force able to operate in defence of our vital interests at short notice.”¹⁰

The decline in the strength of the RAAF, vis-a-vis the other services, was confirmed by 1947 when the Minister for Defence, Mr John Dedman, announced his Defence Policy Plan for the period 1947–1952. The Navy continued to receive the greater annual percentage of the defence vote (29.5%) while the Army and Air Force each received about 24.5%.¹¹ The reduced emphasis on both Army and Air Force was partly an attempt to contain defence spending. Nonetheless Dedman spelt out the priority which was to be given to the RAAF. It is worth noting that meeting the needs of local requirements was placed last.

The role of the post-war Air Force harmonises with that of the Navy and Army. From its contemplated and potential strength it will assist Australia in fulfilling its obligations under the United Nations Charter, including regional arrangements in the Pacific. It will enable participation in arrangements for co-operation in British Commonwealth defence. It will provide a basis for expansion in war, and will furnish the air contribution to the requirements for the local defence of Australia.¹²

¹⁰ Post War RAAF(Plan C), 1946 AWM 51, 164.

¹¹ McCarthy, John, *Defence in Transition*, ADFA, March 1991, p. 2.

¹² CPD 4 June 1947 p. 3341.

By 1948 collective co-operation was expressed in the ANZAM arrangements which began as a joint planning forum.¹³ However Australia was looking for a broader base in which to ground its security. Reflecting pre-war Australian Labor party reliance on the League of Nations¹⁴ Dedman's anticipation of UN auspices was voiced in the February 1948 Review of Defence Policy. This review concluded with comments on Australia's security and advocated:

- (i) all possible support to the UN to make it an effective body for the maintenance of peace...
- (ii) the imperative need for the development of co-operation in British Commonwealth defence and assistance to Britain to enable her to maintain her position at the heart of the British Commonwealth,
- (iii) the equally great importance of developing co-operation with the United States in every way possible.¹⁵

The priority which Australia placed on supporting the United Nations was echoed in the primary role identified for the RAAF—that of assistance to the United Nations.¹⁶ It was to do this by being equipped with long range aircraft which could be rapidly deployed out of Australia or which could range vast distances from the continent. The ANZAM agreement also accommodated the idea of deploying to forward bases to defeat an enemy in Australia's approaches. The RAAF would be able to deploy rapidly to Malaya to not only protect the peninsula but those forces of Great Britain stationed there. By deploying to Malaya RAAF aircraft would be able to contribute to the stability of the region, thereby freeing British forces to deploy to the Middle East to counter any Soviet advances should they occur.

¹³ Millar, T.B., *Australians in Peace and War*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1978, p. 238. ¹⁴ McCarthy, John, *Defence in Transition*, ADFA, March 1991, p. 3.

¹⁵ AA A5954/1 852/3 *Review of Defence Policy*, February 1948.

The perceived need for the RAAF to operate at long ranges from the continent is reflected in an Air Staff requirement of August 1948 which called for the construction of a twin seat, all weather, attack aircraft of Australian design. Australia was concerned that, in a future war, the supply of suitable air defence aircraft would not be forthcoming from even the most sympathetic of allies. It was therefore in Australia's interests to design and produce aircraft from local sources to meet air defence needs. Prompted too by a desire to retain design and manufacturing expertise in the local aircraft industry the CA.23, as the aircraft came to be designated, was to be capable of fulfilling the following roles:

- (a) protection of friendly striking forces at long range,
- (b) attack of enemy surface targets at long range,
- (c) as a secondary role, the interception of enemy air striking forces under all weather conditions,
- (d) a version of the aircraft will be required to carry out tactical reconnaissance.¹⁷

These specifications clearly indicate the perceived need for protection of long range bombing and for the ability to interdict enemy sea lines of communication. The lessons of 1942 appear to have been well heeded. Interestingly, the primary requirement, as noted here, was amended from that of "Protection of Allied Air Striking forces at long range."¹⁸

¹⁶ *ibid*, para 9.

¹⁷ Air Staff Requirement OR/AIR.7 in AA A705/1 9/1/1891.

¹⁸ Technical Specifications for CA23. 8/2/49 1.03 in AA A705/2 9/3/143 Pt 1.

That “Allied” was omitted is perhaps a reflection on a growing awareness of independent operations. It certainly would fit more closely with the rationale for the design of this aircraft in the first place. The post-war theme of strategic operations for the RAAF was again voiced in the 1949 Strategic Review which stated Australia’s war aims must be to “ensure the abandonment by Russia of further military and ideological aggression” and “to create conditions conducive to world peace.”¹⁹ These aims were to be achieved foremost by the following:

(a) To deliver the strategic air offensive from the outbreak of the war;

(b) To hold the air bases and sea areas essential for our air offensive.

These are the United Kingdom the Middle East, Japan.²⁰

While voiced in the context of a global war it is worth remembering that initial allied concern about the invasion of Korea was that it not be a catalyst for another global conflict. While the RAAF was in Japan as part of the peace settlement arrangements the commitment of the squadron would fulfil the desire to secure Japanese bases essential to deter any global escalation. However it also clearly underscored Australia’s strategic thinking—defence was based on strategic rather than regional or tactical perceptions. Global campaigns were to be conducted by strategic air power—if not by Australian aircraft then by those of Australia’s allies.

This was spelt out on the occasion of the visit of General Stratemeyer, US Commander, Far Eastern Air Forces (FEAF), to Australia in January 1950. He noted that ever since 1945:

¹⁹ AA A1209/23 *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence, Policy* para 1.

²⁰ AA A1209/23 para 1.

Australia's accepted role within the Commonwealth [has been] as a supply base and a concentration base, Australia would also be used as a super long range bomber base [with] strategic aerodromes, capable of carrying the world's heaviest bombers...being constructed at Darwin, Coffs Harbour and Narromine.²¹

Australia was in fact merely echoing other Western strategic thinking. In the light of the 1939–45 war, but especially the rapid post-1945 aerospace developments, little thought was given to the notion that a future war might be limited by geography or politics. Any future war would be global. The best means to conduct a global war would be through the extensive use of strategic air power.

By 1950 defence planning was being influenced by the newly emergent threat from Communist China. The Council of Defence resolved, 21 June 1950:

- (i) To join with other Commonwealth countries, the United States and the countries of Western Europe in organising essential deterrent forces, in building up effective defences and in working out the necessary plans, preferably on a regional basis, in accordance with Article 52 of the United Nations Charter;
- (ii) To resist the spread of communism by all means short of war.²²

However Australia did not possess its own means of countering the spread of regional communism, particularly that inspired by Communist China. Australia could only resist the communist threat by working closely with the United States. The difficulty, for Australia was that America had been reluctant to become involved in Southeast Asia or in the Pacific after 1945.

²¹ *Sunday Herald*, 22 January 1950.

²² AA A5954/1 1626/1 Council of Defence Agendum 3/1950.

Nonetheless there was an awareness that the United States would come to play a more active role in the region. As early as 1948 the Ministers on the Council of Defence had adamantly declared:

The US is the predominant power in the Pacific, and it is essential for effective cooperation that we should know our role in relation to American plans. Talks with the US will probably have to be developed initially on a purely service level and probably be of a predominantly naval nature. The important thing is to get them started and gain the fullest confidence of the Americans.²³

An alliance with the United States would be advantageous to Australia in underwriting its security. However the usefulness of such an alliance was not something which dawned on Australia with the emergence of the communist threat. In 1946 Dr. H.V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs, was involved in negotiations with the United States over the sovereignty of Western Samoa and the Admiralty Islands. The American proposals did not wholly meet with Australian approval,

...but Evatt kept pondering them in the hope of a wider bargain, especially the proposed regional defence agreement which he kept pushing at the Americans and which they kept politely ignoring or rejecting.²⁴

Evatt had hoped, in the years 1945–49, that Australia might have been able to enter into a military agreement with America, specifically, a Pacific security arrangement.

²³ AA A5954/1 852/3 *Review of Defence Policy 1948*.

²⁴ Millar, T.B., *Op.Cit.*, p. 200.

Evatt, along with his party, was voted out of office in the December 1949 election. However the idea of a Pacific pact was also pursued by the Liberal Party. The new Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender was, a month after the election, promoting "...the idea of Commonwealth economic and technical co-operation (what became the 'Colombo Plan')" at the Colombo meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers. It was hoped that the plans might attract US participation but at the conference both Asian members and the US resisted a New Zealand proposal for a Commonwealth-US security pact in the Pacific. But as Millar concludes:

Far from being put off by either this or the American resistance, Spender began to devote his considerable energies towards bringing a pact into being.²⁵

Spender's vision was for a bilateral pact which would provide for Australia's future security, but also "influence policies and events in the region."²⁶ Spender persisted in his attempts to gain a Pacific pact, eventually using the Japanese Peace Treaty as a lever to gain it. Spender, worried about the "soft" Treaty which the Americans were to grant Japan, refused during the Treaty talks in February 1951 "...at one stage to discuss the Peace Treaty further until he knew the United States position on a Pacific security pact."²⁷ Eventually a Japanese Peace Treaty, inclusive Japan's right to rearm, and a security treaty—ANZUS²⁸—were signed in September 1951.

Perhaps most significantly during this period of Evatt's and Spender's negotiations for the Pacific pact, was the perception that "the American view of the world became an important—sometimes the most important factor in Australian foreign policy... It was a factor in the Australian decision to send

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 205.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁸ Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Agreement.

forces to Korea...”²⁹ It is in this context that the contribution of 77 Squadron to operations in Korea became politically significant. The squadron was able to provide Australia a means of demonstrating its commitment and resolve as an United States ally. It was able to do this by having operational RAAF units in Japan when North Korea invaded the South which were able to respond rapidly and effectively to the request for air support of the beleaguered South Korean forces.

²⁹ Millar, T.B., *Op.Cit.*, p. 209.

THE KOREAN WAR AND AUSTRALIAN AIR POWER: OPENING PHASE

The Political Dimensions

77 Squadron was to play a vital political role in the first four months of the Korean War. This was indicated through the peace time deployment of the squadron to Korea and through the Australian response to the US request for assistance in June 1950.

In order to help secure a voice in the Japan Peace treaty, Australia had committed substantial forces from each of its three services to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force of Japan (BCOF) and their role was far reaching, as

....responsibilities of the force included broad supervision of Japanese execution of allied directives, demilitarisation, decommissioning of Japanese military installations and disposal of armaments, repatriation and demobilisation of Japanese forces, protection of allied installations, supervision of elections, and control of smuggling and illegal immigration, especially from Korea.³⁰

Australia's contribution to BCOF included an army brigade group, three fighter squadrons and two warships³¹ and by February 1946 11,500 personnel had been sent to Japan. Other contingents came from the United Kingdom, New Zealand and India, to bring the total BCOF strength to 37,000. BCOF was commanded by three Australians; firstly by Lieutenant General J. Northcott, then by

³⁰ O'Neill, Robert, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, Volume 2, AWM, Canberra, 1985, p. 4. ³¹ *Op.Cit.*, p. 32.

Lieutenant General H.C.H Robertson and finally by Lieutenant General W. Bridgeford. On operational matters the Commander BCOF reported to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Tokyo, General MacArthur, and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia (JCOSA). The latter were primarily responsible for policy and administration.³²

By 1947 the strength of BCOF began to decline. The effectiveness of BCOF, indeed of the whole allied peace effort, helped to rapidly settle conditions in Japan and this, together with manpower difficulties at home meant New Zealand and Great Britain began to reduce the size of their contingents.³³ India withdrew completely following its declaration of Independence in August 1947. By the end of 1948 both New Zealand and Great Britain had withdrawn all their personnel “leaving the British Commonwealth Occupation Force composed entirely of Australians.”³⁴

In spite of Australia’s desire to influence the outcome of the Japanese Peace Treaty major reductions in the size of the force were ordered to take place throughout 1948–49. The army component was reduced from a brigade to a battalion, the RAAF returned two of its fighter squadrons to Australia³⁵ while the RAN was to retain only one vessel plus its shore establishment, HMAS *Commonwealth*.

77 Squadron was the sole remaining air element in BCOF. It was formed in 1942 at Pearce, Western Australia, when General George Brett, the American Air Commander in Australia, handed over 75 Kittyhawks to the RAAF. With these aircraft the RAAF formed Nos 75, 76 and 77 Squadrons. 77 Squadron first fought over Darwin and later, in 1943 at Milne Bay. The departure for Milne Bay was the last time the Squadron was to be in Australia until after the

³² Background Notes to AWM, *Index File 114*.

³³ O'Neill, Robert, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, Volume 1, AWM, Canberra, 1981, p. 32. ³⁴ *loc.cit.*

³⁵ No.s 76 and 82 SQNs.

end of the Korean War. By the end of 1945, still equipped with the Kittyhawk, it was stationed at Labuan, Borneo. After the war the squadron was equipped with P-51D Mustangs, arguably the best propeller driven fighter of the day, and sent to Japan where it was based at Iwakuni.

The Mustang was originally designed to meet a World War Two requirement for fighter aircraft capable of escorting allied bombers on operations over Germany. It served in this role over Europe and also over the Pacific, escorting B-29 bombers on the attacks against Japan. An American aircraft, its development had been prompted by British interest, contracts and operational experience.³⁶ It more than met the requirements for long range, the D Model having a maximum radius of 1040 miles. It also proved to be a highly manoeuvrable aircraft, well able to contend with the German Bf109 and Fw190 fighters which attempted to intercept allied bomber forces. By mid 1944 the Luftwaffe, with mounting aircraft losses which German industry was unable to replace, posed a reduced threat to the bombers and the Mustang was increasingly diverted to ground attack, firing 5" rockets. It was in this role that the Mustang was to be principally employed in Korea.

Even though it was the sole remaining air unit in BCOF, 77 Squadron was perceived by some to be the lynch pin of that force. That it could play such a crucial role was closely tied to the goodwill which Australia was hoping to engender in the United States by the mere presence of military units in Japan. It was in that context that 77 Squadron's presence proved valuable to the Australian government.

Australia's desire for that goodwill was perhaps best highlighted by an awkward situation in which BCOF found itself in 1948. The Americans, uneasy about the deteriorating situation on mainland China, and the increased tension

³⁶ Anderton, D.A., *History of the United States Air Force*, Hamlyn-Aerospace, London, 1981, p. 46.

vis-a-vis the USSR, had armed those of its aircraft stationed in Japan. However Australian forces were in Japan on occupational duties only and were not there to contribute to the American order of battle in an East-West conflict. General Robertson hurriedly obtained assurances that the orders pertaining to the arming of the aircraft did not apply to British occupation forces. The Chiefs of Staff Committee reiterated that “in the case of the Air Force components they should be employed in defensive operations in support of other BCOF components only within the BCOF area.”³⁷ But there was the rub, for as the Chiefs of Staff Committee pointed out, “we must be prepared for an inevitable loss of American goodwill when their commanders realise that our armed forces and national policy would not necessarily be behind them in whatever developments occurred.”³⁸ At a time when Australia sought closer security ties with America it was vital this loss not occur. The presence of the air unit ensured that it did not.

The potential lack of co-operation by BCOF was taken seriously by the Americans. SCAP was of the opinion that, should BCOF be reluctant or unable to contribute to allied forces in an attack on Japan by the USSR, the following options were open:

1. Unrestricted use of British Commonwealth Air (BCAIR) and Naval units from the outset.
2. Use of BCOF airfields.
3. To ground or remove BCAIR³⁹ so as not to interfere with operations. If removed they were to be placed on outlying Pacific Islands.
4. Take Commonwealth aircraft for own use.⁴⁰

³⁷ AA A5954/1 1637/1 Meeting, 29 June 1948.

³⁸ AA A5954/1 1637/ Departmental dispatch 103/1948 from Australian Mission in Japan. ³⁹ British Commonwealth Air Group.

These options made it quite clear that the only allies of interest to the US were those

who were prepared to fight. However the pressure was more significant than that applied by SCAP for the perception within the Commonwealth force was that

...without our small air force which is our only effective weapon the rest of the BCOF becomes a liability and should be withdrawn.⁴¹

This perception of liability was underscored by SCAP's thought to banish BCOF to the Pacific where it would not impede war operations, should it not be prepared to fight.

However the issue was addressed by AM Jones, the then Chief of Air Staff, in a report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee.⁴² Jones argued that if Australia was not prepared to fight it should not be in Japan. If Australia were to remain then its assets should be completely integrated into the United States Air Defence System for Japan, for, without that protection Commonwealth aircraft would be destroyed on the ground in the opening phases of an USSR attack. Rather, as Jones argued,

In the event of an attack [Australian aircraft should act] under the direction of the Air Commander, to seek to destroy the enemy forces before they reach their targets. This may require operations over several hundreds of miles of air space and could not be possibly restricted to the BCOF area.⁴³

⁴⁰ From Message, BRICOSAT to Army, Melbourne, 22 July 1948.

⁴¹ Signal Z.7077.

⁴² AA A5954 1637/1 Agendum Number 5/1948, 13 August 1948.

⁴³ AA A5954 1637/1 Agendum Number 5/1948.

The response to Jones' argument was a Chiefs of Staff recommendation that:

the government consider any attack on Japan as an attack on our forces and that we would, in that instance, act in full cooperation with American Forces from the outset...⁴⁴

The Chiefs of Staff also argued that national prestige was the basic reason for leaving the small [air] force in Japan...and that if it were destroyed the whole BCOF be withdrawn.⁴⁵ The Secretary disagreed and felt rather that the complete withdrawal of the RAAF component would mean "the loss of the Government's inalienable right to judge the circumstances and take the decision whether it goes to war or not."⁴⁶

The magnitude of this comment cannot be over-emphasised for Australia's government was now actively seeking to make its own foreign affairs and defence decisions. In 1939 Mr Menzies took upon himself his "melancholy duty" and directed Australia to war. It was a commitment based more on filial ties rather than sound strategic reasoning and Australia was determined that such a situation would not be repeated. Accordingly, handwritten at the bottom of the minute cited above, was the following annotation by Dedman:

Have discussed with Prime Minister who agrees that C-in-C BCOF might be advised that for purposes of planning and coordination with S.C.A.P. it might be assumed that in the event of an attack on Japan BCOF will act in full cooperation with American Forces. Signed
13/10/48

⁴⁴ AA A5954 1637/1 Agendum Number 5/1948.

⁴⁵ AA A5954/1 1637/1 Minute from the Secretary to Prime Minister 8 September 1948. ⁴⁶ *loc.cit.*

This annotation later became, almost verbatim, the directive to the Chiefs of Staff.

That such a perception of 77 Squadron's contribution to BCOF existed meant that Mr Menzies, in later electing to go to war, simply had two options; he could recall the squadron or commit it to war operations. However, to recall 77 Squadron would convey the wrong message to the United Nations, the Commonwealth and to the United States of the seriousness of Australia's claims to be involved in regional security discussions or even in foreign affairs generally. It would have flown in the face of all that Australia had been working towards in post-war strategic planning. In reality he had no option and readily contributed 77 Squadron to the conflict.

It is seen by some that the whole BCOF contribution hinged on the deployment of 77 Squadron. Without this unit not only Australia's initial contribution but that of the Commonwealth would have been placed in jeopardy. The significance of the contribution was primarily political. 77 Squadron was essential to the structure of BCOF, in underscoring Australia's serious intentions about global security, and in demonstrating to the US Australia's resolve to be a faithful ally in times of war as well as in times of peace.

On the 25 June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea with "the source of [the] initiative [appearing] to lie on the communist side with one or more of China, the Soviet Union or North Korea responsible."⁴⁷ In Australia first news of the offensive came via the Tokyo embassy on the 26 June (local date) although the Embassy was unsure as to whether this was a full scale invasion or not.⁴⁸ On the same day the UN Security Council called for the withdrawal of North Korean forces, followed by a US resolution calling for a cease-fire.

⁴⁷ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 16.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 45–6.

K.C.O. Shann, Leader of the Australian Mission to the United Nations in New York, felt that “no result was expected from the cease-fire appeal and that further action [would] also involve us directly because of our relationship with the United States and our place in Asia.”⁴⁹ Spender voiced concern that democratic nations needed to demonstrate firm resolve in facing up to communist imperialism. He noted, in terms which later came to be labelled the “domino theory”,

It is proper that the Australian people should understand that, if southern Korea falls under the dominion of Communist imperialism, the strategic picture of Asia as it affects Japan and the whole of the area of the North-West Pacific will undergo a radical change and will increase the dangers of the whole of South and South-East Asia.⁵⁰

Shann’s prediction proved correct and on the 27 June, the US sought from Australia, with its small contingent in Japan, some “clear indication...of the support which it would likely be able to provide for Korea.”⁵¹ It is useful to remember that, while the US had emerged from the Second World War as a military and economic giant, it was still reluctant to assume strategic responsibilities which could be interpreted as colonial in nature. Accordingly, the US was keen to have 77 Squadron involved in the conflict as “it would make the backing of the United Nations instructions more international.”⁵²

Although declining to give any comment until Britain had been consulted, on the 27 June Britain placed those of its ships in Japanese waters at the disposal of General MacArthur. Clearly the situation was serious—Australia “gave similar approval on the morning of the 28 June with respect to the two

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ *op.cit.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵² Odgers, G., *Across the Parallel*, William Heinemann Ltd, Melbourne, 1952, p. 23.

Australian ships in Far Eastern waters, HMA Ships *Shoalhaven* and *Bataan*.”⁵³

However Australia still hesitated in making any full commitment until both the UK and the US had been consulted. Accordingly Menzies visited London and Washington. Nonetheless the pressure of the UK commitment, along with the US desire to have Australia's air elements committed, led to Spender offering Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, "the use of a fighter squadron of Mustangs in Japan..."⁵⁴

General MacArthur was also undertaking some lobbying of his own.⁵⁵ He was specifically looking for long-range ground-attack aircraft⁵⁶ and in what appears to have been a clever attempt to speed up the decision making process in Canberra, MacArthur leaked to the press that there was an urgent need for P-51 aircraft to operate from Japan. It was a capability which the USAF could not immediately provide. Australia could. Moreover, while the US could call up reserves of these aircraft, they could not provide enough pilots.⁵⁷ However Australia had nearly a full wing of aircrew only recently returned from Japan who were familiar with the region, methods of operation, but above all were all qualified Mustang pilots. The allusions and implications were clear—Australia had the aircraft and the pilots in place "now" with which to negate the losses being inflicted on her allies. That the aircraft were needed is beyond doubt. There was a perceived

...urgent need for aircraft of long endurance and ground attack qualities of [the] Mustang until forward aerodromes [are] established in Korea. Need is so pressing that if BCAIR is to be

⁵³ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 50.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ AA A5954/1 1661/1 *BCOF Assistance to UN in Korea*.

⁵⁶ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 51.

⁵⁷ *loc.cit.*

employed it should be used now as allies have none of this type of Squadron in Japan.⁵⁸

Hodgson, Australian Mission Tokyo, underscored the point by noting “Jets have to operate from Japan [and] can only make one short strike and return with only 5 minutes fuel. Hence they are regarded as a failure so far which is the reason for urgent request from Australian squadrons especially equipped and trained for long range work.”⁵⁹

A possible complication was that Australia had decided to withdraw 77 Squadron from Japan. It was therefore important to gain some feel from the US as to how they would like to see the squadron disposed. Overriding this brief hesitation was all of Spender’s work in attempting to secure for Australia a “Pacific pact” with the US. To hesitate now in the committal of 77 Squadron, or to make any contribution less than significant would not be to Australia’s advantage. Therefore, without waiting for the reaction of the Truman administration to Australia’s offer of its aircraft the Prime Minister announced the committal of the squadron on 30 June 1950.

Of note, subsequent to these deliberations, is the special Parliamentary sitting held 6 July 1950. Apart from Australia’s response to the appeal for assistance from the Security Council, in addressing the House “no mention was made of any of the other circumstances which had led to the commitments of Australian naval and air forces.”⁶⁰ It appears at this point that the political significance of the response of these military units was lost on Australia’s politicians.

⁵⁸ AA A5954/1 166111 *BCOF Assistance to UN in Korea*, Z.271, BCOF to Defence Melbourne, 29 June 1950.

⁵⁹ AA A5954/1 166111 *BCOF Assistance to WI in Korea* Signal 1.9512.

⁶⁰ O’Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 58.

General MacArthur's request was readily met by 77 Squadron. While the unit had flown its last occupational sortie and had been in the process of packing for the return to Australia it was quickly placed on stand by. Even as the squadron's aircrew were being briefed about the invasion, Squadron Leader Strout recalled that "the aircraft were being armed with point fives, drop tanks are being fitted and we don't know yet but we might have to fly immediately."⁶¹ LtGen Robertson signalled to Defence Headquarters in Melbourne "that the squadron was 'all ready to operate'" and that he was only awaiting a decision from Australia as to the employment of the aircraft.⁶²

The rapidity and flexibility of the response was based on the way aircraft could be brought on line, with minimum lead-up or work-up times, no transport lag, and no recruiting and training delays. This unit could be transformed from its peacekeeping duties, have its aircraft armed and, in switching from an air defence role to that of ground attack, be operational at very short notice. Significantly, this rapid response had strong political appeal as well as operational practicality. Australia could be seen to be quickly and therefore unequivocally supporting the United Nations as well as supporting the United States which could only assist Spender in seeking an American alliance. This seemingly insignificant operational commitment could give valuable political returns by demonstrating Australia's resolve in its argument for the establishment of a regional defence treaty by enabling Australia to promote itself as a worthy and responsible ally.

This is not to detract from the role the naval units had to play in lending weight to Australia's case of quick response to the UN call. However the aircraft were to be involved in war operations straight away, something which Menzies was to remind the US Senate and House of Representatives in September 1950. He

⁶¹ Odgers, G., *Across the Parallel*, p. 9.

⁶² O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 52.

reminded the Senate that Australia had already given to the campaign⁶³ and pointed out to the House that

as you know in the case of Korea, indeed within the first few hours, after your own decision, we placed at your disposal a fighter air force and certain vessels of the Royal Australian Navy.⁶⁴

The publicity which the squadron gave Menzies was extended to the press. Because the squadron was to be so rapidly committed it was involved in joint air operations escorting American bombers attacking Korea. This made for significant American headline and radio coverage⁶⁵ which could have only been to the advantage of Australian diplomatic efforts in the United States specifically working towards a Pacific defence pact. It would have also generally raised Australia's profile as a nation projecting its own independent voice on post-war foreign and strategic issues. It was for this reason that McBride, Minister for Defence, sent an official war photographer to Korea at this time,⁶⁶ an interesting decision, clearly made with an eye to creating the right impression in the United States. The political utility which an air force unit gave a government was being fully realised. Spender followed Menzies to the United States and, in a brief call on President Truman, raised the issue of the Pacific pact. O'Neill makes the telling point that

⁶³ Address by Menzies to US Senate, *Current Notes*, 1 August 1950, p. 575.

⁶⁴ Address by Menzies to US House of Representatives, *Current Notes*, 1 August 1950, p. 572. ⁶⁵ Note contained In AA A5954/1 166111 BCOF *Assistance to United Nations in Korea*. ⁶⁶ Cabinet Submission Number 168, 9 October 1950.

There can be no doubt that this conversation was the real turning point which led to the ANZUS Treaty. Australia's support for Truman's policy in Korea was a key factor in this change of American attitudes. In particular, the high proficiency shown by No. 77 Squadron, RAAF, the only Australian unit to have been heavily engaged in the war at the time of Spender's conversation with Truman, must be given credit for enhancing Australia's reputation as a worthy ally.⁶⁷

Every advantage which could be gained from Australia's commitment of 77 Squadron was being exploited, especially in the context of impressing upon America the seriousness of Australia's commitment as an ally. That seriousness could only be demonstrated by active operations in a war theatre. That same theatre was to provide Australia with a new insight into the conduct of air power. Politically vital, 77 Squadron was to also significantly influence Australia's operational thinking through its experience in Korea.

Operations and Doctrine

On taking command of the Wing of which 77 Squadron was part Col Brooks Lawhorn, formerly a commander of the 49th Group, Fifth Air Force, stated his mission in his new command "...was to kill Chinese, kill North Koreans, and destroy their supplies and equipment."⁶⁸ This distillation of the Colonel's modus operandi puts simply, if crudely, the aims of the UN air forces arrayed against North Korea. This simplicity belies the complexity of operations, in all environments, undertaken by the military. It is my contention that it belies, not exclusive of the other arms, the complexity of air operations in particular and perhaps dismisses the beginnings of what we now attempt to embody in official tomes as "air doctrine". General Stratemeyer emphasised "that the fighting in

⁶⁷ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 111.

⁶⁸ 77 SQN Unit History (UH), *February Summary Of Events*, 16/2/51, Sheet 314.

Korea must not be taken as a model indicating the likely nature of a modern aerial conflict between major powers.”⁶⁹ However there is a temptation to merge the model with that of World War Two and, in so doing, simply dismiss it.

Yet in the study of air power doctrine it has been put that fundamental principles “provide an ideal foundation to develop air power doctrine for any nation.”⁷⁰ Those principles are taken to have arisen from combat experience and then later distilled into the working doctrine and the application to subsequent air operations of lessons learned. What Korean combat experience was eventually distilled into the working doctrine of the RAAF?

Australia’s operational experience was significant on two counts. First it came at a time when Australia’s strategic planning was embracing global principles. Yet the RAAF found itself fighting a limited war. All of Australia’s strategic planning had little or no application in Korea. Even the roles of the Mustang—long range bomber escort and long range air defence—had little place in the ground attack roles in Korea. Australia’s air involvement in Korea was also significant therefore, for the extensive tactical experience which the squadron was to inject into the RAAF.

Within that tactical environment other points of significance need to be noted. First, that of Australia’s contact with American units, doctrine, operations, and equipment. This exposure was important for it confirmed the 1946 perception that the RAAF should have the most modern equipment and procedures possible. The need to have suitable equipment was positively demonstrated through General MacArthur’s request for Mustangs at the outset of the war. The same lesson was later demonstrated in a negative manner through

⁶⁹ Press Release to *Aircraft*, 14 November 1950.

⁷⁰ Waters, Gary (ed), *RAAF Air Power Doctrine*, SDSC, ANU, Canberra, 1990, p. 7.

Australia's acquisition of the Meteor, the best aircraft available but second best for the task. The issues this purchase raise will be addressed separately.

The second point is that from an operational point of view the air involvement in Korea provided Australia with a number of permanent air force personnel who remained with the service, and formed a combat experienced core. After World War Two the RAAF had lost, through demobilisation, the majority of its operational expertise. Post-war planning called for a permanent force around which could be built an expanded force in time of war. Korea provided the RAAF the bonus of a permanent core comprised of personnel with extensive operational experience. These men were to continue into the senior rank structure of the RAAF until the 1980s. What was it that they learned and what did they bring back to Australia? It is in the light of what they learned that one might argue that in many respects the RAAF started out afresh, in spite of the extensive experience gained in World War Two.

Before examining the operational lessons a number of general points need to be made. Broadly speaking Korea was significant for it was the first modern limited war in which Australia flew. The experience of World War Two did not prepare the RAAF for the types of operations in Korea. The rules had been relatively simple in WW1 and WW2—targets were attacked with all resources available. Korea demanded a more complex range of rules. These included restrictions which were wide and varied, with perhaps the most well known being the limitations placed on attacking targets in Manchuria. These were invoked in order to reduce the possibility of provoking the USSR or China into a global war. In the earlier phases of the war, when it was anticipated the fighting would be over quickly and the country reunited, restrictions were also placed on the type of targets to be attacked. America had no desire to rebuild the peninsula and, with funds already dedicated to the rebuilding of Europe and Japan, the bombing of towns and industrial infrastructure was forbidden.

The Korean War might be divided into four phases.⁷¹ The first embraces that of the drive south to the Pusan perimeter by North Korean forces; the second, the allied drive north from Pusan to the allied defeat at Chingchon; the third, from the reverses of the UN forces under the Chinese advance to the stabilising of the line roughly along the 38th parallel; and the fourth was the “search for air target systems during the last twenty-four months of almost static ground warfare until the end of the war in July 1953.” Within each of these phases air operations took on different characteristics and one might expect to see different emphases in doctrine applied.

Of significance in the first phase was the destruction of the enemy air force in the opening days of the war. For the RAAF, and other air forces, this obviated the need to provide bomber escort missions and the main air effort was directed to ground support operations. In August a transition occurred in this phase, from close support operations to those of interdiction as the Pusan Perimeter stabilised and attempts were made to relieve the pressure being placed on it from the north.

In the second phase air operations were given over to support of the allied ground forces advancing into North Korea. The third phase covered the retreat from the north, in the face of overwhelming Chinese forces, of those same allied forces. For the Air Forces close support of ground forces continued to be a vital role. However it was in this phase that a new threat was introduced—that of the Chinese MiG fighter. The allies were now forced to dedicate aircraft to the air defence role in order to protect the ground forces and the aircraft providing close air support. The fourth phase of the air campaign arose from the frustrating experience of the previous interdiction campaigns which had proved ineffective in stopping the supply of enemy men and materiel to the war zone. Whether road or rail the Chinese proved adept at rapidly repairing or working

⁷¹ Armitage, M.J., and Mason, R.A., *Air Power in the Nuclear Age 1945–84*, MacMillan, 1985, p. 23.

around any cuts made in their lines of communication by UN aircraft. Given the previous failings of air interdiction campaigns the FEAF attacked targets in what is now known as the air pressure campaign. These targets included military targets within Pyongyang as well as “mines, cement factories, all types of military concentrations and inevitably the towns in which these targets were situated...”⁷²

That Australia started afresh is suggested by a study of 77 Squadron operations. When the North Koreans invaded everyone was caught by surprise, not least the RAAF personnel in Japan who were celebrating their prospective return to Australia at a Mess function when the news came through. Confusion at higher levels was reflected at the tactical level. On receiving the news of the attack aircrew

...wanted to know what was going on. Nobody knew whether it was a large scale attack, or just a border skirmish. What in the hell were they fighting about anyway? Was it to be a major war involving the Russians as well as the Koreans or just a local outbreak? Would the 5th Air Force be able to interfere? Do the North Koreans have an air force with which they could attack Iwakuni?⁷³

This confusion was reflected in operating procedures. “At first direct air support had been haphazard and badly coordinated. Shooting Stars...operating from Japan...didn’t have more than ten minutes to lock around for targets, make a few hurried passes and then set course for home. Mustangs could stay a bit longer.”⁷⁴ For America the confusion was partly a result of subscribing to strategic thinking. Aircraft were not designed to meet the needs of a tactical environment. In its strategic thinking and planning of the post-war years

⁷² Armitage, M.J., and Mason, R.A., *Op.Cit.*, p. 40.

⁷³ Odgers, G., *Op.Cit.*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 71.

Australia had been guilty of the same confusion. So with the sweeping onrush of the North “the allies had to make major revisions to their strategy and as the enemy forces moved across the border it appeared that airpower would have to be employed much more broadly to reduce the numerical superiority of the Chinese.”⁷⁵

Unit histories reveal the revision which occurred in the RAAF at this time. 77 Squadron flew a number of different missions, of which the principal ones were combat air patrol, (CAP) escort, armed reconnaissance, strike, rescue combat air patrol, close support and air defence. In spite of the variety of labels, in many instances it is difficult to determine what distinguished one type of mission from the other. Weapon loads for armed reconnaissance missions were the same as for close support missions so using weapon fit to determine mission types can be confusing. However there are a number of characteristics about the different missions which will be enumerated which will go some way to aiding understanding of the changes which took place.

Armed reconnaissance missions flown by the Mustangs in the opening phase of the war were directed at those targets of opportunity which the pilot, or a ground or air controller, was able to determine as suitable or necessary for attack. Perhaps one of the marked characteristics was the flexibility with which these missions were flown, air and ground controllers being able to direct and redirect aircraft on and off targets as the ground forces requested assistance. It was not uncommon for aircraft, en route an initial target, to be asked to attack another target in another location which was causing greater concern to ground forces.⁷⁶ Being called in to support hard pressed ground forces in this way was also indicative of the ability to change the mission profile while the aircraft was airborne and missions which started out as armed reconnaissance sorties could often end up in the close support role instead. Therefore, in order to best

⁷⁵ Momyer, W.W., *Air Power in Three Wars*, Department of Air Force, Washington, 1978, p. 5.

anticipate these role changes the aircraft would carry rockets and use its guns but would also carry napalm.⁷⁷

The majority of the close support sorties were conducted by formations of four aircraft. While at Pohang the Squadron had four aircraft at any given time on fifteen minute stand by for close support missions. The control of these missions lay with either ground or airborne controllers although these simply vectored aircraft onto available targets and did not dictate flight plans in any way. This method of operation is perhaps best elucidated by the following annotation:

After going from area to area contacting controllers who had no targets, the section finally were contacted by the controller for the 3rd US Inf Div...⁷⁸

Close support mission pre-flight briefings did not include the target to be attacked. These were given to the pilots after the aircraft were airborne which goes some way to explain why aircraft were armed for any contingency.

The flexibility of the Mustang operations extended to those missions labelled combat air patrol. Today this “describes the mounting of patrols by armed interceptors across potential tracks of intruding enemy aircraft, or in the vicinity of a particular target area.”⁷⁹ However the missions flown in Korea had a different application. In the first instance the aircraft tended to be configured for ground support operations and did in the end often attack ground targets.⁸⁰ CAP was also extended to provide protection to downed airmen—protection

⁷⁶ UH *Details of Events*, 10 November 1950, p. 51.

⁷⁷ UH *Summary of Events*, October 1950, Sheet 31.

⁷⁸ UH, *Details of Events*, 22 January 1951, p. 45.

⁷⁹ Armitage, M.J., and Mason, R.A., *Op.Cit.*, p. xi.

⁸⁰ Attacks on bridges and boats, UH *Details of Events*, 17 March 1951, p. 67.

against both air and ground threats.⁸¹ The most logical explanation for this form of CAP was the virtually non-existent North Korean air threat. It was also unlikely that Chinese aircraft would ever pose a threat. Accordingly, other entries indicate napalm was carried on CAP missions in the event of nil enemy aircraft sightings.⁸²

Attack, or strike, missions were few in the early days of the war. Directed against specific targets such as bridges or headquarters the Mustangs were usually armed with only 500lb General Purpose (GP) bombs, although occasionally these were complemented by 4.5” rockets. Again, missions were clearly flexible, attack missions flown in January 1951 being armed with rockets and napalm for close support or armed reconnaissance duties.⁸³

That the squadron was able to initially fly bomber escort missions—the role for which the Mustang had been designed—and then dedicate the aircraft to ground attack missions as the nature of the war changed suggests two things. First, the Mustang was a particularly flexible and capable aircraft and ideally suited to the theatre. Second, the RAAF had the right aircraft for the task demanded of it, vindicating MacArthur’s insistence on having the support of the squadron.

Mustang operations were flown from July 1950 until 6 April 1951 when the last sorties were flown prior to conversion to the new Meteor jet aircraft. How successful were these missions? It has been said that without tactical air power engaged in the close support role that Korea would have fallen to the communists.⁸⁴ The role of 77 Squadron was important in those early months as one of only eight squadrons available for ground attack operations, so vital in holding the Pusan perimeter when the North Korean forces came close to

⁸¹ 2 references to such instances UH *Summary of Events*, 12 March 1951, Sheet 3.

⁸² UH *Details of Events* 19 March 1951 p. 74.

⁸³ UH *Details of Events*, 12 January 1951, p. 21.

⁸⁴ LtGen Stratemeier in Futrell, R.F., “Air Power in Korea”, *Air Power Journal*, Volume 1, Number 4, p. 31.

driving the allies off the peninsula in August 1950. In that struggle 77 Squadron alone was responsible for destroying 35 tanks (and possibly destroying or damaging another 31), “182 trucks, 30 other vehicles, 4 locomotives, 14 box cars and 13 ammo and fuel dumps.”⁸⁵ The effort in those weeks in August was made somewhat less onerous by the proximity of the Korea peninsula to the air bases in Japan. “The Australian pilots took off from Iwakuni early in the morning, flew across to Korea, carried out a strike mission and then landed at Taegu for refuelling and rearming. There was never any shortage of targets and it was normal for pilots to fly four missions per day...”⁸⁶

By late October the Pusan crisis had passed and American forces were ready to break out and strike north, the RAAF having played no small role in the defence of the perimeter as part of the FEAF. That the ground forces

...had achieved such a transformation only three months after being in full retreat was due in no small measure to the efforts of the FEAF. The North Korean Air Force had been destroyed. Threatened sectors of the Eighth Army’s front had been saved repeatedly by close air support. The interdiction campaign had destroyed large quantities of North Korean supplies and had crippled their major means of transportation throughout the peninsula. What limited means the North Koreans had of producing war materials were destroyed by strategic bombing.⁸⁷

Australia was to learn no lessons in this period which related to a global war. Rather the lessons had been primarily political. The use of the unit had proved invaluable in convincing the Americans that Australians were allies who could be trusted to commit themselves to the difficult as well as the pleasant activities

⁸⁵ Odgers, G *Op.Cit.*, p. 76.

⁸⁶ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 2, p. 310.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 316.

which an alliance might impose. Moreover the government learned that the air unit was a valuable political tool in that the returns gained were far in excess of the investment in men and money which a large land or naval component might demand. Such minimal outlay was also less likely to arouse domestic censure, a consideration for any politician.

Those tactical lessons which were gained related primarily to the fact that tactical air power was still a vital ingredient in defence planning and not to be sacrificed to strategic ambitions. The tactical viability of air power had been proved again and, as the Pusan situation demonstrated, air superiority first, followed by interdiction and close support of ground forces remained fundamental tenets of air power. Within those tenets 77 Squadron demonstrated the obvious value of having an aircraft capable of great flexibility. It was able to meet the needs of the situation, flying escort, interdiction, strike missions with little adjustment to the weapons configuration. The ability to be so flexible laid the groundwork for another valuable lesson, that of the indispensability of air power to stabilise the ground situation and thus aid the ground forces in turning it to their own advantage. If “air power is about the best use of air services”⁸⁸ 77 Squadron was about air power. Most importantly those who flew these aircraft were learning and practising principles of air warfare which, though not new, were to remain with the RAAF and help ensure that it evolved into a highly trained, high technology, modern air force.

The nine months of Mustang operations demonstrated new political lessons which air power could provide. It also confirmed old air power lessons. The skills and knowledge gained in the operational theatre of Korea were to remain with a new RAAF generation who were about to embark on a new era—that of jet aircraft. They were skills which were not to be lost to the RAAF but retained

⁸⁸ Waters, Gary, *RAAF Air Power Doctrine, A Collection of Contemporary Essays*, SDSC, ANU, Canberra, 1990.

in those who would remain in the permanent air force and direct the shape of the RAAF into the latter half of the twentieth century.

CHANGE IN SQUADRON ROLE: METEOR PURCHASE

Part of Australia's post-war defence thinking accepted the need to maintain its air force at the forefront of technology. To that end Australia intended the RAAF to be equipped with jet aircraft by 1949 although this plan had not been realised as early as had been hoped and Australia went to war in July 1950 with piston driven aircraft. However, even though jet powered aircraft were being used by the USAF, the Mustang proved the more suitable for long range ground support operations in the early days of the war. Although RAAF aircraft were not called upon to do so, USAF P-51s also proved their supremacy over North Korean aircraft in the brief struggle for air superiority in the opening phases of the war. After UN forces had advanced north to the Yalu, China entered the war. Marking the third phase of the air war the advent of the Chinese MiG-15 reintroduced the problem of establishing and maintaining air superiority. Suddenly the RAAF, which until this point was at no real disadvantage in using Mustangs, found itself equipped with an aircraft which could not match the new threat. Even the USAF front line fighter, the F-86, had difficulty in combating the MiG-15 in some situations:

The superiority of the MiG-15 in terms of speed, rate of climb and high altitude performance, together with the advantages of great numerical superiority and secure bases situated within a few minutes of the combat zone, placed the United Nations Command air forces in a difficult situation.⁸⁹

Given this situation, together with the difficulty the US was experiencing in late 1950 of obtaining reinforcements in order to meet the Chinese threat, LtGen Stratemeyer recommended No. 77 Squadron be equipped with jet aircraft.

⁸⁹ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 149.

Acutely aware of the need to maintain equipment superiority the RAAF was nonetheless faced with a dilemma for, while the need to re-equip with jets was without question, the choice of aircraft was not so straight forward. The US was unable to supply F-86 aircraft and Australia was forced to accept that which was available at the time, namely the British Meteor.

The Meteor had been under development since 1939 and had seen service as the Mark 1 as early as 1944. However the RAF did not place the Meteor in front line operational service until December 1949 in the form of the Mark 8⁹⁰ although modifications were carried out in 1950 to enable the aircraft to carry rockets or additional fuel tanks. In spite of this improved operational capability the Meteor was dated by 1950 for it was a

pioneering type of jet aircraft which lacked the major advances achieved in the final years of the war. In particular it did not have swept wings. While the Meteor 8 could equal and sometimes surpass the performance of the swept wing MiG-15 at altitudes below 7500 metres, it was much slower and less manoeuvrable at high altitudes.⁹¹

However discoveries about the aircraft's shortcomings lay in the future. On the 6th April 1951 the final operational sorties were flown by Mustangs after which the Squadron transferred to Iwakuni, Japan, to convert to the new Meteor jets.

The decision to convert to jets had not been without some reservation, the most pointed being that prompted by the Korean theatre prior to China's entry into the war. AM Jones approached BCOF in July 1950, requesting some feedback as to likely enemy opposition to any intercept role which the Mustang might

⁹⁰ "Gloster Meteor (II)" *Aviation and Marine International*, Volume 83, September 1981, p. 32. ⁹¹ O'Neill, Robert, *Op.Cit.*, Volume 1, p. 149.

fulfil in the theatre.⁹² Two messages were sent by way of reply which not only reflected the value of the Mustang but the perceived limitations posed by jet aircraft.

In spite of ample number of jets in theatre range [is] a problem when operating from Japan. Therefore most pressing need is for Mustang's endurance until the forward dromes are established in Korea and for their ground attack qualities both now and later. In consequence I am accepting American pilots, machines and personnel to operate within 77 Squadron until Americans are able to organise Mustang squadrons. Resisting any notions of jet conversion.⁹³

A further message on the same day noted that Stratemeyer was drawing Mustangs from his Pacific command as his jets had been found wanting over Korea. BCOF suggested that "a change to jets needs careful examination as... there will be a need for a good ground attack aircraft in any operations which any army needs to conduct."⁹⁴ However by November 1950 Stratemeyer pressed the RAAF to re-equip 77 Squadron "with jet aircraft from British sources as early as [it] can"⁹⁵ although his rationale for this endorsement was that it would be the first opportunity to field test the Meteor aircraft.

By December 1950 the full impact of the Chinese involvement was apparent, not just to the RAAF but also to Menzies' Liberal government which was equally concerned that the RAAF receive modern equipment. Australia had been considering the purchase of an aircraft still on British drawing boards, the P.1081 Hawker fighter project. It had also placed orders for new Vampire aircraft. However the delivery of these had been delayed and it was anticipated

⁹² A1196/2 36/501/665 pt 1 *No.77 SQN Reinforcement* AM Jones to BCOF, A933, 3 July 1950. ⁹³ *ibid.*, Cypher Message Z278, 4 July 1950, BCOF to RAAFHQ.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, Cypher Message Z281, 4 July 1950, BCOF to RAAFHQ.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, Cypher Message Z3806, 11 November 1950.

the P.1081 would not fly until 1953. The RAAF was falling behind and the Government was worried. Cabinet recorded:

The resultant lag in the re-equipment of the RAAF fighter squadrons with modern jet fighters is viewed with much concern, particularly having regard to the present international situation [Chinese intervention in Korea] and to the possibility under such circumstances of the RAAF being required to take part in operations overseas at short notice (as is the case of Air Force units at present engaged in Korea and Malaya).⁹⁶

Accordingly Cabinet recommended Australia purchase 36 Meteor 8 and 4 Meteor 7 (twin seat) together with operational equipment from Great Britain, the decision to do so being “primarily due to the deterioration of the position in Korea.”⁹⁷ It was a notable decision on the part of the Australian government for the Air Force was not being allocated second rate trainer aircraft as had been the case prior to 1939, but was now receiving the best equipment available. Clearly the Air Force was receiving greater attention and priority after the experience of World War Two but particularly after the opening phases of the Korean War.

After converting to the Meteor at Iwakuni the squadron redeployed to Korea in July, the Unit History proudly recording on the 29th of that month:

Today 77 Squadron made history in the annals of the RAAF by being the first squadron equipped with jet aircraft to enter into active operational duties.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Cabinet Submission Number 236, *Proposal to Purchase Meteor*, 5 December 1950. ⁹⁷ *loc.cit.*

⁹⁸ UH, *Summary of Events* 29 July 1951.

The squadron looked forward to greatly improved operational performance with their new jet. While at Iwakuni an F-86 from the 4th Fighter Intercept Wing (USAF) had been forwarded to the RAAF to carry out comparison trials against the Meteor. Initial response had been that the Meteor “compared very well.”⁹⁹

Now based at Kimpo, with high hopes for an aircraft which appeared to rival the F-86 interceptor, the squadron anticipated fulfilling the air defence role. The training program, undertaken until approval was given to carry out combat operations, covered “firing guns periodically at 35,000 feet to ensure undue stoppages will not result at height” and the practice of intercept vectors.¹⁰⁰ However the squadron’s first air defence sorties were not successful for it transpired the MiG-15 outclassed the Meteor in this role.

The underlying problem in the Meteor’s shortcomings was that Australia had purchased a European day fighter. Designed with the European theatre in mind it had short range and as a fighter was not originally equipped with rocket racks or bomb pylons. In spite of its suitability as a ground attack platform experience in Korea with the aircraft was not favourable. Its unsuitability eventually forced the squadron to go to the 5th AF (not an easy thing to do)¹⁰¹ for a new role clearly needed to be identified. Disappointed by its inability to be effective in the air defence role, 77 Squadron conducted ground support operations for which the Meteor proved more suited.

⁹⁹ UH, *Summary of Events* 18 May 1951.

¹⁰⁰ UH, *Summary of Events* 25 July 1951, Sheet 324.

¹⁰¹ Newham notes “It Is not an easy thing for a man to do (CO going to 5 AF) because it smacks of cowardice. (But) there is no point in going to war when the (enemy) flies higher and faster than you do. Just getting a bloke back to 6 o’clock to do something with him or lure him down to the Meteors favourite flying altitude just doesn’t make sense. You just have to fly faster and you have to fly higher.”

Indeed, a number of role changes for the squadron occurred as the nature of the war changed and the squadron's tactical reports outline the evolution, from air defence to ground support, of the role the unit was to finally fulfil. In the air defence role the squadron initially flew CAP, the primary aim of which was to deter attacks against strike aircraft conducting their own ground attacks. To this end the tactics used by the Meteors were to fly "into the area at 25,000 feet and during their patrol [descend] to 15,000 feet at which low altitude it was anticipated the MiGs would not press their attack for too long" for it was found that only at this lower altitude could the Meteor contend with the agile Soviet fighters. Clearly technical capabilities limited what the aircraft could do and as seen here tactics were modified accordingly. On a positive note the same report records that "F51, F81 and F84 aircraft had not been molested with the Meteors above them,"¹⁰² However these tactics were simply not enough and if the Meteor were to be embroiled in a fight only a debilitating evasive "'grey out' turn [was] tight enough for the MiG."¹⁰³ While the squadron clearly preferred to conduct air defence operations the squadron's CO reluctantly admitted that "though results have not been spectacular the Meteor on CAP has contributed favourably to the work of attack aircraft in enabling them to go about their task relatively untroubled by MiGs."¹⁰⁴

By January 1952 the squadron was flying both air defence and ground attack sorties. Air defence was flown by "standing patrols inside the bomb line from a half hour before dawn to half an hour after dark."¹⁰⁵ Ground attack was conducted with rocket projectiles (both HE and napalm) although at this time a marked increase in the intensity and accuracy of anti-aircraft and small arms

¹⁰² Tactical Report 1 Nov 51.

¹⁰³ Op.3/52.

¹⁰⁴ Op.3/53.

¹⁰⁵ Tactical Report 15 Jan 52–15 Feb 52.

¹⁰⁹Tactical Report 16 Feb 53–May 53.

The squadron was becoming more and more specialised, not for reasons of doctrine, but because of aircraft limitations. These limitations were keenly felt, the CO 77 Squadron, Wing Commander Steege, reporting after five months of Meteor operations;

Thinking here tends to be on the lines that two types of fighter are required, one with the emphasis on air fighting, the other on fighter attack, each specifically designed for its role. The swept wing F-84 is designed as an attack fighter and available information as to its range, performance, and bomb carrying capabilities indicate that it will meet daylight attack requirements rather than the medium bomber of the past. Such an aircraft would efficiently and economically fulfil the daylight strike requirements of the RAAF.¹¹⁰

Two aircraft, it was therefore reasoned, would be better than the one inadequate Meteor.

There were even limitations in the role for which the Meteor was eventually adopted. In the first instance the aircraft could not carry bombs. Most telling was that as the war settled into an inflexible conflict of attrition targets became harder and harder to find and the squadron began to run out of targets within the radius of action of the Meteor,¹¹¹ severely limiting the flexibility of the unit. Aircraft were also running out of fuel before bombing escort missions could be completed.¹¹² Pilots recalled the frustration of flying an aircraft

¹¹⁰ Tactical Report 1 Nov 51–15 Dec 51, para 21.

¹¹¹ Tactical Report 16 Nov 53.

¹¹² *ibid.*, para 9.

which simply didn't suit a number of the targets which we could have attacked. There were other targets available which were given to the F-84s and other aircraft which we could have had a go at. So there were times when we felt that we were not getting the right targets...¹¹³

Part of that frustration was born of the combination of weapons/fuel load. One ventral tank could be carried along with external rockets. To increase the radius of action would have meant removing rockets but as it was pointed out "the whole objective of the exercise [was] the prosecution of violence. If you [were] going to mount a sortie you might as well make it as effective as possible."¹¹⁴ The scarcity of targets raised the issue of the value of targets. Was the loss of life and aircraft warranted in attacking low value targets, attacks brought about by the small radius of action of the aircraft in the first place?

In spite of these experiences with the Meteor its use by the RAAF was important for a number of reasons. First, and most simply, it was significant in that this was the first occasion the RAAF had flown jet aircraft in combat. From this point significance lies in the limitations of the aircraft which required the RAAF to continually change the role of the squadron throughout the final phases of the war. Perhaps making the best of a bad thing, the CO's reports are replete with "flexibility" when commenting on squadron performance with the aircraft. The ability of the Meteor to move from role to role as the nature of the ground war changed might be used as an argument to demonstrate the flexibility of this platform. However the RAF and the RAAF intended the aircraft to fly in the air defence role, not in ground support operations. In spite of aircraft and aircrew adjustments some disappointment continued over the inability to fulfil this role.

¹¹³ Interview, Newham.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Newham.

What the aircraft experience did do was demonstrate the difficulties which arise when equipment dictates the operational doctrine of the unit. That operational doctrine was dictated by the Meteor is demonstrated by the operations flown which were never intended to be flown. It further forced the squadron to continue to adjust its role for the period in which the aircraft was flown in Korea. A number of Tactical Reports noted: "During the period [of the report] the role of the Squadron has not remained static..."¹¹⁵ These adjustments meant changes to crew training as well as modifications to the aircraft airframe and weapons systems to better improve its ability to carry out functions for which it was never intended. Gun sights were altered, cockpit layout changed, ailerons adjusted, bomb fittings experimented with and rocket rails rebuilt. The end result was the production of an air defence aircraft which

On ground attack...was good in many ways, a stable platform. It was fantastic for gunnery, it was good for rocketing.¹¹⁶

One of the difficulties arising from equipment determining doctrine was that the aircrew increasingly became specialists in one form of warfare only. In 1953 Wing Commander Cresswell, former CO 77 Squadron, visited Korea to study the operational impact the war was having on RAAF operations. He reported the standard of aircrew performance was high. Nonetheless he was concerned they were not receiving the depth of experience they would have received had they been flying air defence missions. It was a shortcoming directly brought about by the purchase of the Meteor. Cresswell reported

¹¹⁵ For Example Tactical Report 15 May 52–15 August 52.

¹¹⁶ Interview Newham.

[The standard of the Squadron] is high but only with the type of operations now carried out with the Meteor aircraft. I personally consider that the U.S.A.F pilots are better trained and more able to adapt themselves rapidly to operational conditions especially in the fighter to fighter role.¹¹⁷

This shortcoming raises the second significant operational factor which the experience of the Meteor brought about. In order to overcome the dearth of air defence experience Cresswell demanded “that selected pilots [be attached] to the USAF F86 units no matter what the cost.”¹¹⁸ At the same time he requested from the USAF correspondence related to “fighter training development in that Service”¹¹⁹ and input from 77 Squadron which might contribute to operational training in Australia.¹²⁰

In the development of the RAAF this point marks the realisation that not only aircraft but aircrew standards needed to be the best possible if Australia was to be responsible for the conduct of its own tactical operations. The consequences were obvious as Australia sought to acquire the most modern aircraft. Coincidentally at this time Australia was faced with purchasing a new maritime surveillance aircraft. The choice was either the modern Neptune or the aging British Shackleton. Looking for the most modern equipment available it chose the Neptune while in the Sabre Australia was to reportedly have one of the most capable fighters of the time. Secondly, Australia also sought to expose its aircrew to US operational experience. In the USAF “...things like air to air discipline and tactics were all fed back into the fighter weapons school at Nellis [Air Force Base] and we put people there on exchange. You need to go outside to find your own standards.”¹²¹ The aircrew exchanges with the USAF to draw

¹¹⁷ AA 1969/100/176 16/3/AIR/Pt 1 *Cresswell: Visit to Japan/Korea–April/May 1953*, para 102. ¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, para 109.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, para 106.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, para 105.

¹²¹ Interview, Newham.

on operational experience and to raise the standards of the RAAF is a practice which continues to the present.

The tangible benefits associated with the Meteor clearly lay not in the aircraft but in the operation of that aircraft in a theatre of war. The disappointment of the Meteor's performance was not allowed to detract from the operational experience gained and in his report Cresswell recommended pilot training be changed to be designed to "ensure that pilots arriving in the squadron were suitable for squadron employment."¹²²

Direct lessons from Korea were being learned which could be incorporated into RAAF training. These included formation flying, weaving procedures, exercising armed reconnaissance missions, rocket projectile firing "similar to the Squadron procedures", air search procedures, night flying and all weather flying. In a new era of fast jets targets became more difficult to acquire visually and so close ground and air control through army observers was established and Forward Air Control (FAC) came to play a major part in the conduct of the air war. All these were the tangible benefits returned to the RAAF through the Meteor operations conducted in Korea. It is worthy of note that some of the lessons are in fact those skills which had been acquired in the years 1939–45 but had been lost to the RAAF by 1950.

¹²² Cresswell, *Op.Cit.*, para 47.

CONCLUSION

The Korean War marked the beginning of a new period in Australia's appreciation of the utility of air power. Before the Second World War Australia was content to place its defence trust in the ability of the British Empire to meet its security needs. That trust was continued in the post war years in spite of the clear inability of Empire to meet, or be willing to fulfil Australia's security needs. Australia planned to dovetail into security arrangements which reflected English rather than Australian security concerns. Concepts were global and strategic in nature. For the RAAF this meant the contribution of assets to South East Asia in order to release British forces to the Middle East should a global conflict ever recur. The RAAF even planned for the direct support of British forces and on one occasion sent aircraft to Malta—ostensibly to gain experience in the European environment but also to fulfil that global commitment.

Further, as part of the global concept the RAAF was to be equipped with long range bombers and fighter escorts and even went so far as to design and bring to mock-up stage an indigenous long range fighter. Australia would be a long range bomber base for the aircraft of its allies and contribute its own long range aircraft to a common global cause.

In spite of these plans the next war Australia was to be committed to was not global or strategic but wholly tactical and as such was to change Air Force thinking about the employment of air power. It became apparent in this environment that aircraft needed to be suited to the task required of them. It was

not sufficient to simply tailor the task to the airframe. To this end recommendations were proposed for specialised aircraft fulfilling specific functions. Indeed the RAAF was not to pursue the notion of a true multi-role platform until technology provided a suitable airframe thirty years later in the shape of the F/A-18. Another facet of this global outlook was that before 1950 Australia did not intend to place its own local defence needs first while in some defence planning they were distinctly placed last. But the air involvement in Korea demonstrated the need to be able to provide for Australia's own tactical needs given that the "next war" clearly was not going to be global after all.

The war also usefully provided Australian defence with a core of men with experience who would remain in the professional armed services for the following two decades. For the RAAF the severe loss of Second World War experience through demobilisation and the effects this would have had on Australia's attempts to retain a qualitative edge in machines and men can only be speculated upon had this service not been called upon to fight in Korea. One may well ask where the present day RAAF would be had it not been involved in the Korean War where sound experience in jet operations in a modern tactical environment and the close association forged with the USAF were to influence the later development of the Air Force. The pilots of 77 Squadron were to become the experienced core of RAAF leaders for the next thirty years.

At the same time the RAAF learned from the experience of working closely with the USAF the need to retain high technical and qualitative advantages over the enemy. The cooperation with the USAF which is continued to the present day can be traced back to the cooperation worked out in the Korean conflict.

It was also a time for Australia's ground forces to learn the value of air power and the part it has to play in the overall battle plan. While this was perfected in the latter years of the Second World War the armies in Korea relearned the value of the protection afforded by the tactical air forces providing air cover and denying the enemy his full capacity to re-equip his forward line. At the same time a new generation of fighting forces learned the essential value of cooperation. During the

RAAF Air Power Conference¹²³ audience comment urged the establishment of closer liaison between the man in the foxhole and the pilot delivering ordnance. It was an urging enthusiastically endorsed by the audience. Interestingly the operations by 77 Squadron indicate a remarkable degree of cooperation which, though learned in Korea, has subsequently been allowed to decline, as this comment would suggest.

The operational significance of the RAAF's involvement in Korea is complemented by the political significance of this deployment. The political utility which the Australian governments of the time discovered in the small squadron commitment placed in Korea lay in the large political returns for this small outlay in men and aircraft. Most importantly this deployment went a long way to convince the United States that Australia was an ally which could be trusted in difficult times and which later paid dividends in the form of a Pacific pact which Australia had sought from the United States. The eventual signing of ANZUS was in some way expedited by the commitment of 77 Squadron to the Korean conflict.

¹²³ "Conventional Air Power into the 21st Century", 25–27 March 1991.

Be it operational or political, the contribution of Australia's 77 Squadron to the Korean War had ramifications which were to influence the shape, thinking and direction of the modern RAAF and the country's use of air power. As such one cannot dismiss Australia's air involvement in the theatre as merely a continuation of Second World War principles and practices or worse, as simply insignificant. Rather, the contribution of 77 Squadron laid a foundation for the later development and employment of modern air power in Australia, a foundation which would not have been available to Australia even after the experience of World War Two. This was the era of jet aircraft, high technology and limited war. The significance of Australia's air involvement in Korea lies in the foundation which the experience provided Australia as it transformed the RAAF from post-war global concepts and low levels of operational capability to the balanced and thoroughly modern air force which it strove to be.

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