

HMAS Albatross - Nowra.

The Navy has two bases at Nowra, HMAS Albatross, which is the major base and is about 25 klms inland from the coast and home of their air fleet and HMAS Creswell, which is on the southern coast of Jervis Bay and home of the RAN's Naval College - and not much else.

In March this year we were driving back to Brisbane from Melbourne and as we had decided to take the coastal route we thought it a good opportunity to see if we could have a look over the 2 bases. We contacted ADF Media Ops in Canberra, who we find are always only too happy to help, and they arranged it.

We were told to report to the Front Gate at Albatross where we would be met by Dallas McMaugh, who is the Navy's PR lady at Nowra and she would show us around.



Which we did – and we couldn't have timed it worse if we'd tried. The day we arrived was the same day that Rear Admiral Mark Campbell (that's Air Vice Marshall in the real language) had decided to also tour the base on his sojourn from Naval life. This of course tied everyone up and meant our tour had to be cut short, which is a shame as it looked a very interesting base and we would have loved to get inside a few of the buildings – next time perhaps!!



But Dallas, who was a very busy lady that day, did her best and made sure we saw as much of the place as she could in the short time she had available. We also got a history lesson.

HMAS Albatross is the home of the Royal Australian Navy's Fleet Air Arm and also home to the Fleet Air Arm Museum (formerly known as, and now incorporating, Australia's Museum of Flight). It is the Navy's largest Base and its only Air Station. The Navy has three squadrons based at Albatross,

- 723 Squadron with AS350 Squirrel helicopters;
- 816 Squadron with S-70B Seahawk helicopters; and
- NUSQN 808 with MRH-90 helicopters.



This one must have been on loan from the Army??

The decision to build an airfield on the land was taken soon after WWII was declared in 1939. It was initially a RAAF Base. The RAAF moved in in May 1942 followed shortly thereafter by the US Army Air Corps and the Royal Netherlands East Indies Air Force. In 1944, the British Admiralty directed forces to the South-West Pacific necessitating shore base establishments in Australia to support the Royal Navy and its Fleet Air Arm. RAAF Base Nowra was considered ideal because of its proximity to Jervis Bay, which was large enough to accommodate the entire British Pacific Fleet. The Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm began operations at Nowra in late October 1944, and the base was renamed HMS Nabbington. In March 1946, at the end of the war, the US, Dutch and the British all went home and the base reverted back to RAAF control "to be retained but not maintained".

In July 1947, the Commonwealth Defence Council approved the formation of a Fleet Air Arm which would be controlled and operated by the RAN. The initial planning included purchase of

two aircraft carriers, aircraft and the establishment of shore facilities. The carriers were named HMA Ships Sydney and Melbourne, and the shore facilities were at Nowra.

In August 1948 the Base was handed over to the Navy, renamed HMAS Albatross and became the home of the 20th Carrier Air Group. A number of Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft were brought from England to Australia by HMAS Sydney. These aircraft, operated by 805 and 816 Squadrons, arrived in Nowra in May 1949. In November 1950, they were joined by the Carrier Air Group of 808 and 817 Squadrons, also flying Sea Furies and Fireflies.

HMAS Albatross has been expanding ever since. As more capable aircraft have been acquired, so ground support facilities have had to be built. In 1955, Sea Venoms and Gannets arrived, requiring radar workshops and test facilities. More aircraft necessitated stricter standards of air traffic control and a new control tower was built in 1958. In 1964 the introduction of Wessex helicopters, with a dunking sonar capability, required a further expansion of services.



In 1965, it was decided to buy American aircraft to replace the ageing British Gannets and Sea Venoms. 20 McDonnell Douglas Skyhawks and 32 Grumman Trackers were chosen and additional avionics facilities were built to service the complex equipment they carried. The Skyhawks and the Trackers were pensioned off in 1984. Today the Trackers are scattered all over the country, with a large selection of them held at West Sale airport, though they are not in very good nick.

An old Navy pilot reminisced about the now gone Trackers, he said:

"The carrier circuit was flown at 300ft, trimmed out at its landing speed of 95 knots. There was a special grip in front of the Twin Otter-style throttles to stop the pilot pulling them back during the acceleration of the catapult shot. Landing one on the Melbourne at night, in a high sea state and no shore diversion could be described as 'intense'. The Landing Signals Officers (LSO's) did a fantastic job getting us on board safely in these conditions. Australian Trackers were



flown single pilot, the co-pilot duties performed by the Tacco, a highly qualified Observer. A great posting for a kid just off Pilot's Course.

It had the capability of a P-3B and could be on task in minutes off the carrier instead of the Air Force's hours (and that was assuming that the RAAF wasn't having a 'sportie', not in the bar and it was a week day) and we often worked in pairs. Tracker sorties were flown round the clock during an exercise, each one up to six hours, some of it at low level, at night down to 300ft on the radalt when conducting MAD trapping patterns.

It carried two homing torpedoes, rocket pods and depth charges, in addition to sonobuoy sensors ejected from the tubes in the rear of the engine nacelles. Formation and 20 degree rocketing on the range or splash target was a buzz. The sound of the two Cyclones at 56" of boost was something else.

The helicopters now based at HMAS Albatross have restored to the RAN much of the anti-submarine capability lost when the Tracker squadron was disbanded.

In recent years significant redevelopment has taken place, continuing the operation of HMAS Albatross and recognising its strategic importance as the sole Royal Australian Navy Air Station.

Future pilots, on joining the Navy, do their initial new entry officers' course at HMAS Creswell then are posted to Tamworth NSW to undertake Basic Flying Training (120 working days) in CT4 trainers. *(Would someone please explain to me why ADF pilots are now trained in RAAF aircraft, by civvies at a civvy airport – and not at Point Cook!!! - tb)*



On completion of BFTS, graduates proceed to 2FTS at Pearce to continue training (170 working days) on PC9 trainers then to 723 Sqn at Albatross to conduct rotary conversion on Squirrel helicopters. After that, they are then posted to either Seahawk or Sea King squadrons for type conversion.

Sailors that will work on the aircraft do their rookies at HMAS Cerberus, on Western Port Bay, about 70 kilometres south east of Melbourne. They are then posted to the RAAF School of Technical Training at Wagga for a period of 12 months then up to Albatross where they are posted to a squadron to learn the aircraft.

One of the first areas to which we were taken was the Memorial to the four 817 Sqn persons who lost their lives in the Sea King accident which occurred on Nias Island (Indonesia) in April 2005.



The accident occurred while the aircraft was making a normal approach to land on a local sports ground after having provided humanitarian support following a devastating [earthquake](#) which occurred in the region on the 25th March 2005. A Defence Board of Inquiry later found that the primary cause of the accident was due to a failure of the aircraft's flight control systems as a result of a series of errors and generally poor maintenance on the aircraft.

Nine personnel died in the accident, including three members of the RAAF.

Those killed were:

- Lieutenant Paul Kimlin - *Pilot and aircraft captain.*
- Lieutenant Jonathan King - *Co pilot*
- Lieutenant Matthew Goodall - *Tactical coordinator*
- Leading Seaman Scott Bennet - *Utility aircrewman*
- Squadron Leader Paul McCarthy - *RAAF Medical Officer*
- Lieutenant Matthew Davey - *RANR Medical Officer*
- Flight Lieutenant Lynne Rowbottom - *RAAF Nursing Officer*
- Petty Officer Stephen Slattery - *Navy Medical Assistant*
- Sergeant Wendy Jones - *RAAF Medical Assistant*



Two personnel survived the crash: Navy Leading Seaman Shane Warburton, and Air Force Corporal Scott Nichols.

The Board of Enquiry found that the crash was survivable and that deficiencies in the seating, restraint systems and the cabin configuration contributed to the deaths of seven of the occupants who appeared to have survived the initial impact. The primary cause of the accident was found to be due to a failure in the flight control systems, specifically a separation of the fore/aft bell-crank from the pitch control linkages in the aircraft's mixing unit. The failure in the flight control systems was ultimately found to be caused by systematic errors and deficiencies in the maintenance program employed by 817 Squadron at the time of the accident. The maintenance activity which lead to the accident occurred 57 days before the accident.

The Board made 256 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the Department and were fully implemented by October 2008.

After leaving the Memorial, the one thing we did notice was the amount of construction being undertaken at the Base. New accommodation and messing buildings have been built and current projects include replacing old and out-dated engineering services infrastructure and training facilities.



As is the norm at ADF bases these days, in most cases living on-base is no longer mandatory, if you want to live off base you can. What is also different is on-base accommodation is no longer arranged by the base Orderly Room but by Defence Housing Australia (DHA). If you're posted to a base you go on line ([HERE](#)), log in then fill in your accommodation preferences.

If you select an on-base accommodation, you will be issued with a "Licence to Live In" – see [HERE](#). This licence gives you certain privileges and responsibilities such as:

- A lockable room that is suitable for your rank and situation. Exception: Barracks or shared accommodation may not be lockable.



- Access to common areas and facilities at the living-in accommodation.
- Privacy to use the assigned room and facilities, without unreasonable interference by Defence. Exception: Barracks or shared accommodation will not be private. (*What?? No more panics?? - tb*)
- Maintenance and repair of the living-accommodation provided in a timely manner.

The Navy calls the on base living quarters “the Cabins”, with the Officers and Senior NCO’s block being referred to as the Wardroom. Corporals and below live in Cabins in the “Ship’s Company”. Males and females share bathrooms and toilets.

Of course, living in is no longer free, you have to pay for it. The ADF have produced a booklet which they call the “Pay and Conditions Manual” (PACMAN) which was written in such a way that no-one can really understand it. The scale of fees payable to live on-base can be found [HERE](#). If you’re the equivalent of a corporal or below, you pay \$90.59 a fortnight for a single room, if you’re a Flt/Lt or equivalent, you pay \$115.22 – considering the standard of accommodation being offered these days it’s pretty cheap really.



Officers and Senior Sailors take their meals in the Combined Mess with cooking undertaken by a Defence Primary Support Contractor. Meals are served three times per day with a great selection on offer.



All junior sailors living on-base take their meals in the Junior Sailors cafeteria where meals are served three times per day. They say a wide variety of wholesome and tasty food is on offer with at least three main choices at every meal including a vegetarian option. Unfortunately, due to the Rear Admiral's visit, we were not able to get a look inside the Mess, or to sample the meals, but from the outside it looked pretty good.



Junior Sailor's Mess.

Like most major bases, Albatross has an on-base medical centre which provides a full range of services including Dental, Physiotherapy, X-Rays, Pathology, etc. It is the Navy's major Health provider in the region and supports personnel at HMAS Creswell as well as the Naval Air Squadrons, the Parachute Training School, the Hydrographic Office and Lodger Units.

At present there are about 1300 uniforms at Albatross, as well as 600 civvy workers, so you can bet the hospital is one busy place.



The Medical Centre, HMAS Albatross.

For a Base that operates predominately helicopters, it is huge. There are two runways, 03/21 which is 6,713 ft long, and 08/26 which is 6,870 ft long. (*Williamtown's runway 12/30 is 7,999 ft long*).



When Navy acquired its first helicopter landing dock ship, the HMAS Canberra, (28th November 2014), a section of the airfield was painted out to resemble the landing area on the ship. Navy pilots and aircraft handlers use the painted out area to practice landing on and handling aircraft as if on the ship itself.

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The Canberra, which was built in Spain, is 230 metres long, 32 metres wide and when fully loaded, weighs 27,500 tonnes. It is the largest ship the Navy has ever had.

Canberra normally carries 8 helicopters but has space for another 10 in its hangars. It is manned by 358 personnel, of which 293 are Navy, 62 are Army and 3 are RAAF. If necessary, it can transport 1045 fully equipped troops and can carry up to 110 vehicles at over 20 knots. A sister ship, HMAS Adelaide, is in production and when delivered in 2016 will allow Navy to retire the old Tobruk, Kanimbla and Manoora.

The ships will be “based” at Fleet Base East in Sydney and will operate out of Townsville, the home of the 2nd Battalion, RAR, on a regular basis.



Army Parachute training complex.

The Parachute Training School (PTS) is an Australian Army training unit based at Albatross. It trains people silly enough to leave perfectly serviceable aircraft in parachuting techniques, developing parachute doctrine and techniques, trial-evaluation of parachute systems and associated equipment.

The School was originally formed in 1951 as the RAAF's Parachute Training Wing at Williamstown but the RAAF are not silly enough to willingly leave a serviceable aircraft in flight, so in 1974 the school was handed over to the Army – who are.

The school was renamed Parachute Training School, under command of Lieutenant Colonel [Harry Smith](#), the Officer Commanding of D Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (D Coy, 6RAR) during the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August 1966. The school relocated to HMAS Albatross in 1986 and has continued its role there until the present.





Unfortunately, Dallas had to leave us and attend to the Rear Admiral, so we were handed over to Keith Boundy for a tour of the Museum. Keith has a radio background, having done his apprenticeship with AWA. In 1979 he was AWA's Test Equipment Calibration Manager at Albatross then in 1993 he moved over to BAE Systems as their Avionics Workshop Supervisor, still at Albatross. In 1999 he was offered the Logistics Engineering Analyst position with SMA – a position he holds today.



Dallas McMaugh and Keith Boundy.

He joined the RAN Reserve in 1991 and was commissioned in 2007. He has been with the Museum since 1979 and today is their Duty Reserve Manager.

He's still current with the AVO and scope iron and looks after avionics on both HARS' and the Museum's aircraft.

The Museum is housed in a huge 6,000 m², two-storey building. It contains an exhibition centre, souvenir shop, function centre, theatre and airfield viewing platform and is open seven days a week, 10.00am to 4.00pm, except for New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas and Boxing Days. Pre-booked guided tours are also available for bus groups at no extra cost.

Entry costs are:

| | |
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| Adults | \$10 |
| Children under 16 | Free |
| Defence members | Free (on presentation of ID card) |

Back in 1974 a team of Navy Volunteers obtained a small collection of naval aviation relics and five obsolete RAN aircraft and decided to put them on show – the museum was born. Today it is the largest regional aviation museum in NSW, containing over 30 aircraft and numerous aviation artefacts. Back in the 1980's, over \$8m was raised through both corporate and private donors and material was donated from building companies which enabled the building of the complex.

On the 1st September 2006 the Chief of Navy, VADM Russ Shalders AO, CSC, RAN accepted ownership and management of the Museum on behalf of the Royal Australian Navy, announcing its new name as the Fleet Air Arm Museum. An enthusiastic team of volunteers maintains the Museum and contributes significantly to its operations. Volunteers are drawn mostly from the local community and former Navy personnel and they work in teams. The Museum is always looking for additional volunteers, if you are interested in becoming part of this team, contact the Museum on (02) 4424 1920.



Aircraft on display include:

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[CAC Winjeel](#)

[Dragonfly](#)

[Fairey Firefly](#)

[Douglas C-47](#)

[Fairey Gannet T.2/T.5](#)

[Skyhawk](#)

[Jindivik](#)

[Sea Vampire](#)

[Iroquois UH-1H](#)

[Westland Scout AH-1](#)

[Bristol Sycamore HR50/51](#)

[Sea Otter](#)

[Sopwith Pup](#)

[Sea Fury](#)

[Fairey Gannet AS1/4](#)

[Grumman Tracker](#)

[Sea Venom](#)

[Kalkara](#)

[Macchi](#)

[Iroquois UH-1B/1C](#)

[Wessex](#)

[Sea King](#)



Fairey Firefly.

The Fairey Firefly was a British Second World War-era carrier-borne fighter and anti-submarine aircraft. It entered operational service towards the end of the war and was designed around the concept of a two-seat fleet reconnaissance/fighter with the pilot and navigator/weapons officer housed in separate stations. The design proved to be sturdy, long-ranging and docile in carrier operations, although the limitations of a single engine in a heavy airframe reduced overall



performance. They were flown by the naval air arms of the UK, Australia, Canada, India, and the Netherlands

Australia Fireflies flew ground attack operations off various aircraft carriers in the Korean War. A total of 1702 Fireflys were built, of which the RAN had 108.



Fairey Gannet AS1/4

The Fairey Gannet was developed for the Royal Navy in 1949 to meet their anti-submarine warfare requirements. It was a mid-wing monoplane with a tricycle undercarriage and a crew of three. It was powered by an Armstrong Siddeley double turboprop engine driving two contra-rotating propellers. The engine could run on kerosene, "wide-cut" turbine fuel or diesel fuel, allowing the Navy to eliminate the dangerous high-octane 130/145 Avgas required to operate piston-engined aircraft from carriers.

The RAN ordered 36 of these aircraft and they operated from the carrier HMAS Melbourne and from Albatross. First delivered in 1955, they were retired in August 1967.

Navy had 4 of these old Gooney work-horses, which they used as navigation trainers and for general transport. This particular aircraft was originally built for the USAAF but was transferred to the RAAF in March, 1944. In 1949, it was transferred to the RAN.

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As it was required as a flying classroom to train Sea Venom and Fairey Gannet observers, a Sea Venom radar was fitted in the peculiar nose and a Gannet radar was fitted in a retractable "dustbin" in the belly. In 1976 it was withdrawn from service and donated to the Museum.

Then it was time to leave the base and try and have a look through HMAS Creswell. We'd like to thank Dallas McMaugh who, under difficult circumstances, made us feel very welcome and gave us as good a look-around as could be arranged and also to Keith Boundy who gave us the royal tour of the museum. If you're in the area, make sure you drop in, it is a first class tourist attraction and a visit is highly recommended.





Creswell is about 30 minute drive from Albatross, and is located on the south-western shores of Jervis Bay and surrounded by the Booderee National Park. It is listed on the National Register as a significant heritage site and a quarter of HMAS Creswell's buildings are heritage listed.

Parliament selected the site of Captain's Point, Jervis Bay, for the Royal Australian Naval College (RANC) in November 1911. This site is the cradle of the Australian Navy. Construction of the main college buildings was completed in 1915 and the first two entries of cadet midshipmen moved from the temporary college at Geelong in February 1915. The first graduation in 1916 included Midshipmen Collins and Farncomb, both of whom later gained flag rank.

Funding cuts driven by the Great Depression forced the closure of the Naval College in 1930, which then relocated to HMAS Cerberus in Victoria. The buildings were leased as hotels and guesthouses, although Navy retained use of the waterfront and some married quarters. From 1944 to 1946 the RAAF 2nd Military Rehabilitation Unit was housed in some of the college buildings.

From the early 1950s it became clear that Flinders Naval Depot was becoming overcrowded and in 1956, the government decided to return the College to its original site. This was achieved in January 1958 and the site was commissioned as HMAS Creswell, after VADM Sir William Creswell, KCMG, KBE, the First Naval Member of the Naval Board (Chief of Navy) from 1911 to 1919.



In 1987, the Staff Training School was established at HMAS Creswell. Now known as the Advanced Leadership and Management Faculty (ALMF), the school conducts the Junior Officer Leadership, Management and Strategic Studies courses, and both phases of the Senior Sailor Advanced Staff Skills course. In 1993, the RAN School of Survivability and Ship's Safety was relocated to Jervis Bay and HMAS Creswell became the lead establishment for firefighting, damage control, and nuclear, biological and chemical defence training.

As part of a large national park and in recognition of its historical significance, Creswell was placed on the Australian Heritage Commission's National Estate register in 1981. Creswell consists of the RAN College and four other departments.

1. The School of Survivability and Ship's Safety teaches fire-fighting, damage control and nuclear, biological and chemical defence.
2. Kalkara Flight provides a remotely controlled jet target for anti-aircraft operations around Australia, and is based at Jervis Bay airfield.
3. The Beecroft Weapons Range across the peninsula offers targets for Naval Gunfire Support practice.



4. The fourth department provides administrative support for all sections operating out of Creswell.

Unfortunately we timed our visit to Creswell very badly too, for starters it was late Friday afternoon (enough said) and secondly as the base was in Safe Base Charlie mode, the civvy guard at the gate politely but firmly informed us that without an escort we had two hopes (Nunn and Buckleys) of getting in.

We would say though that Creswell would be a swan posting. It is small, on the water, no annoying aircraft or smelly old boats to work on, wonderful old buildings and a training base – possibly a bit like Brookvale used to be.

We didn't get on to have a look through but you can drive around the bay and see the base on the southern shore.

