

In the hills of the Broulee hinterland earlier this month, a bugler played The Last Post as one of Australia's great airmen was farewelled. Air Vice-Marshal Frederick William Barnes, who died aged 93, would have been humbled by the F/A-18 Hornet that flew over just as his funeral ended.

Barnes was a respected fighter pilot who ended his stellar career as deputy chief of the Royal Australian Air Force in 1981. The late Air Vice-Marshal Fred Barnes, a decorated Korean War fighter pilot.



Born and educated in Melbourne, he joined the RAAF in 1943. After training at Narrandera and Uranquinty on Tiger Moths and Wirraways, he gained his wings in September 1944. He spent some time flying Wirraways to train air gunners before being posted to 77 Squadron at Morotai (now in Indonesia) to fly Kittyhawks.

After moving to Labuan Island (now in Malaysia) just before the war ended, Barnes joined the operations against the Japanese, including covering the reoccupation of Kuching. He was promoted to pilot officer in November 1945. He then switched to flying Mustangs before moving to Bofu, Japan, in March 1946 as part of the allied nations' Occupation Force.

During a stint in the Ceremonial Guard in Tokyo, Barnes met Pamela, who would become his wife of nearly 70 years. They married in Tokyo in 1949. After a brief posting back to Australia, Barnes was sent to RAAF Base Richmond to prepare to return to 77 Squadron in Japan. The Korean War had begun.

His first operational flight in that conflict was in July 1950. During sorties in September, ground fire holed his Mustang's wing and main oil tank. The squadron

moved to Hamhung in North Korea, from where they operated at night and with snow-covered runways – conditions new to the Australian pilots. The enemy made a major breakthrough in late November and the squadron was forced to evacuate back to Pusan in South Korea.

Barnes' operations continued until March 1951; he had clocked up 100 missions over Korea. The milestone was a first for 77 squadron and he marked it by arranging his 100th sortie with another of his squadron's pilots, so they completed their 100th missions at the same time. Barnes received Britain's distinguished flying cross and the US Air Force's military medal for his contribution in Korea.

On returning to Australia, Barnes was posted to Woomera with the RAAF's aircraft research and development unit in 1951, where, as a test pilot, he worked on the Jindivik project, the early days of developing what we now call drones.

He then went on an exchange with the US Air Force in California before becoming his squadron's operations officer. A posting back to Williamtown, outside Newcastle, followed, where he commanded the about-to-be-reformed 3 Squadron, which was to be equipped with the new Australian F-86 Sabres. When the entire Department of Air moved to Canberra, he relocated to the capital, too. Barnes became commanding officer of 2 Occupational Conversion Unit at Williamtown, delivering the first Mirage 111O to Australia in 1964. He then returned to Canberra.

With their two sons in boarding school, Barnes, Pamela and their two daughters moved to Paris from 1968 to 1968, where he was the Australian embassy's defence attache. Other postings followed, including to Butterworth, Malaysia, and to London, to study at the Royal College of Defence Studies.

He returned to Australia to become director-general of personnel, moved again to Williamtown as the base's commanding officer, and then to Support Command in Melbourne, his home town, where he was the air officer commanding. His last appointment was in 1979 as deputy chief of air staff in Canberra. He stayed in that role until he retired.

During his 38 years of service, Barnes flew 36 different military aircraft, a tally unlikely to be matched today. They ranged from training aircraft to cargo planes to fighter jets. His favourite, though, was the Mustang.

His final RAAF flight was in a dual Mirage IIID in 1981, from Fairbairn, Canberra, to Williamtown for his dining-out night.

Barnes retired to Tweed Heads, where he and Pamela stayed for two decades. He was previously involved with the Heart Foundation when in Canberra and Legacy in the Tweed region. He revelled in the warmer climate, buying a boat and working on his golf handicap. However, he and his wife later settled in the NSW South Coast to be closer to their family.

Barnes is survived by Pamela, their four children – Fred jnr, Rob, Kathie Thackray and Deborah Hicks – 10 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.