FROM PAST TO FUTURE: THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE OF LAND/AIR OPERATIONS

THE ODD COUPLE: ARMY/AIR FORCE RELATIONS

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Early in 1988 the then-Brigadier John Baker presented a study into Australian Defence Force command arrangements to the chief of the defence force.[1] Among other things, the Baker report examined the role of air power on the modern battlefield. Few Australian studies have addressed this complex and sometimes contentious topic more thoughtfully.

It has been the advent of air power, the report argued, with its influence on all forms of military operations, which has been the greatest complicating factor in present day command arrangements. While noting that of the three services it is the RAAF which is most likely to retain single-service operational roles, Brigadier Baker also acknowledged that it has been 'air' which has given 'rise to the inexorable trend towards joint operations'. In the past, the Australian Defence Force has not been immune from the tensions implicit in those two observations.

The Baker report then commented on the extent to which air power is understood within the Australian military. According to the report, the proper use of air forces has not been well understood and air power has often been misapplied. In a telling passage, Brigadier Baker sheeted home much of the blame for that situation onto the RAAF:

> In part, Air Forces themselves are to blame for any dearth of understanding. There are few scholars adding to the strategic debate; there is little written doctrine. Too often air power is portrayed as an end in itself rather than the pervasive influence on all forms of operations ... The only long term remedy is for Air Force to provide exemplary support in all its forms; to itself understand the importance of its contribution to success in all forms of operations on land, sea or in the air. In turn, it must educate others in the effective use of all air assets.[2]

The attention the RAAF has paid to its history and doctrine since 1988, initially under the leadership of Air Marshal RG Funnell, suggests that General Baker's exhortation has been taken to heart. It is noteworthy that three of the speakers at this conference are present or past members of the RAAF's Air Power Studies Centre, while the research conducted by a fourth speaker into air liaison activities during the Second World War was partly sponsored by the APSC.[3]

Through its use of such phrases as 'dearth of understanding', 'little written doctrine' and the need for a 'long term remedy', the Baker report implied that things have not necessarily always been well in Air Force/Army relations. Interestingly, the friction that has arisen has in general been most pronounced in peacetime. That should not be surprising. The circumstances which foster inter-service rivalry—the competition for resources, influence and status—are almost certainly going to be exaggerated during times of constrained budgets and public disinterest; that is, in peacetime.

The RAAF was formed after the First World War and for the first 20 years of its existence had a very difficult time, primarily at the hands of the Australian Army. The generals had opposed the establishment of an independent air arm in 1921, and continued to do so actively into the 1930s. In 1925 the Chief of the General Staff, Sir Harry Chauvel, was still insisting that it was never the intention of the government for the Air Force to be 'coequal to the other two services', and that he could not envisage any situation in which the RAAF would be employed independently of the other two services against a seaborne attack on Australia; while in 1929 Sir John Monash and Sir Brudenell White were urging at a Council of Defence meeting that 'the Air Force was an arm and not a separate service ... no independent sphere of action for the Air Force existed in the Great War nor did it exist in Australian defence'.[4] A particularly

strong anti-RAAF move emerged in 1929, when there was a genuine possibility that the Air Force would be dismembered. With the government of Prime Minister JH Scullin trying to manage the economic depression, a proposal was formally made to split the RAAF between the other two services. Chief of the Air Staff Sir Richard Williams later wrote that the campaign against the RAAF was 'supported by the Navy and General Monash', and but for the 'foresight of Messrs Scullen (sic) and Theodore ... the move would have been successful'.[5] The campaign was continued when the Lyons Government assumed office in 1932. Cabinet eventually decided that the RAAF should be retained and, according to Air Marshal Williams, after the mid-1930s the existence of the Air Force was not again threatened'.[6]

In the context of this conference, and of trying to understand Air Force attitudes, it is important to remember the Army's open hostility in those early years, just as it is important to remember that the Australian Army has never had to confront threats to its survival, particularly those originating from supposed 'comrades in arms'.

In addition to fraternal hostility, for the first decade of its existence the RAAF had to struggle along with less than 10% of the defence budget. Consequently, institutional survival rather than operational effectiveness tended to occupy the thinking of the Air Force's leaders.[7] At the start of the war with Germany, every one of the RAAF's 246 aircraft was obsolescent. The order of battle did not include a single front-line fighter or strike aircraft. Those Army commanders who later complained about inadequate air defence and close air support when the war in the Pacific began might well have directed their dissatisfaction at the pre-war generals rather than at the wartime air marshals.

Notwithstanding those difficulties—which were by no means confined to air/land operations, but which were evident in many aspects of Australia's early war effort—the RAAF and the Army worked together very effectively during the Second World War. Of course there was the occasional failure, but overwhelmingly Australian soldiers received blue ribbon service from their nation's air arm. So dominant were Australian and American air forces in the southwest Pacific that after 1943 allied surface forces were rarely attacked by enemy aircraft. Further, those surface forces benefited enormously from the almost total superiority gained by the RAAF and USAAF in reconnaissance, resupply, strike and close support. The Japanese, on the other hand, suffered enormously from the constant strafing and bombing, the interdiction of their supplies, and the observation of their activities.

That pattern of initial teething troubles followed by air dominance in all its forms was repeated in the subsequent major Australian military actions in Malaya, Korea and Vietnam. Joint operations in those conflicts have been the subject of earlier papers in this conference and do not need further detailed discussion here, although aspects of the Vietnam experience will be raised later. For the purposes of this paper, developments during peacetime after 1945 throw more light on the nature of Army/RAAF relations. Initially the partnership was highly productive. Responding to the lessons of the Second World War, in 1947 a Joint Air/Land Warfare Committee which reported to CAS and CCS was formed.[8] Simultaneously the school of army cooperation which had been established at RAAF Station Canberra late in 1941 to train Air Intelligence Liaison Officers and RAAF pilots in air/ground procedures was used as the foundation of the School of Air Support which was formed at Laverton on 22 January 1947. Subsequently renamed the School of Land/Air Warfare, the unit had an Air Force commandant but its staff of 10 officers was drawn from each of the three services.[9] Initially intended to operate for only 18 months while the principles of joint operations were agreed to and published and a number of officers trained, the school was found to be 'most valuable'.

In 1948 the school was relocated to RAAF Station Williamtown, which had suitable facilities (buildings, lecture rooms and hangars) and was a good site for 'triphibious' warfare training. Shortly after the move parachute and air portability training wings were added. Courses conducted included air support (army/air force operations), forward air control, ground liaison duties, planning for joint exercises, and parachuting. On most courses the students were drawn about equally from the Air Force and Army. In addition to their instructional duties, the school's staff planned, observed and analysed joint exercises conducted by RAAF and Army operational units.

The School of Land/Air Warfare's early success was followed by something of a flat spot during the 1950s, when interest and student numbers both fell. In 1958 the school's declining status was reflected in its change of name to the Air Support Unit. The pre-eminence of joint operations in South Vietnam exposed the short-sightedness of that attitude. A review of the Air Support Unit conducted by the Land/Air Warfare Committee (previously the Air/Land Warfare Committee) in 1966 recommended expanding and modernising the unit's syllabus. Numerous problems were identified, the most serious being the omission of naval activities from joint doctrine and training. The commandant was instructed to incorporate lectures on naval gunfire support, amphibious warfare and land-based air support for naval units in future courses, as well as paying special attention to joint warfare in Southeast Asia.[10] With strong backing from the RAAF's Director-General of Operational Requirements, Air Commodore RT Susans, agreement was reached to reorganise the Air Support Unit as a Joint Warfare School, with an expanded role in developing doctrine. In the mid-1970s the responsibilities of the Air Support Unit were increased to prepare for its planned transformation into the Australian Joint Warfare Establishment.[11]

The evolution of AJWE (later renamed the Australian Defence Force Warfare Centre) has been one of the minor success stories of Australia's post-war defence forces. Unfortunately that success has not always been mirrored in other endeavours. In particular, Army/Air Force relations over the command and control of battlefield aircraft has too often been acerbic, even hostile. It is an episode from which neither party emerges with credit and which on occasions has damaged the well-being and operational effectiveness of the Australian Defence Force.

The flashpoint was, of course, the decision taken in 1986 by Defence Minister Kim Beazley to transfer ownership of the Blackhawk battlefield helicopters from the RAAF to the Army. It is not an overstatement to say that the decision traumatised the senior levels of the RAAF and left a legacy of bitterness which is still apparent in some quarters today. The path to the Blackhawk decision was tortuous and unedifying.

The RAAF's original raison d'etre was to support the other two services, especially the land forces. As the Second World War, Korea, Malaya and Vietnam subsequently demonstrated, Western armies came to regard battlefield air support as essential. At the same time, however, the rapid evolution of the fight to command the air and of air strike had led many air strategists in other directions. The tendency for airmen to focus on the alleged 'war winning' components of their business—namely, fighters and bombers—was understandable but short-sighted. Notwithstanding the natural appeal of the roles which made air power unique, the demands of modern warfare and the politics of inter-service relations made it vital for the RAAF to give the Army high quality battlefield support. Too often that support was lacking.

In 1950 the RAAF accepted responsibility for acquiring and maintaining light aircraft for army Air Observation Post (AOP) duties, and established No 16 Air Operations Flight at RAAF Station Canberra, equipped with six Austers. The flight was fully supported by the Air Force, with RAAF executives and maintenance facilities, but the line pilots eventually were to come from the Army. The flight's two basic tasks were AOP cooperation and Army pilot training. However, forming the unit was one thing, doing the job properly another. According to the Army, No 16 Flight rarely met its commitments. Requests for AOP missions were only occasionally satisfied, the flight was 'hard pressed' to train the four pilots the Army needed annually, and its aircraft were obsolete.[12] Air Force leaders seemed to treat those legitimate grievances with indifference. Following a review by the air staff in 1958 which confirmed the Auster's obsolescence and validated Army's stated peacetime requirement for 18 AOP aircraft, the Air Board refused to fund more than eight replacement Cessna 180s, even though the total cost for each aircraft, including spares, freight and handling, was a relatively trifling £13,750.[13] Requests from the Army to supplement the Cessnas with helicopters were simply ignored.

Administrative indifference was accompanied by operational insensitivity. In 1958 the RAAF's Director of Operations, Group Captain WE Townsend, berated Army aviators for their allegedly high accident rate,[14] conveniently forgetting that at a similar early stage of development the pre-war Air Force had itself experienced an unhappy series of crashes. Several years later Air Vice Marshal F Headlam repeated that performance during a visit to an

Army aviation unit, giving an address described by one Army pilot as 'probably the most insulting' he had ever heard.[15] Headlam seemed to represent a generally held Air Force view that unless aeroplanes were fast and loud, they and their pilots were second-rate. Army aircraft may have been slow and quiet, but their operations at tree-top level in hot, turbulent conditions were demanding and inherently far more dangerous than those of some Air Force jet squadrons. What was needed was professional encouragement, not disdain.

A crucial document in the history of Army/Air Force relations appeared from the Department of the Army on 30 July 1957. Titled 'Light Aircraft Support for the Army', the paper presented a forceful case for the Army to assume full responsibility for tactical air support.[16] According to the paper, the Second World War and Korea had shown that light aircraft were essential to the 'proper functioning' of a modern army in both peace and war, and that consequently the Army should be responsible for the 'procurement, operation and maintenance of such fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft as [were] required'.[17] The paper noted that light aircraft had been organic to the United States Army for a number of years, and that only five months previously the British Government had transferred responsibility for AOP and light liaison aircraft from the RAF to the Army. In essence, Army's argument rested on the notion that some air power roles had become so important to land operations that the units which provided those services had to be considered integral to armies. Implicit in that judgment was the belief that air forces (or at least the RAAF) could not always be relied upon to provide the necessary support when, where, and in the quantities required.

The Army suggested that because the RAAF'S leadership was focused on what was flatteringly described as 'the formidable problems' associated with acquiring, operating and maintaining high performance aircraft of advanced design, the needs of light aircraft inevitably would receive a low priority. Acknowledging the RAAF's past assistance, the paper concluded with the assurance that the Army had no intention of competing with the other services in providing air power for the defence of Australia, any more than the RAAF competed with the Navy by operating its own marine craft (which were used for search and rescue at some flying bases) or with the Army by operating trucks. The overriding issues were the Army's increasing requirement for light aircraft, and the generals' reasonable ambition to control the means necessary for their force to carry out 'indispensable aspects' of a modern army in peace and war.

Inter-service suspicions cut across the debate from the start. Briefing the CAS, Air Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, on the Army paper, Group Captain WH Gibson advised against presenting the matter to the Joint Planning Committee, where the Navy was 'certain to line up with the Army—therefore such action should be avoided'.[18] Whether Gibson's advice represented anything more than a knee-jerk reaction to a perceived attack on the RAAF's status was unclear. What was clear from experience in the United States and the United Kingdom was that armies could muster a fair case for organic light aircraft support. The big difference in Australia was size: could a small country afford three air forces? During a previous discussion on Army aviation in 1956, Minister for Air Athol Townley had rhetorically asked the Air Board: 'We now have two air forces, are we to have three? If the Army is to come up to date it will need AOP aircraft, of course, and perhaps odd others. The RAAF is the air arm, and should not agree to any—even the smallest part, going from its control'.[19] Townley's approach was organisationally, economically and doctrinally sound. It did not, however, suggest that the RAAF should ride rough-shod over the Army's legitimate needs. The interests of both the Air Force and Australian defence would be best served if the RAAF made every effort to support the Army in the way the Army wanted, not the way the RAAF found the least troublesome or the least threatening.

Air power doctrine was the issue which should have been occupying the Air Board's collective mind. Air Marshal Scherger and his colleagues should have been concerned that the doctrinal principle of 'unity' was under serious threat, as well as the RAAF's position as the prime provider of Australian military air power. It had been an article of faith in Western air forces since the First World War that the control of aircraft should be centralised. Only through centralised control could a commander exploit the unique characteristics of the air weapon—flexibility, speed, range and striking power—and be in a position to apply the right amount of force in the right place at the right time. Any attempt to allocate scarce air power assets to

individual commanders—to 'penny packet'—would undermine the maxim of unity and confound the flexibility which is perhaps air power's greatest asset. Yet 'penny packeting' was precisely what the Army intended doing in response to the RAAF's perceived failure to provide the necessary degree of support. The Air Force's leaders seemed not to have grasped the point.

The belief that the generals had a reasonable case was shared by the Defence Committee when it considered the Army paper in 1960.[20] Approval was given for the Army to own and operate light aircraft up to 1820 kilograms gross weight in the roles of command and control, artillery observation, liaison and communication, air dispatch letter service, message dropping, photograph delivery, reconnaissance, cable laying, freight delivery and supply dropping. By stipulating a weight limit, the committee intended preventing any attempt by the Army to exceed its charter by branching out into other roles such as troop transport, resupply and armed close air support.[21]

Because the Army had neither the flying supervisory nor technical skills needed to satisfy defence standards, the generals planned to build their independent aviation skills on the foundations of No 16 Air Operations Flight, with the Air Force retaining major responsibilities for many years. Thus, when No 16 Army Light Aircraft Squadron (ALA) was formed at RAAF Base Amberley in December 1960 with 14 fixed-wing and 11 rotarywing aircraft, it was an integrated unit with 72 Army and 65 RAAF personnel. The commanding officer was Wing Commander KV Robertson, a graduate of the Empire Test Pilots School and the RAAF's first helicopter pilot in 1947, all aircraft technicians were RAAF airmen, and all pilots were Air Force-trained. The RAAF remained responsible for procuring aircraft, maintenance standards, technical publications, flying safety, accident investigation, meteorological services and air traffic control.[22]

From the outset the Army appeared determined to demonstrate a fundamentally different approach towards military flying. An air force's pilots are its elite, enjoying a status within their own service much greater than that accorded by an army to its infantrymen and a navy to its seamen. The Australian Army, however, initially did not accept aviation as a career path in itself, instead insisting that their pilots would be drawn from the traditional corps (infantry, artillery, armour and so on) for a limited period before resuming their careers in those 'real' military branches. It is tempting to speculate that in adopting that approach, in dismissing its pilots as just another group of part-time artisans who existed only to serve the combat corps, the Army was deliberately thumbing its nose at the Air Force. The stance was taken against the strong advice of the Director of Air Force Policy, Group Captain JF Lush, who told the Army that such an *ad hoc* approach would impede the development of a group of pilots with sufficient worthwhile experience to become good flight or other commanders.[23] The RAAF may have treated its Army support responsibilities casually in the past, but most of its senior officers did know a lot about military aviation. Over time the logic of Lush's argument became apparent and the Army started to recruit officers on short-service commissions solely as pilots.

By September 1964 Army aviation had grown to 15 fixed-wing and 27 rotary-wing aircraft and 304 personnel (including 78 from the RAAF), and further expansion was certain. At this stage the RAAF began to look for ways to remove itself completely from any operational involvement with No 16 ALA, an ambition the Army encouraged. CAS Air Marshal Alister Murdoch was eager for the disassociation to happen as quickly as possible so he could 'get [his] technical people back onto RAAF tasks'. The two parties agreed that the RAAF would train sufficient Army tradesmen to permit all Air Force corporals and below to return to their parent service by January 1968.[24] A small number of RAAF senior NCOs would remain, with the timing of their withdrawal dependent on the progress made by junior Army tradesmen. In fairness to Murdoch, while his heart may not have been in the Army task, the Air Force consistently staffed No 16 ALA to 100% of its approved level, compared to 88% for RAAF operational squadrons.[25]

While the RAAF worked to remove itself from No 16 ALA'S activities as much as possible, organisational changes were ensuring that Army's demand for air support in other areas would continue to grow. Prior to the Vietnam War the regular Army had consisted of about

24,000 personnel structured as a 'Pentropic Division', an organisation intended primarily to fight a limited war. Vietnam prompted not only an increase in numbers to 33,000 but also a reorganisation along divisional lines, with nine infantry battalions backed up by the usual supporting arms and three Task Force headquarters. As far as practicable the new organisation was to be air transportable, a characteristic which was immediately used to place pressure on the Air Force.[26]

In September 1962 Cabinet had approved the purchase of eight heavy lift (later described as medium lift) helicopters to bolster Army's tactical mobility. Because no suitable aircraft was available the project had been deferred. The adoption of the divisional structure revived Army's requirement but not the RAAF'S interest. Frustrated by delays, in 1965 the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir John Wilton, urged the Chiefs of Staff Committee to deal with the matter 'without delay'. However, while large helicopters may have been perceived by the Army as fundamental to land operations, it was the RAAF which was responsible for staffing the proposal, allocating a priority in the air acquisition program, managing the selection and acquisition process, and providing the people, the training, the facilities and the resources to introduce and operate the machines. At the time, the RAAF was introducing into service the Mirage III, the F-111, the C-130E, the P-3 Orion and two radar control and reporting units. The last thing Air Force leaders wanted was another new aircraft type, particularly one which would add nothing to the preferred air power roles of control of the air and strike. Wilton's proposal received an unsympathetic hearing from Air Marshal Murdoch, who recommended deferring the project. His position was supported by the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Scherger, who, while acknowledging the Army's changed organisational arrangements, saw no reason to examine the requirements for air support.[27]

Murdoch and his colleagues simply did not seem to realise that they were jeopardising the RAAF's position as the prime source of Australian air power. One senior officer who did appreciate the full import of what was going on was the Director-General of Operational Requirements, Air Commodore Brian Eaton. In the wake of a stream of well-argued and reasonable submissions from the Army, Eaton attempted to draw Murdoch's attention to the central issue.[28] Noting the rapid growth of Army aviation generally, Eaton pointed to two significant recent developments. First, in an apparent challenge to the 1820 kilogram weight limit agreed to in 1960, the Army was now bidding for 12 twin-engined aircraft; and second, General Wilton wanted to conduct a joint examination with the RAAF of close aerial support systems, a role traditionally performed by air force fighter/ground attack aircraft. Summarising the total Army bid, Eaton advised Murdoch that it was 'clearly the Army's intention to have complete command and control of these [ground attack] aircraft'. The best response, Eaton believed, was for the Air Force to satisfy the Army's legitimate needs by acquiring the types and numbers of aircraft proposed. He then sounded a caution on close air support. The United States Army had recently introduced the term Aerial Fire Support', which Eaton described as a new phrase designed to disguise the fact that they are looking for ways and means of taking over, following the USAF'S failure to provide a simple close support aircraft. Close support, Eaton maintained, was an air force function, but if the RAAF did not meet its responsibilities it would not be long before Army would take over the air roles in the entire tactical battle area.[29]

The growing friction between the RAAF and the Army peaked following the deployment of the 1st Australian Task Force to Nui Dat in mid-1966. For the first three months there were constant and rancorous arguments over the employment of No 9 Squadron's Iroquois helicopters, which had been sent to Vietnam solely to support the ATF. In short, Australian Army commanders believed that the RAAF was not performing to the same standards as United States Army Iroquois units, an alleged failing which the commander of 1ATF, Brigadier OD Jackson, brought home forcefully to Air Marshal Murdoch when the latter visited Nui Dat in August.[30]

Three points regarding the Vietnam experience need to be made here. First, the weight of evidence suggests that in certain key respects No 9 Squadron was not as well prepared as it should have been for war. Second, after those early problems were resolved, it is clear that No 9 Squadron operated more skilfully, more safely and more effectively than any other Iroquois unit in South Vietnam.[31]

And finally, in suggesting that RAAF helicopter squadrons should adopt American practices, the Australian Army was applying a considerable double standard. Australia's first substantial commitment of ground forces to Vietnam, made in 1965, had consisted of one battalion, which was amalgamated with an American brigade. The decision to increase the commitment from battalion to task force size was taken primarily because General Wilton and his senior Army advisers believed United States doctrine was unsuitable. By deploying an independent task force—including RAAF helicopters—Australian troops would be able to employ their own operational concepts and procedures, which were regarded by Australian strategists as superior to United States doctrine in Vietnam.[32] It seems curious that the Australian generals rejected American Army doctrine for ground operations yet endorsed it for air operations, about which they knew comparatively little. Presumably they were also unaware that the United States Army was experiencing worrying problems with its helicopter operations. At the same time as the Australian Army was criticising the RAAF and citing the Americans as the epitome of rotary-wing expertise, a United States Army team was visiting Vung Tau to try to determine why No 9 Squadron's aircraft availability rate was so high, its mission success rate so good, and its loss rate so low.[33]

The commander of the American heavy bomber force in Europe during the Second World War, General Carl Spaatz, once observed in exasperation that soldiers and sailors speak solemnly about the years of experience that go into training a surface commander, thus making it impossible for outsiders to understand their calling. Yet, he continued, they all feel capable of running an air force.[34]

While relations settled down in Vietnam, friction continued to build on the home front when, in 1969, the Army sought to acquire front-line helicopter gunships. Because the RAAF was the operating service, Air staff officers were responsible for developing and managing the bid. In the process, the Air Force showed it had learned little from the unhappy experience with No 9 Squadron in Vietnam three years previously. Army presented a well-argued case for the AH-1G Huey Cobra in preference to the modified UH-1H Iroquois gunships developed by the RAAF, emphasising the Huey Cobra's superior firepower (up to three times greater), weapons delivery accuracy and versatility in the fire support role.[35] As the Army pointed out, it had been precisely the limitations of the Iroquois as a gunship which had prompted the Americans to develop a specialised attack helicopter, namely, the Huey Cobra. Air staff planners dogmatically insisted that the modified Iroquois was 'good enough', even though since its earliest years the RAAF had appreciated the importance of the leading edge in air combat, of always acquiring the best available machines. The application of that philosophy since 1946 had seen the RAAF become the region's most advanced air force. Army commanders were entitled to ask why one standard apparently applied for airmen and another for soldiers.

Those commanders would have found part of their answer in the Air Force's assumed mantle of superiority in all matters aviation; in its long-standing condescension towards Army flying. In this instance political factors were also involved. The Army believed that since Korea, the RAAF'S capability to provide close air support for troops in contact with the enemy had gradually declined. The Sabre fighters which had replaced the Mustangs and Meteors had only a limited ground attack capability, the Mirage was not much better, and Army was concerned that the Mirage's successor 'could well have less'.[36] There was little doubt among the general staff that the RAAF would be most reluctant to use its F111s (once they arrived) in the close air support role. A modern gunship was, therefore, 'more than ever' an Army priority.

This was an unpleasant turn of events for the Air Force. On the one hand, RAAF leaders were understandably cautious about committing extremely expensive fighters which were essential for achieving control of the air to high risk ground attack operations which, in the overall context of a battle, might be relatively unimportant (although not to the soldiers concerned). On the other hand, the air staff invariably cited the RAAF'S formal responsibility for the ground attack role as part of the justification for acquiring high performance fighter aircraft. If that role were transferred to helicopters, the RAAF might find itself struggling the next time it made a bid for a new top-of-the-range fighter/ground attack aircraft. After a good deal of bitterness the dispute lapsed in the wake of the withdrawal from Vietnam, and back in the Australian training environment the modified Iroquois continued to perform the gunship role

competently enough. The exchange had, however, undoubtedly hardened Army's determination to get control of a resource which it considered essential to its operations. Matters were not helped when the air staff expressed fleeting interest in the British Harrier and the American developmental A-X ground attack aircraft without first consulting the Army, an omission which angered the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir Mervyn Brogan.[37]

General Brogan became even angrier when the subject of mapping survey photography was brought to his attention. High quality, up-to-date maps are essential to military operations. The responsibility for mapping in the Australian defence forces rested with the Army Survey Corps, assisted by Air Force photographic services. According to Brogan, in the almost 20 years since the disbandment of No 87 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron in 1953, RAAF support had varied from 'minimal to zero'.[38] Persistent Army requests for aerial photography had been met with indifference, the RAAF claiming that its cameras were unsatisfactory and that in any case 'only a very small, if any, flying effort could be directed to survey work'. Consequently the Army had chartered civilian Beechcraft B80 Queen Air aircraft to do the job. As a means of supplementing the Queen Airs, in 1970 Army sought approval to fit a survey camera to its Pilatus Porter light fixed-wing reconnaissance aircraft. The Porter's limited performance also limited its survey potential: the intention was to use it simply to fill gaps in existing survey photography.[39] Because the RAAF was responsible for airworthiness in the Defence Force, the proposed modification to the Porters had to be submitted to Air Force Office. Once again the Army found itself frustrated as the RAAF, while having notably failed to show any interest in survey work, questioned and delayed the proposed modification because it seemed to fall outside the 'approved' roles of Army aviation. General Brogan had every justification for castigating the RAAF for its contrary behaviour in the face of the Army's attempt at a bit of 'self-help'. Is it any wonder', Brogan wrote, 'that we, the Army, desire to indulge in a little self-help to get our ... work done?'[40] When, under pressure largely of its own making, the Air Force modified a number of Canberra bombers for the aerial survey role in 1972-73 and started to give the Army excellent support (having previously advised that the survey equipment could not be fitted into the Canberra because of weight and airframe configuration problems), it was probably a case of closing the stable door after the horse had bolted.

The incident seemed to be the last straw for the CGS, who in an important policy paper written in 1972 dismissed the RAAF once and for all as a provider of battlefield air support. Brogan's sentiments were uncompromising, indeed almost contemptuous, in their undisguised rejection of Air Force practices and attitudes:

> [Army aviation's] units are organic to field formations and its personnel are soldiers first and aircrew second. They are required to live and work in intimate association with their Army comrades. They must be on hand for quick response and subject to the same routines and disciplinary codes as the rest of the Army. Their environment conditions their outlook and gives them the necessary appreciation of the problems and the requirements of the arms they are supporting. Only soldiers can do this in full.[41]

General Brogan's statement was stronger in polemic than logic, as No 9 Squadron's splendid achievements for more than five years in Vietnam had demonstrated. Similarly, throughout the late 1960s the hours flown by the RAAF's C-130, Caribou and Iroquois fleets on Army support were 42%, 94% and 89% respectively of their total effort;[42] that is, the Caribou and Iroquois squadrons were in effect operating as part of the Army, and the C-130s were making a major contribution to land operations. But flying hours were only part of the equation: it was the RAAF's attitude Army objected to, and would no longer accept.

The formation of the 1st Aviation Regiment at Amberley in April 1966 had in fact already signalled Army's determination to take total control at the least of its battlefield air support, a determination which was given important symbolic and substantive form two years later with the formation of the Army Aviation Corps followed by the construction of an Army Aviation Centre at Oakey, about 100 kilometres from Amberley.[43] Oakey was intended to become the 'hub of Army flying activity', where the soldier-pilots could be trained 'to think and appreciate

situations in an Army environment and manner',[44] free from any dependence on and interference from the Air Force. That was a reasonable objective, albeit expressed somewhat self-indulgently given that the Army would continue to rely on the RAAF for airworthiness, engineering standards, supply and flight safety.

The RAAF's failure to come to terms with its responsibilities to the Army represents the low point of its post-war history. Because this was only one episode of many, it would be unfair to be too critical and to characterise the RAAF's performance generally in the same light. On the contrary, in most other respects the Air Force's performance was one of continual improvement as the foundations of a committed and professional organisation were laid. There were also sound intellectual arguments for the priority given by the RAAF's leaders to the roles of control of the air and strike. Like the Army and the Navy, the Air Force had limited resources and had to direct its efforts towards those activities it believed to be the most important for national security. In that context, it is important to note that in the 50 years since the Second World War—a period which has seen Australia involved in three major conflicts and numerous smaller actions—no Australian soldier has been attacked by enemy aircraft; additionally, those soldiers have almost invariably received abundant aerial resupply and information support, a situation in direct contrast to their enemies'. It is also interesting that there has been a tendency for some soldiers to 'blame' the RAAF for being incapable of maintaining a permanent presence over the battlefield, a circumstance attributable, of course, solely to the Air Forces size and share of resources;[45] by comparison, official histories carry no record of entrenched RAAF criticism of the Army's inability always to protect vital assets, the retreats from airfields in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies in 1941-42 and in Korea in 1950-51 being conspicuous examples.[46]

There is no reason to question the motives of the men who were guiding the RAAF during this troublesome period of inter-service relations or to doubt that they believed that they were acting for the greater good. The point nevertheless should be recorded that every chief of the air staff during the critical years from 1954 to 1969 was a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, with Air Marshal Sir John McCauley the first, followed by Air Marshals Sir Frederick Scherger, Sir Valston Hancock and Sir Alister Murdoch. All had been in the RAAF before 1939 when their service was explicitly subordinated to the Army, and all had participated in the dramatic rise in status enjoyed by air forces during the war. There is no obvious evidence that those experiences sharpened the usual peer and inter-service rivalries, but the possibility must exist. When it came to dealing with the Army there seemed to be a hierarchy of 'doctrine' applied under which 'air force' roles were important and the others were not. If in the process of applying that 'doctrine' the opportunity presented itself to pay back the Army for its ill-considered condescension towards the RAAF in the years before the Second World War, then so much the better.

In fairness to those RMC graduates, the behaviour of postwar senior Army officers was sometimes far from acceptable. The generals' early attempts to demonstrate that military flying was a part-time profession was naive at best, perhaps even childishly self-indulgent, as the eventual establishment of an Aviation Corps staffed by professional aviators tacitly acknowledged; while in the early days in Vietnam some senior Army commanders displayed an inexcusable ignorance of aircraft operations and the air doctrine on which the success or failure of their endeavours might ultimately rest.

Nevertheless, the inability of the Air Force's leaders to understand what had to be done for the Army was a political failure of the first order, a failure which ultimately was to damage the Air Force institutionally. RAAF senior officers were wrong to treat the Army's legitimate needs peremptorily and they were wrong to treat Army aviation patronisingly. It was ironic that each time the RAAF reluctantly met its obligations, whether in the field or through staff work, its people did so with characteristic skill. But by about the late-1960s it probably did not matter how competent the men and women at the working level were. A generation of lieutenant-colonels and majors had come to believe that the RAAF did not care about army support, and they were to carry that belief into the 1970s and beyond.

In summary, until the 1970s at least, Air Force/Army relations frequently fell below the level Australians were entitled to expect. Informal discussions with serving senior officers suggest that a good deal of progress has been made since then, although the debate over the control of battlefield aircraft still seems alive.[47] It would clearly be in the ADF's best interests for that debate to be properly resolved, and for the attitudes it represents to become so benign that instead of demanding the attention of the chiefs of staff, they are of interest only to participants at history conferences.

Endnotes

The research for much of this paper was drawn from Alan Stephens, *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force, 1946-1971*, Canberra, 1995. See especially chapters 15, 'Vietnam', and 16, 'Joint Warfare'.
1. Brigadier JS Baker, 'Report of the Study into ADF Command Arrangements, Headquarters Australian Defence Force, March 1988'.
2. Ibid, pp 4-16/17.
3. Drs Stephens and Mordike are currently members of the APSC and Dr Coulthard-Clark is a former member; while Ms Baker's monograph *More Than Little Heroes* was jointly sponsored by the APSC and the Directorate of Army Research and Analysis.
4. A[ustralian] A[rchives] CRS A5954, Box 787. At the time Chauvel was CGS, while White was his predecessor. Monash had been the Army's most notable commander in the First World War. Monash and White were wrong in their assessment of air operations during the First World War. The fight to control the air represented an 'independent' sphere of operations from 1915 onwards, while both sides conducted strategic bombing attacks, maritime reconnaissance patrols, and the like.
5. Williams Papers, letter, Williams to Drakeford, 2 July 1943, RAAF Museum. Edward Theodore was the Commonwealth treasurer.
6. Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, *These Are Facts*, Canberra, 1977, pp 198-200. See also Williams' Foreword to Department of Air, *The Golden Years*, Canberra, 1971, p xi; and CD Coulthard-Clark, *The Third Brother*, North Sydney, 1991, pp 72-75.
7. See Alan Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude: Ideas, Strategy and Doctrine in the RAAF, 1921-1991*, Canberra, 1991, pp 15-49.
8. AA, CRS A7941, L4, 9 December 1958, Land/Air Warfare Committee.
9. AA, CRS A5954/8, 1509/16, RAAF School Land/Air Warfare, 2 September 1948; AA, CRS A7941/2, A45, Australian Joint Warfare Establishment, 25 November 1966.
10. AA, CRS A7941/2, A45, Australian Joint Warfare Establishment, 25 November 1966.
11. Ibid, 2 April 1971.
12. AA, CRS A7942/1, A199, Air Support for the Army, 30 July 1957.
13. Air Board Agendum 12749,19 June 1958, RAAF Historical Section (RHS).
14. AA, CRS A7942/1, A199, Air Support for the Army, 28 November 1958.
15. Mr Brian Oxley, interview with author, 30 September 1993.
16. AA, CRS A7942/1, A199, Air Support for the Army, 30 July 1957.
17. Ibid.
18. AA, CRS A7942/1, A199, Light Aircraft Support for the Army, 14 August 1957. The JPC was chaired by an officer of air vice marshal rank or equivalent and staffed at air commodore/group captain equivalent. Its function was to advise the Defence Committee and chiefs of staff on operational aspects of defence planning.
19. Air Board Agenda 12567, 9 October 1957, RHS Townley's note was dated 21 September 1956.
20. The Defence Committee advised the Minister for Defence on higher policy and strategy. It was chaired by the secretary of the Department, and might include the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the three service chiefs of staff, and the secretaries of the Treasury, External Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Department.
21. AA, CRS A7941/2, A24, Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, 11 April 1960. The Defence Committee was EW Hicks (secretary, Department of Defence, and chairman); Lieutenant General Sir Henry Walls; Vice Admiral Sir Roy Dowling; and Air Marshal FRW Scherger. MW O'Donnell, an assistant secretary from the Treasury, was also present.
22. AA, CRS A7941/2, A24, Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, 2 June 1960; AA, CRS A7941/2, J6, The Roles of Army Aviation, 29 September 1966.
23. AA, CRS A7941/2, A24, Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, June 1960; AA, CRS A7941/2, H2, Rationalisation of Helicopter Activities in the Services, 17 September 1962.
24. AA, CRS A7941/2, A24, Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, 17 February 1966. 25. Ibid.
26. AA, CRS A7941/2, J6, The Roles of Army Aviation, 16 June 1965. 27. Ibid, 30 July 1965 and August 1965.
28. Ibid, 30 May 1966.
29. Ibid; AA, CRS A7941/2, A24, Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, 29 September 1966.

30. Commanding Officer's Report, No 9 Squadron, August 1966, RHS; see also Lex McAulay, *The Battle of Long Tan*, Milsons Point, 1992, p 17.
31. See Stephens, *Going Solo*, pp 295-97; and Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam*, St Leonards, 1995, pp 132-83.
32. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan*, St Leonards, 1993, p 179.
33. Commanding Officers Report, No 9 Squadron, November 1966, RHS. The US Army lost twice as many helicopters in accidents as it did in combat.
34. Quoted in Phillip S Meilinger, *Ten Propositions Regarding Air Power*, (USAF) Air Force History and Museums Program, 1995, pp 49-50.
35. AA, CRS A7941/1, H1, Armed Helicopters for Fire Support, 3 December 1970.
36. Ibid, 3 and 10 December 1970.
37. Ibid, 20 October 1971. Brogan was CGS from 19 May 1971 to 19 November 1973.
38. AA, CRS A7941/2, J6, The Roles of Army Aviation, 9 August 1972.
39. Ibid, 13 November 1970, 15 March 1971. 40. Ibid, 9 August 1972.
41. Ibid. See also Oxley, interview.
42. AA, CRS A7941/2, A24. Air Support for the Army, Light Aircraft Support, 18 November 1966.
43. AA, CRS A5882/1, C0436, Construction of an Army Aviation Centre at Oakey, Queensland, 4 December 1968.
44. Ibid, 21 November 1968.
45. See, for example, Douglas Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, Canberra, 1962, p 459; McNeill, *To Long Tan*, pp 430-33, and Dr Alan Stephens, 'The Royal Australian Air Force and Amphibious Operations in the South-West Pacific Area', in Lieutenant Colonel C Wahlert (ed), *Australian Amphibious Operations in the Southwest Pacific 1942-45*, Sydney, 1995, p 66.
46. See George Odgers, *Air War Against Japan 1943-1945*, Canberra, 1968; Gillison, *Royal Australian Airforce 1939-1942*; and Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, Vol II, *Combat Operations*, Canberra, 1985.
47. See, for example, AW Grazebrook, 'Caribou Successor Debated', in *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, July/August 1955, p 20, in which the author states: 'Army have denied emphatically to A-PDR that they would like to fly and operate fixed wing Caribou successors'. The mere fact that the denial was considered necessary is evidence of friction over the issue.