

## ***THE KOREAN WAR 1950-53: A 50 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE***

### ***SUCCESS AND FRUSTRATION: THE KOREAN WAR AND AUSTRALIAN LAND/AIR WARFARE*** **Russell Parkin**

Throughout the twentieth century few issues have generated as much inter-service animosity as close air support (CAS). In the First World War it was one of the first types of missions flown by aircraft, but during the inter-war period both armies and air forces largely neglected it. During the Second World War, following the lead of their Axis enemies, the Allies made tactical air support an integral part of the combined arms team. However, it was in the independent role of precision strategic bombing that air forces, particularly the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF), felt that they had made the greatest contribution to winning the war. In the immediate post-war period the USAAF pursued and won its independence from the Army. The advent of nuclear weapons and the Cold War with the USSR seemed to vindicate the primacy of the strategic role of air power over its tactical support of both land and naval forces. However, the Korean War again demonstrated the importance of being able to employ air power in a variety of tactical roles, including CAS. The US Army's post-war assessment of the US Air Force's support for the UN ground forces in Korea was critical of the poor level of joint cooperation achieved between the air and ground units. The air force believed that the Army's use of CAS wasted resources better employed on more lucrative targets and two years after the war it abolished all joint doctrine boards. Observing this quarrel at close hand, the civilian strategist Bernard Brodie concluded, 'If airmen were like laboratory animals running a maze, they would seek to repeat successes and recoil from frustrations. They would now be all in favour of tactical as against strategic uses of air power'. Of course, Brodie understood that the reason this did not happen was human nature.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, during this same period, all three Australian Services maintained a remarkably positive attitude to the use of tactical air power in support of land and naval forces. Indeed, the decade from 1943 to 1953 was a high point in joint co-operation between the Australian Services. Unlike the US, where the post-war environment fostered inter-service rivalries, in Australia the close co-operation developed in New Guinea and the island campaigns of the South-West Pacific was preserved into the 1950s. This essay will examine why the Australian Services were able to maintain high levels of inter-service co-operation, particularly in the area of CAS in the period immediately following the Second World War. It will also discuss the successful employment of Australian air units in tactical operations during the Korean War. It will conclude with an examination of the increasing frustrations, which saw inter-service co-operation in Australia decline significantly over the next four decades.

#### **The Importance of Joint Forces to the National Strategy—1946**

In February 1946, the Australian Chiefs of Staff drew up their appreciation of the nation's strategic circumstances. By their assessment, the strategic choices open to Australia were isolation or co-operation. The chiefs rejected what they termed the fallacy of isolation because, as 'an isolated continent with a small population and limited resources, [Australia] is unable to defend herself unaided against a major power'.<sup>2</sup> They concluded that an isolationist policy of continental defence would only lead to disaster and hence national security policy 'must be built upon co-operation with other nations'.<sup>3</sup> It followed that the nation's preparations for war 'must be such that her forces can co-operate with those of other nations [and that] overseas commitments may be necessary and in fact unavoidable in ... a future war'.<sup>4</sup> To meet the requirement for credible forces to contribute to coalition operations, the appreciation called for a force structure in which the three Services were organised and trained to provide a mobile joint task force based on permanent personnel, rather than specially raised forces or militia. Key aspects of the force structure that the service chiefs wanted were a fleet train capable of maintaining the task force operating in the South-east Asian littoral, Army units trained for amphibious operations to take and hold forward operating bases and an air component that included not only fighters and bombers, but also sufficient strategic transport assets to support the other services.<sup>5</sup>

The strategy of co-operation with allies and the focus on developing joint forces suitable for coalition operations were direct results of Australia's experience in the Second World War, particularly the American led campaign in the South-West Pacific Area (SWPA). One of the important developments of that campaign had been the founding of a RAAF School of Army Co-operation at Canberra. Between 1942 and 1945 the school had trained over five hundred Australian Army and Air Force personnel in the techniques of ground air co-operation, forward air control of artillery and reconnaissance. After April 1943, following the development of a US/Australian air support doctrine for the SWPA, Australian Army and Air Force personnel trained at the school made a significant contribution to the success of ground/air co-operation operations. This included support to the many amphibious operations carried out along the northern coast of New Guinea and in the islands of the Dutch East Indies. Of particular note was the planning and conduct of air support for the OBOE Campaign in Borneo during mid-1945, when large numbers of bomber and carrier borne fighter aircraft were used to support divisional-sized landings by Australian troops at Tarakan, Labuan and Balikpapan.

### **The School of Land/Air Warfare**

On 31 August 1946 the RAAF School of Army Co-operation was disbanded. However, the acting Minister of Defence had approved the establishment of a similar organisation to be re-named the School of Land/Air Warfare (SLAW) at RAAF Base Laverton in Victoria from 22 January 1947.<sup>6</sup> The following year, acting on a recommendation of the Defence Committee, the Minister of Defence proposed that the school be re-located to RAAF Base Williamtown in New South Wales and established on a permanent basis. Indeed, the Minister wanted the operations of the school expanded 'because of the benefits derived from courses [taught] at the school'.<sup>7</sup> The Minister considered that the school was a valuable instrument for training officers from the three Services in combined operations and the principles of inter-service co-operation as they related to air support. In expressing this opinion he had been influenced by a Joint Planning Committee report, in which Colonel JG Wilton had stated: 'In the recent war close co-operation and understanding was developed between the Services and agreed systems of procedure adopted in relation to air support. It is most important that this co-operation be retained in peace. Unless a school such as that under consideration is established on a permanent basis, much of this experience and co-operation will be lost'.<sup>8</sup> Wilton also believed that the creation of the SLAW on a permanent basis was the best way to keep current with new technical developments from abroad and provide the Australian forces with a medium for demonstrating and training personnel in the techniques of joint warfare.

RAAF Williamtown was already closely associated with joint training. During the Second World War aircraft from the base had provided support for training US and Australian personnel in amphibious operations at the RAN's HMAS *Assault* at nearby Nelson Bay. The primary considerations for the siting of the SLAW at Williamtown were the availability of adequate accommodation in the form of hangers and lecture huts and the ability of No 78 Wing to provide aircraft. However, the location was also regarded as 'most suitable in the event of triphibious warfare training being undertaken'.<sup>9</sup> Two courses were taught at the school's Land/Air Warfare Wing: a Senior Course of two weeks duration for lieutenant colonel and above and a six week Junior Course for captains and majors. The Senior Course taught general principles of employment, while the more detailed Junior Course taught air/ground co-operation procedures, reconnaissance, air photograph interpretation and artillery fire support direction.<sup>10</sup> Of the twenty positions available on this course three were filled by RAN students, seven by the RAAF and the remaining ten students were from the Army.<sup>11</sup> During the same period the Army Command and Staff College at Fort Queenscliff also taught students the use of air support in amphibious and other types of operations. In addition, from late 1948 qualified Army Ground Liaison Officers (GLO) were stationed at HMAS *Albatross*, near Nowra in New South Wales, to foster close co-operation between the new RAN Fleet Air Arm and the ground forces.

In the five years between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Korean War, the Australian Services were largely successful in maintaining and developing their hard won expertise in joint operations. Achieving this goal was largely due to the strong support which joint operations received from both politicians and the service chiefs. This support was

based on a clear assessment of Australia's strategic circumstances and the understanding that, to be a useful coalition partner, Australia would need effective joint forces capable of operating with those of other nations. In the period immediately before the Korean War, the importance of coalition operations to the national defence strategy saw Australian air, ground and naval units committed to Malaya and Japan. The SLAW was the main agency through which expertise in joint warfare was maintained. The school was not just aimed at maintaining expertise, there was also a strong commitment to developing both the technology and tactics of interservice co-operation. In December 1950, only a few months after the beginning of the war in Korea, the SLAW launched the Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter. Issued under the authority of the naval, military and air boards, the first edition of the letter contained a foreword by all three Australian Chiefs of Staff, which emphasised the importance of maintaining the skills of inter-service co-operation in peace and war. The Liaison Letter was an important medium for disseminating reports from operations in Korea and Malaya and discussing new doctrinal and technical developments. This was especially important, as operations in Korea marked the first large-scale use of jet aircraft in combat and there were new lessons to analyse and incorporate into the air/ground co-operation doctrine. As the editor of the Liaison Letter reminded his readers, the problem of peacetime was 'that our doctrine tends to exist in a vacuum, or more correctly, in a refrigerator'. He believed the only 'antidote' to the slow atrophy of land/air warfare doctrine in peacetime was the objective study of lessons from the Second World War, regular training exercises and contemporary operations.<sup>12</sup> In the light of the controversy that developed over tactical air operations in Korea, such advice was both wise and timely.

### **Frustration—The UN Forces and Tactical Air Power in Korea**

In the first months of the Korean War, the UN forces were compelled to come to terms with the fact that air superiority did not make victory on the ground inevitable. This was an idea that would prove to be very resistant to antidote in Korea and in many of the conflicts in which the US was subsequently involved. The problems surrounding CAS in Korea were largely the result of inter-service rivalry between the US Army and Air Force in the late 1940s, which had led directly to the atrophy of US land/air doctrine. The USAF explained their priorities in terms of strategy and funding. The predominance of strategic air assets over tactical was based on deterrence theory and designed for the worst case scenario of a general war with the Soviet Union in Europe. However, as Air Force Chief of Staff General Vandenberg told the US Congress in May 1949, the USAF was funding 'the minimum tactical air force requirements which permit joint training with other forces for testing and improvement of new tactics, techniques and equipment, for some limited deployment during the early phases of a war and for a minimum basis for expansion in event of war'.<sup>13</sup>

Within the USAF, the subordination of Tactical Air Command (TAC) to Strategic Air Command (SAC) was underlined by the fact that in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s no TAC general became Air Force Chief of Staff. Before Korea, relations between TAC and the Army were strained over the question of CAS. TAC commanders wanted to focus the bulk of their limited assets on an interdiction campaign, while Army commanders wanted greater power to determine the priorities of tactical air support. Army doctrine still relied upon artillery to supply its requirement for intimate fire support and did not expect the type of integrated close support enjoyed by the Marines.<sup>14</sup> However, the unresolved question of greater Army control over tactical air assets, together with the numerical inferiority of the US ground forces in the early months of the war, exacerbated existing inter-service animosities. In Korea, the USAF felt that the Army's demands for CAS were in large part due to this initial numerical inferiority, which also made it difficult for the ground forces to fulfil their part in the joint air-ground mission. The Air Force believed that these inadequacies caused the Army to substitute aerial firepower for tanks, anti-tank weapons and artillery, whereas from the USAF's perspective most CAS missions had little effect on the Communist ground forces. The USAF's resistance to close support operations, combined with their strong doctrinal commitment to deep interdiction and strategic operations, rapidly pushed disputes with the Army into the open. The presence of US Navy and Marine Corps air units with their own tactical doctrine and command and control arrangements further inflamed the controversy. In particular, many Army commanders began to covet the dedicated tactical air support organic to the Marines, seeing it to be the correct way to control air power.<sup>15</sup>

In July 1950, General Vandenberg, reacting to criticism of the air force over the CAS issue in both professional journals and the civilian press, complained that 'the American public has no appreciation of the fact that air action has been an essential factor in operations in Korea'.<sup>16</sup> Lieutenant General Walton Walker, the ground force commander, agreed with Vandenberg.<sup>17</sup> Walker believed that tactical air support had been a key factor in keeping the UN Forces on the Korean Peninsula and then allowing them to advance to the Yalu River. His assessment of the contribution of tactical air power included both CAS and interdiction missions. However, while CAS comprised a smaller proportion of the missions flown by the US Far Eastern Air Forces (FEAF) and the UN Allied contingents, the highly visible CAS missions had greater importance to the ground forces.

CAS was certainly crucial in the first weeks of the war when it helped to stabilise the situation in the Pusan Perimeter. Close support operations were also significant in protecting the UN withdrawal after the Chinese entered the war. Operation STRANGLE, a concerted air interdiction campaign against the Communist lines of communication, proved to be ineffectual. This was largely because the Communists were able to open alternative routes to re-supply their forces, while increased anti-aircraft defences resulted in heavy losses among UN aircraft.<sup>18</sup> In June 1952, when the ground war was relatively static, FEAF adopted the more successful air pressure strategy.<sup>19</sup> This aimed at inflicting high losses on the Communist Forces to encourage an outcome to the protracted armistice negotiations at Panmunjom. The problem was working out how to damage enemy targets, without exposing UN aircraft to the danger posed by enemy anti-aircraft defences. It was solved by relatively simple measures, such as increasing the altitude used for attacking ground targets and diversifying the target program. This common sense strategy thus capitalised on the UN's air superiority, as well as the inherent flexibility of air power. In Korea the USAF was operating under conditions very different to those for which it had been designed and trained to fight. North Korea had few targets worthy of strategic attacks. However, this does not excuse the misuse of strategic air power by the Army and it is easy to have sympathy for the FEAF Commander, Lieutenant General George Stratemeyer, after he was ordered by MacArthur to carpet bomb an area of twenty-six square miles.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary claims, that the circumstances of the war in Korea were extraordinary and that the peculiarities of this one theatre should not give rise to hasty judgements about the proper application of air power, had great validity. That they seem less valid now is only because, with greater experience of limited warfare, the second half of the twentieth century has continued to expose shortcomings in the employment of air power in limited conflicts.<sup>21</sup>

### **Success—Australian Air Power in Korea**

This atmosphere of inter-service rivalry was the backdrop against which the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and later the Royal Australian Navy's (RAN) Fleet Air Arm (FAA) contingents operated in Korea. However, the passion generated by the ongoing inter-service antagonisms between the US Forces had little effect on the small and specialised RAAF and RAN FAA contingents. The operations of No 77 Squadron RAAF have been well covered in the official history, specialist books and the 1996 RAAF History Conference. It is difficult to add anything to the history of the squadron that has not already been covered in these sources. However, some synthesis of the sources provides useful amplification of the reputation for competence in joint operations, which this RAAF unit gained in Korea. In contrast to the RAAF's contribution to the Korean War, the operations of the RAN's Carrier Air Group (CAG) operating from HMAS *Sydney* are less well known. As with No 77 Squadron, the contribution made to the war effort by No 805 and No 808 Sea Fury Squadrons and No 817 Firefly Squadron was well respected by the US Forces, with whom they operated. Indeed, although relatively small in size, the contingents committed by all three Australian Services to the UN war effort in Korea made valuable contributions to the coalition, largely through the high quality of their personnel and training. Their performance was certainly a vindication of the Chiefs of Staff 1946 policy of building forces that could credibly contribute to coalition operations.

## No. 77 Squadron—RAAF

The Official Historian, Robert O'Neill, highlights the importance of No 77 Squadron's ability to operate closely with units of FEAF and the US Fifth Air Force. From early July the squadron's P-51 Mustang fighters, flown by pilots experienced in air-to-ground missions, made a contribution to the defence of the Pusan Perimeter 'far out of proportion to its modest size'.<sup>22</sup> No 77 Squadron's call-sign, 'drop-kick', became synonymous with accurate support to ground forces and FEAF records listed RAAF sorties separately from other 5th Air Force operations.<sup>23</sup> The squadron was fortunate in its familiarity with USAF operational methods and the excellent logistic support for its aircraft provided by the USAF supply system. So useful were the Mustangs that the Americans had to re-equip several squadrons with P-51s, when the F-80 Shooting Star jet fighters were unable to operate from airfields then available to the UN Forces, giving them a very limited loiter time over ground targets. The P-51 was a slower but highly versatile aircraft, with a good weapons load and drop tanks, which gave it endurance. While it was well suited to the ground attack role, the exposed position of the radiator in the belly of the fuselage was particularly vulnerable to small arms fire and flak. Once punctured, the radiator rapidly lost coolant and the engine seized. This was usually fatal to the pilot, especially at low altitude and, during the nine months it operated with Mustangs in Korea, No 77 Squadron lost ten pilots, mainly to ground fire.

In the initial stages of the war, No 77 Squadron operated from their base at Iwakuni in Japan. Pilots would leave Iwakuni early in the morning and attack a pre-assigned target, then land at Taegu airfield for refuelling, rearming and reassignment. These operations, which included air superiority, interdiction of the battlefield and CAS missions, tested the versatility of the squadron. In accordance with existing US doctrine, these operations were controlled by a Joint Operations Center (JOC) manned by personnel from the US air force, navy and army.<sup>24</sup> The JOC passed on Army requests for air support to a USAF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC), which was generally co-located with the JOC and had the task of allocating missions and special control measures for specific missions. The TACC would then pass control of the aircraft to a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) composed of air force personnel. The most important of these was the Forward Air Controller (FAC), who could be either airborne or ground based. FACs were supported by communication staff who ran their VHF radio sets for communication with aircraft and an HF set to communicate with a USAF Air Liaison Officer posted to the headquarters of the Army formation that the TACP was supporting.<sup>25</sup> The system was very similar to the one developed during the Second World War and generally conformed with Field Manual 31-15 (1946) *Air-Ground Operations* and a number of inter-service agreements made in the late 1940s.

This hastily formed air support system suffered from problems caused by the lack of joint training before the war.<sup>26</sup> The inexperience of personnel and poor communications resulted in a number of incidents of fratricide. On 3 July 1950, No 77 Squadron was directed to attack an enemy convoy, which turned out to be South Korean troops.<sup>27</sup> In September, sixty soldiers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highland Regiment became casualties of an attack by USAF P-51s. The Argylls had displayed white recognition panels, but so did the intended target, a North Korean unit on an adjacent hill. The TACP supporting the British was unable to contact the aircraft to alert the pilots and call off the attack.<sup>28</sup> The worst such incident involving Australian ground forces occurred at Kapyong in April 1951, when two members of D Company, 3RAR, were killed in a napalm strike from a US Marine Corsair directed by a FAC.<sup>29</sup> Observing these problems from the US, Lieutenant General 'Pete' Quesada, who had led Eisenhower's tactical air force in Europe during the Second World War noted, 'You can have all the doctrine you want, but unless you have the people ... to implement those doctrines, you might as well throw those doctrines away'.<sup>30</sup>

In November 1950, the appearance of Soviet built MiG-15 fighters gave the Communists an aircraft that outclassed the RAAF and USAF Mustangs. As a result of this, No 77 Squadron was withdrawn from operations in early April 1951 to begin retraining on jet aircraft at their base in Iwakuni, Japan. The decision to rearm the squadron with jet aircraft had been made in the previous December. The Minister for Air had informed the Australian Cabinet that Mustangs 'would not compare with any jet aircraft which might be brought against them and

General Stratemeyer had recommended that they be re-equipped with jets'.<sup>31</sup> The decision to purchase the British built Gloster Meteor Mk 8 was made on the basis that the preferred replacement aircraft, the US F-86 Sabre, would be unavailable until at least 1954 because of the need to equip US squadrons. As Alan Stephens explains in *Going Solo*, the introduction of the Meteor into RAAF service, during wartime, was attended by a number of problems.<sup>32</sup> Foremost of these was the aircraft's performance, particularly in the air-to-air role for which it was designed. While the Meteor could put up creditable opposition against the newer swept wing fighters such as the Sabre and the MiG-15 at lower altitudes, it was outclassed at higher altitudes where air-to-air combat commonly occurred.

Even before the squadron resumed combat operations, the question of its role and performance had assumed political importance. As is so often the case in coalition operations, national pride meant there was a desire to ensure that No 77 Squadron continued to be in the forefront of UN air operations. On 29 June 1951, the senior Australian officer and commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) in Japan, Lieutenant General Sir Horace Robertson, wrote to the RAAF's Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice Marshal George Jones, indicating that 'a limited employment of 77 Squadron in Korea will inevitably result in adverse criticism'.<sup>33</sup> He also believed that such criticism, presumably from senior USAF officers, would be '...damaging to the very high reputation 77 earned (sic) in the first few months and I am anxious that they not be subject to [such] criticism when they go into action with their new aircraft'.<sup>34</sup> However, soon after it commenced operations with the Meteor in Korea on 29 July, doubts about the aircraft's performance in air-to-air combat mounted. By late 1951 the squadron found itself looking for a role in which the RAAF could again make a useful contribution to the UN war effort.<sup>35</sup>

The decision to return the squadron to the ground attack role coincided with a major shift in the tempo and type of air operations in Korea. As part of the new air pressure strategy, the USAF was considering removing the RAAF Meteors from the forward air base at Kimpo and assigning them to a less demanding role. This was exactly the type of damage to the squadron's (and thus Australia's) prestige that General Robertson had feared. However, it was avoided when No 77 Squadron's new commander, Wing Commander Ronald Susans, proposed to the USAF that the Meteors could be useful in the type of air-to-ground missions in which the squadron had excelled when it was operating Mustangs. Susans had established that the aircraft could be modified to carry rockets and maintain a rate of 1000 sorties per month. The squadron's return to the ground attack role in January 1952 was, as the official history notes, one that they found 'both humiliating and tedious'.<sup>36</sup> The pilots now 'believed that they had the worst of both worlds: all the discomforts of active service life at a forward base in the extremes of the Korean weather and none of the offsetting excitement and valuable professional experience of combat'.<sup>37</sup> Once again, ground attack missions would prove to be expensive in both lives and aircraft. Already by the end of 1951 one in four of the squadron's pilots had been killed or captured.<sup>38</sup> When the war ended, No 77 Squadron had completed 15,000 sorties in their jets, losing 23 Meteors and 32 pilots (in addition to those killed flying Mustangs) mainly to ground fire.<sup>39</sup> Through its operations in Korea the squadron had established and maintained a fine reputation for the RAAF. Its flexibility, responsiveness and high levels of serviceability made it a very useful addition to the allied air contingent during the war.

### **The RAN Carrier Air Group—HMAS Sydney**

Although less well known than the operations of No 77 Squadron, the three squadrons of the RAN's FAA, which served in Korea, also demonstrated the value of having forces well versed in the techniques of joint operations. The FAA was a new capability for Australia and one directly related to the 1946 Chiefs of Staff appreciation. The first of two aircraft carriers, HMAS *Sydney* was commissioned in mid December 1948 and thirty-two months later the FAA was at war. In the period between its formation and setting sail for Korea on 31 August 1951, the carrier's air crew were involved in antisubmarine warfare exercises (ASW), combat air patrols (CAP) with the fleet and naval gunnery control exercises. These were practised on cruises in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and from the airfield at HMAS *Albatross*, the Naval Air Station near Nowra in NSW. Embarked with the CAG was an Army Carrier Borne Air

Liaison Section (CBALS) tasked with assisting in the training and briefing of air crews on such matters as targets, battle damage assessments, map reading, escape and evasion techniques and the procedures for directing naval gunfire.

On her arrival in Korean waters, the *Sydney* was due to take over from the British carrier HMS *Glory*. *Glory* had been working as part of the USN's Task Force 77, which was primarily engaged in Operation STRANGLE, the ultimately unsuccessful campaign of interdiction against the Communist supply routes. The allied naval aircraft involved in these missions attacked roads, bridges, railway tunnels, enemy troop concentrations, supply dumps and convoys. The RAN CAG's squadrons would perform all of these missions, which, like the RAAF's ground attack missions, commonly took place at altitudes of between sixty and 3000 metres. The presence of the CBALS was vital to the successful conduct of such missions. When *Sydney* departed, 71 CBALS, which normally had a complement of one officer, a warrant officer and a corporal driver, was augmented by the officer from 72 CBALS, Major Max Simkin, because of the high tempo of naval air operations in Korea. Simkin flew ahead to Japan to conduct reconnaissance for the CAG, leaving Major Gordon Hardcastle as the Carrier Borne Air Liaison Officer (CBALO) charged with conducting the work-up training for the pilots during the passage to Korea.

Hardcastle was an Air Liaison Officer (ALO) with considerable experience. He had attended a course at the RAAF School of Army Co-operation in early 1945 and ended World War II attached to a USN bomber wing in the Philippines. In 1947 he attended a course at the School of Land/Air Warfare at Laverton and returned for subsequent courses as a part-time instructor. The following year he was sent to the RAF School of Army Co-operation at Old Sarum to be trained as a CBALO. He also spent time with the British Army of the Rhine and on HMS *Illustrious* before joining *Sydney*. In 1949 he had accompanied the carrier on its training cruises and also worked with the pilots, while ashore at HMAS *Albatross*. When *Sydney* received orders to proceed to Korea, Hardcastle obtained a copy of the USN's manual for directing naval gunfire. On the passage to Korea he drilled the CAG's air crews in these procedures, using exercises based on a cloth model set up in the Air Intelligence Room. The only break to this routine occurred on 6 September, as the carrier passed by Rabaul. The Administrator of New Britain requested a fly past as a demonstration to settle some civil unrest. *Sydney* obliged with a fly past and an army support exercise, which, judging by the Administrator's subsequent report, had the desired effect.<sup>40</sup>

The daily drills in target location and gunnery direction paid immediate dividends when *Sydney* commenced operations in Korean waters during October 1951. Following a mission in which pilots from *Sydney* had directed the 16 inch guns of the battleship USS *New Jersey*, the carrier's commander, Captain Harries, received a signal complimenting the *Sydney*'s pilots for the accuracy of their target spotting and the high sortie rate maintained by the CAG.<sup>41</sup> As operations continued, the *Sydney*'s Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft were engaged in a range of missions, which included photographic reconnaissance, bombing of enemy supply lines, close support of ground troops, CAPs and support for search and rescue missions flown by USN helicopters. Korea saw the first large-scale use of helicopters for such missions. The American pilots of these aircraft frequently took considerable risks and many RAN and RAAF pilots owed them their lives and freedom. Another innovation to assist downed air crews was introduced by the *Sydney*'s CBALOs. Using red and yellow fluorescent panels, each about a metre square, pilots could communicate with circling aircraft to inform them as to whether the crews were injured as well as the direction of enemy fire. The system was so effective that it was soon adopted by No 77 Squadron and, on 20 December 1951, promulgated for use by Headquarters, US Fifth Air Force.<sup>42</sup>

The *Sydney*'s experienced CBALOs also ensured that the battle damage reports submitted by the RAN pilots were as accurate as possible. Notes written by the CBALOs in early December 1951 advised the pilots that, in assessing enemy troop casualties, 'a rocket must be seen to strike a known number of troops before we accept them as being killed. Consequently, our estimates are a minimum, for when large concentrations of troops are attacked, many unobserved casualties must result. [This] system gives a much truer picture of the damage done to the enemy than the rather grandiose claims made by some other air units operating in

this theatre'.<sup>43</sup> The role played by the CBALOs in *Sydney's* operations was significant. In particular, the two officers influenced the performance of the CAG on a daily basis, as they briefed and debriefed air crews, gathering target and other intelligence to assist with future missions. Captain Harries recognised their efforts and the excellent work they had done 'since long before the ship came to Korea'.<sup>44</sup> Together with the RAN pilots they helped to train, the Army ALOs formed an effective combined service team. By the time her patrols ended in late January 1952, *Sydney's* CAG had maintained a very high sortie rate (2366 in four months). Once again, via the excellent performance of a relatively small unit, Australia was able to make a significant contribution to the coalition. For the loss of three pilots and nine planes, *Sydney's* aircraft had killed 1428 troops and destroyed forty-seven rail bridges, four road bridges and 1000 buildings.<sup>45</sup>

### **Australia's Defence Policy and Political Economy—1950-53**

The 1946 Chiefs of Staff Appreciation was written by men who had learned the lessons of the Second World War. They believed that Australia could only be successfully defended with allied support and, in order to attract such support, the nation needed to field credible joint forces, structured for coalition operations. The high degree of interoperability that enabled the RAAF, RAN and the Australian Army to work as part of the UN coalition was vindication of that belief. The Menzies Government, elected in 1949, had endorsed the nation's requirement for versatile joint forces to support its policy of Forward Defence, which would see Australian personnel deployed to overseas theatres to oppose the communist threat.

In December 1950, with the added impetus of the Korean War, the new government had formed a National Security Resources Board (NSRB) to 'superimpose an expansion of the immediate and prospective defence programmes on an economy already bearing the strain of ambitious programmes of development and immigration'.<sup>46</sup> The task of the NSRB was to manage the expansion of the armed services together with the building of new defence infrastructure and purchases of new equipment. The program was allocated £395 million over the three years 1951 to 1953. For the RAN it included the construction of ten new ships and the refit or conversion of seventeen more. The RAAF received 690 new aircraft, including nineteen Australian-built Lincoln bombers, and funds were also spent to further plans to produce Canberra and Sabre jets locally. The Army purchased sixty Centurion tanks and 1000 transport vehicles.<sup>47</sup> However, towards the end of 1952, the cost of this massive expansion began to tell on the already strained Australian economy.

In the three years up to 1950, Australia had taken in 350,000 migrants and Menzies' government made plans to accommodate a further 200,000 per year, without impacting on the nation's standard of living. This was to be achieved by boosting production of commodities, such as raw materials and foodstuff, which were Australia's chief income-producing exports.<sup>48</sup> However, even with a wool boom in the early 1950s, the government's ambitious programs of national development and defence expansion soon created a balance of payments problem. As early as December 1951, the Treasurer, Arthur Fadden, had warned Menzies that these programs would put the country in debt. The only means of financing the trade deficit they would create was to cut imports or increase borrowing from overseas.<sup>49</sup> Faced with these unpleasant choices, the government decided that the defence expansion could not be allowed to have a detrimental effect on the nation's economic development. Indeed, the Prime Minister felt, 'excessive expenditure on defence preparations to meet a threat which may never materialise would further the communist aim'.<sup>50</sup>

The Defence Committee's Report, *A Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy*, which cited changes in the international environment, made the government's shift to a more affordable defence policy possible. The Defence Committee had concluded 'the likelihood of global war is now more remote than it was considered to be at the time the present Defence Policy was determined [1950] for two main reasons, namely the strength of the Allies has considerably increased and Russia has achieved much by her cold war tactics'.<sup>51</sup> While the threat of global war had abated, the Committee reported that the Cold War had intensified. On the basis of these assessments the Committee recommended that Australia's defence preparations combine preparation for the remote possibility of global war with participation in cold war operations. The highest priority was allocated to cold war operations such as the counter-insurgency operations in Malaya and supporting collective security arrangements under the South East Asia Treaty Organisation.

## **Frustration—The Long Decline of Australian Jointness**

The effect of this change in defence policy on Australia's land/air capability was not long in coming. Commenting on the Defence Committee report, the Minister of Defence, Philip McBride, noted that the Defence Vote for the year 1953/54 had yet to be decided. The decision hinged on 'the outcome of the Armistice negotiations in Korea, and the effect of the Armistice on the future strength of the Forces'.<sup>52</sup> When it came a few months later, the decrease in the defence budget resulted in reduced unit readiness and efficiency. Major Hardcastle, who, after Korea, had become the Officer Commanding the 1st Armoured Regiment at Puckapunyal, found himself with sixty new tanks but no proper facilities for maintaining and storing them.<sup>53</sup> The net effect of the reduction in defence spending was that it forced the Services to concentrate on their own parochial interests and compete with each other for limited resources.

While the SLAW was formed to teach the principles of inter-service co-operation, it also relied upon inter-service co-operation for its continued existence. The SLAW soon became a casualty of the conditions created by the reduction in the Defence Vote. When the Joint Planning Committee met in September 1953, it decided that, while the desirability of parachute training at the SLAW was unaltered, the financial limitations of the Defence Vote meant that parachute training at Williamstown as a peacetime requirement 'must be regarded as a low priority'.<sup>54</sup> Obviously the Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter was also a low priority and it ceased after only three annual issues. With it disappeared the only forum for discussion of doctrinal issues that affected all three Services.

Over the next four years the activities of the school were gradually curtailed until, finally in 1957, its activities were suspended. The problem was essentially one of funding. The cost of operating the SLAW was paid by the RAAF. The Army only paid for the salaries of its instructors and the allowances of its students. The Air Force proposed a plan to maintain the operations of the school but at a greatly reduced cost. Under this proposal the SLAW would close and its duties would be taken over by an Air Support Unit. The staff from the SLAW would form mobile instructional teams to offset the reduction of formal training at Williamstown. The estimated cost of these arrangements was only £15,000 per year, with the flying hours, personnel and aircraft involved to be 'diverted from other activities over the whole field of operations of the RAAF'.<sup>55</sup> Only seven years earlier General Rowell had written in the forward of the first Land-Air Liaison Letter that, 'Success in war is dependent upon the close co-operation of the armed forces involved ... This co-operation is just as important in time of peace. Therefore, it is essential that every officer of one Service has a knowledge of the organisation, the tactics and the problems of the others'.<sup>56</sup> Although it was never entirely closed down, the Air Support Unit languished until 1966, when joint operations gained fresh impetus from Australia's involvement in Vietnam. However, this revival of interest in air/land operations was not in time to help newly-graduated Lieutenant John Hartley, who went to Vietnam in that same year. In his preparation for operations in Vietnam, General Hartley recalls receiving no formal instruction in the use of CAS, beyond a few lectures at Duntroon and witnessing a CAS display at Puckapunyal.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the following two decades most of Australia's joint capabilities continued to deteriorate. Capabilities such as amphibious and air/land operations existed as little more than residual capacities. Preserved in small units in each of the Services, they remained largely in the form of doctrine without equipment or equipment without doctrine. One positive development was that, in the late 1960s, the Air Support Unit began to undergo the transformation that would see it evolve into the current Australian Defence Force Joint Warfare Centre.<sup>58</sup> This change commenced with the strong support of the RAAF's Director General of Operational Requirements, Air Commodore Ronald Susans, who had commanded No 77 Squadron in Korea. Not surprisingly, the champions of jointness are frequently officers whose operational experience confirms the importance of inter-service co-operation.

The RAAF Historian, Alan Stephens, commenting on the RAAF's joint warfare credentials in the period 1946-71, candidly concedes that the RAAF's downgrading of the SLAW in the late 1950s was short-sighted, especially in view of the joint nature of operations in Vietnam.<sup>59</sup> He also characterises the RAAF's attitude to the issue of battlefield air support during this period as one of 'indifference or arrogance'.<sup>60</sup> When it came to a head in the post-Vietnam period, the resulting inter-service battle over the ownership of rotary wing battlefield support aviation created animosities which still reverberate through parts of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) today. Hopefully, the introduction of armed reconnaissance helicopters to the ADF in the near future will not spark similar inter-service frictions. When Bernard Brodie made the comparison between the USAF's resistance to providing the US Army with tactical air support and behavioural experiments involving rats and mazes, he was making a point about human nature. In this century alone, the armed forces of many nations have neglected the obvious requirement for close co-operation between all three Services with remarkable tenacity.<sup>61</sup> In peacetime, the primary cause of inter-service frictions are low defence budgets, which force the Services to compete for scarce resources. Rats too, when compelled to compete for resources, will turn on each other. The most frustrating aspect of all this is that the skills of co-operation learned at the cost of lives and money during war are very soon dissipated by the parsimony of peacetime defence spending. This cycle of peacetime neglect and rapid wartime expansion has hindered the development of jointness in both the US and Australia. However, for a brief period between the end of the Second World War and the end of the Korean War, Australia was able to break that cycle. The excellent performance of her forces in Korea was the direct result of a defence policy which, recognising the need for training and equipping credible joint forces, did not balk at funding them.

#### Endnotes

1. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 107. Lieutenant General Ira Eaker, Commander of the US Eighth Air Force in Europe during the Second World War, described Brodie's viewpoint as 'a slanted, prejudiced view wholly unrelated to the facts'. Cited in David MacIsaac, 'Voices from the Central Blue: Theorists of Air Power', in Peter Paret, ed, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 636.
2. 'An Appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff on the Strategical Position of Australia, February, 1946', Part I, Introduction, 6, Item 1645/9, Series A5954/69, National Archives of Australia, Canberra (hereinafter NAA).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. The Chiefs' conclusions, based as they were on recent experience in the Second World War, remain sound. The most significant conclusion of Williamson Murray and Allan Millett's *Military Effectiveness*, which presents case studies of the performance of military organisations in the period 1914-45, is that nations with a sound strategy could redress the tactical and operational deficiencies of their armed forces. However, those nations with a faulty strategy, notwithstanding the effectiveness of their armed forces on the battlefield, were invariably defeated. See Murray & Millett, eds, *Military Effectiveness*, 3 vols (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
5. 'An Appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff on the Strategical Position of Australia, February, 1946', Part X, Local Defence, 24, and Part XII, Australia's Forces to be Maintained in Peace, 27, Item 1645/9, Series A5954/69, NAA.
6. See Unit History Sheets of the RAAF School of Army Co-operation, 1942-46, File 43/1, Series 64, Australian War Memorial (hereinafter AWM), and Minutes of Defence Committee Meeting, 20 August 1946, Item 63/301/65, Series A816/1, NAA.
7. Notes on Defence Committee Agendum No 146/1948, 16 November 1948, Item 1509/16, Series A5954/69, NAA.
8. Minutes of a Joint Planning Committee Meeting, 9 November 1948, Item 1509/16, Series A5954/69, NAA.
9. Item 151/2/1206, Series A816/1, NAA. The word 'triphibious' refers to close coordination of amphibious operations with air support. It was used by MacArthur to describe his operations in the South-West Pacific during the Second World War.
10. The syllabus from the post-war SLAW was given to the author by the late Lieutenant Colonel B Williams MC.
11. In 1950 the SLAW ran seven of these junior courses and trained a total of 14) officers, including 9 students from the British Forces and 22 from the New Zealand Forces, the remainder broken down as follows: 12 RAN, 53 Army and 45 RAAF. See Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter No 2, June 1951, 7, Item 9/4/AIR, Series A1127/1, NAA.
12. Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter No 3, June 1952, 8, Item 9/4/AIR, Series A11267/1, NAA.

13. H Vandenberg, Prepared Testimony to US Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services for B-36 Investigation, Vandenberg Papers Box 42, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, DC.
14. For a discussion of the pre-war doctrinal questions see A Millett, 'Korea, 1950-1953', in B Cooling, ed, *Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support* (Washington, DC: United States Air Force, 1990), 349-52.
15. One historian has suggested that the USAF's employment of Marine and Navy pilots against strategic targets deep in North Korea, when they were trained and equipped for close support missions, was a manifestation of post-Second World War service politics. See Roger Beaumont, *Joint Military Operations: A Short History* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993), 140.
16. H Vandenberg, REDLINE Message to General Stratemeyer, 19 July 1950, Vandenberg Papers Box 86. The US professional military journals of the period contained several articles on the CAS issue. For example, see K Kinter, 'Who Should Command the Tactical Air Forces?', *Combat Forces Journal* (November, 1950), and 'The Air-Ground Operation in Korea', *Air Force* (March, 1951). Articles with similar titles can also be found in these journals from the 1960s to the 1990s, indicating that the issue of CAS has never really been satisfactorily resolved in the US.
17. Perhaps the real inter-service failure in Korea was the time it took for the UN Command to establish an effective joint headquarters for the command and control of the land, air and sea assets deployed in Korea. The responsibility for this problem rests with General MacArthur.
18. For an assessment of Operation STRANGLE and interdiction in Korea generally, see Malcolm W Cagle & Frank A Manson, *The Sea War in Korea* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1957), esp ch 8.
19. The Australian Official Historian calls the air pressure strategy one of the few new strategic ideas generated in the Korean War. See Robert O'Neill, *Australia in the Korean War 1950-53*, vol II: *Combat Operations* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1985), 405.
20. This incident occurred in mid August 1950 when the UN forces were hard pressed. However, its effectiveness was questionable, resulting in ninety-eight B-29 Superfortress bombers releasing over 4000 bombs without any confirmation that a single enemy soldier was even injured by the attack. See R Frank Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950-1953* (Washington, DC: United States Air Force, 1983), 130-31.
21. The challenge for air forces is to determine what has changed from one conflict to the next. This is a difficult task and at various times the balance between employing tactical or strategic capabilities of air power will need to vary. This was done successfully in Korea through the air pressure strategy.
22. O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 298.
23. USAF Office of Air Force History, *FEAF Operations History*, vol I: *25 June through 31 October 1950* (Washington, DC: United States Air Force, 1954).
24. Unlike the RAN FAA squadrons, No 77 Squadron did not have an Australian Army Air Liaison Section attached to it in Japan.
25. Details of the USAF air support system are given in an article, 'Air Support in Korea', in Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter, No 3, June 1952, 9-18, Item 9/4/AIR, Series A11267/1, NAA.
26. Even in April 1950, MacArthur's headquarter had refused permission for the 5th Air Force and the 8th Army to form a JOC composed of personnel who were permanently assigned to the unit. See Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea*, 61.
27. See *ibid.*, 86. The RAAF were exonerated of any blame in the incident.
28. R Appleman, *South to Naktong, North to the Yalu: The United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: Office of Military History, United States Army, 1961), 582-83.
29. See B O'Dowd, *In Valiant Company: Diggers in Battle—Korea, 1950-51* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 178.
30. R Kohn & J Harahan, eds, *Air Superiority in World War II and Korea* (Washington. DC: USAF Warrior Studies, 1983), 72.
31. Extract of Cabinet Minutes, 7 December 1950, Item C264, Series A4940/1, NAA.
32. See Alan Stephens, *Going Solo: The Royal Australian Air Force, 1946-1971* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1995), 231-37.
33. Robertson to Jones, 29 June 1951, Item 1/501/636. Series A705, NAA.
34. *Ibid.*
35. For the debate over the RAAF's employment of the Meteor in air-to-air combat see Stephens, *Going Solo*.
36. O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 370.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. No 77 Squadron RAAF in Korea - A Brief History, nd, File 927/1/1, Series 114, AWM.
40. See Australian Naval Aviation Museum, *Flying Stations: A Story of Australian Naval Aviation* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 84.
41. *Ibid*, 88.
42. *Ibid*, 93. The official history ascribes this innovation to Captain Harries, but it seems more likely that the RAN FAA History is correct in ascribing it to the Army CBALOs. See O'Neill, *Combat Operations*, 475.

43. Ibid, 86-87.
44. Ibid, 101.
45. Ibid, 100. These figures were compiled by the CBALOs.
46. Minutes of the First Meeting of the NSRB, 18 December 1950, Series A4639/X/MI, NAA.
47. NSSRB Report: Defence and Development, 1950-1953, December 1953, Item 4, Series AA 1985/58/1, NAA.
48. Economic Development in Australia, 8 August 1950, Item 11/301/739, Series A816V1, NAA.
49. The Balance of Payments Problem, Cabinet Agendum, 3 December 1951, Item 51/1723, Series A571/2, NAA.
50. A Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 8 January 1953, 6, Item C2813, Series A4940/1, NAA.
51. Ibid, 7.
52. Defence Department File on the Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 8 January 1953, Item 1509/16, Series A5954/69, NAA.
53. When the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General SF Rowell, visited the unit to inspect the new equipment, only seventeen of the tanks were in working order. These vehicles proceeded to pass the reviewing stand in succession until the General had seen sixty tanks.
54. Defence Department File on the Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy, 8 January 1953, Item 1509/16. Series A5954/69, NAA.
55. School of Land/Air Warfare—General Correspondence File, Item 63/301/65, Series A81671, NAA.
56. Land-Air Warfare Liaison Letter No 2, June 1952, 5, Item 9/4/AIR, Series A1127/1, NAA.
57. See John Hartley, 'The Platoon Commander's War', in John Mordike, ed, *The RAAF in the War in Vietnam: Proceedings of the 1998 RAAF History Conference* (Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre. 1999), 30.
58. *Australian Joint Warfare Establishment*, December 1966, Item A45, Series A7941/2, NAA.
59. Stephens, *Going Solo*, 309.
60. Ibid, 313.
61. At least one other historian of joint operations has recognised this similarity. See B Fergusson, *The Watery Maze: The Story of Combined Operations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961).