



## AIRCRAFT AND HMAS NIRIMBA

*"The Schofields aerodrome site was cleared for use as a diversionary airfield to RAAF Station Richmond shortly after its acquisition by the Australian Government in 1941".*

In May 1944, a Royal Navy Liaison Team, led by Rear Admiral C S Daniel, arrived in Australia to make arrangements for the establishment of a British Pacific Fleet Base. Not until after the promulgation of the decisions of the Ottawa Conference in October 1944, could direction be given as to the exact nature and extent of base requirements. By the end of the following month, however, agreement had been reached with the Australian authorities whereby a number of Royal Australian Air Force airfields, in varying states of repair and construction, would be handed over to the Royal Navy for the accommodation and support of disembarked carrier squadrons.

The Royal Navy Airfields Organisation which would put these airfields into service had been in existence only since September 1944, but the concept of Mobile Operating Naval Air Bases (MONABs) had originated in 1943, as a means of providing 'instant' naval air facilities at existing, captured, or hastily constructed airfields. In addition to accommodation and continuation flying facilities for front-line squadrons, MONABs would have specialist stores, servicing, and repair sections to deal with specific types of aircraft. Airfield construction and maintenance was beyond the capabilities of the MONABs, as the Royal Navy possessed no civil engineering labour organisation which could be deployed overseas.

MONAB III was formed at RN Air Station Ludham, Norfolk, on 18 October 1944, under the command of Commander (A) S W Kenton, RNVR, and was fitted out and worked up as a Seafire/Firefly support organisation. In December, MONAB III was allocated to RAAF Schofields, some 35 miles from Sydney, and embarked in the cargo liner ATHLONE CASTLE at Liverpool on 22nd, arriving in Sydney on 27 January, 1945. At this time Schofields consisted of only three near-complete runways and hard-standing, while taxi-tracks, accommodation, workshops, stores and the hangars had only just begun construction. Until accommodation could be made available, the personnel of MONAB III lived under canvas on Warwick Farm race course. The advance party moved to Schofields on 5th February, the first runway was completed on the next day, and the first aircraft - the Station Flight Stinson Reliant - landed on 7th February.

The Carriers of the British Pacific Fleet arrived off Sydney on 10 February, and INDEFATIGABLE's fighters - Seafires 887 and 894 Squadrons and Fireflys of 1770 Squadron - disembarked to Schofields. Hutted accommodation was rapidly becoming available, and on 18 February 1945 the MONAB III retard party moved in from Warwick Farm. On the same day, Schofields was commissioned as HMS NABTHORPE. The disembarked squadron personnel lived under canvas for several months to come, and apart from an improvised beer bar and an occasional open-air cinema show, a YMCA marquee provided the only recreational amenity.

Although Schofields was an 'in-line engine' MONAB, two Hellcat Squadrons from the Fleet Replenishment Carriers - 1840 from SPEAKER and 885 from RULER - arrived on 23 February and 8 March, as well as a spare Firefly Squadron - 1772 - which flew in 885 Squadron INDEFATIGABLE's squadrons re-embarked to take part in the Okinawa Campaign in mid-March and did not return until early June. 1840 Squadron left at the same time and did not return, being disbanded in the operational area at the end of April, when 885 took over the Replenishment Group fighter defence task. During the disembarked period, all squadrons had undergone continuation training, using the mobile Ground Controlled Interception Radar Station which was part of the MONAB 'kit', the Holsworthy School of Artillery ranges for bombardment



spotting practice, and the runways themselves for airfield dummy deck landing practice.

On 10 April 1945, a "Pool" training squadron was formed at Schofields, to provide continuation flying training and conversion training for spare aircrew arriving in Australia. Equipped with up to 14 fighter aircraft of the four types serving with the British Pacific Fleet, it suffered from a lack of necessary support equipment and had to rely to a great extent upon the resources of the front-line squadrons to fulfil its task. When the equipment arrived and 706 Squadron became self-sufficient, it was moved to Maryborough, Queensland, where MONAB VII was commissioned in June 1945.

Towards the end of April, two more spare squadrons arrived at Schofields, 899's Seafires and 1843's Corsairs. The former was almost immediately reduced to cadre strength and the latter disbanded altogether in order to provide replacement aircraft and personnel for the Fleet Carriers. It was not until June that Schofields became really crowded, with the return of INDEFATIGABLE's Squadrons, bringing the total number of Naval personnel to 1,600, of whom only 44 officers and 433 ratings were permanent MONAB staff.

The airfield and buildings were still not complete, and in June work came to a halt, due first to heavy rains and flooding and then to a strike by the "CCC" labourers engaged on airfield construction. A happier enterprise was the inauguration of RANVR(A) pilots' conversion training. 899 Squadron, which had been reduced to the Commanding Officer and four tour-expired pilots, was increased to a strength of 14 Seafires and became a tactical and deck-landing training unit for the benefit of a dozen ex-RAAF Spitfire pilots, all of whom had more than 500 hours 'on-type' and had volunteered for transfer to the RAN in spite of the sacrifice of one grade in rank. No 1 RANVR Course 'Passed Out' in mid-July 1945 after completing 10 deck-landings apiece in INDOMITABLE. No 2 Course deck-landing qualification period aboard ARBITER took place in September; although none of the 24 pilots reached the forward area in time to join a Seafire Squadron before the fighting stopped, most of them served in either INDEFATIGABLE or IMPLACABLE after the War.

INDEFATIGABLE's squadrons departed once again at the beginning of July - 1772 replacing 1770, which had disembarked to Maryborough in June. The first Royal Navy Night-Fighter Squadron to reach the Pacific - 1790 - arrived at Schofields shortly before V J Day and the Fireflies initiated the first regular night-flying operations from a Naval airfield in Australia. On 24 August, the Seafires of 801 and 880 Squadrons and Fireflies of 1771 Squadron arrived from IMPLACABLE, and a few days later 702 Squadron was formed, with six Ansons, as an instrument flying training unit. By the end of August, Schofield, was virtually complete, with all the buildings and facilities in use. Air-to-air and air-to-ground firing ranges had at last become available, and a number of Martinet target tugs of 723 Fleet Requirements Unit Squadron had been detached to Schofields for the use of the Fighter Squadrons.

In order to make space for INDEFATIGABLE's Squadrons, 1771 moved to Maryborough in mid-September, but with the return of 887, 894 and 1772, the number of aircraft at Schofields reached nearly 140, and the personnel accommodated numbered over 1,800. MONAB III had originally been intended to handle approximately 90 aircraft, and it was not adequately stocked or manned for that number until late June 1945, when stores and personnel, and the shipping for their transport, were released by the end of the War in Europe.

The overcrowding was reduced at the end of September, when 702 and 899 Squadrons were disbanded and the 723 Squadron detachment moved back to RNAS Nowra. The remaining squadrons, 801 (which had absorbed 880), 887, 894, 1772 and 1790 - embarked in HMS INDEFATIGABLE in February and IMPLACABLE in May 1946. In January 1946, 814 Squadron disembarked from VENERABLE to exchange its Barracudas for Fireflies, remaining ashore to work-up until March. The last squadron to operate from Schofields was 1790, which left for IMPLACABLE on 5 May 1946.



MONAB III, which had been commanded by Captain J F W Sawyer since 22 August 1945, was replaced at Schofields on 15 November 1945, by MONAB VI, and although the only change was personnel, the ship's name was altered to NABSTOCK, to simplify drafting and accounting. HMS NABSTOCK was paid off, and Schofields handed back to the Australian authorities on 9 June 1946.

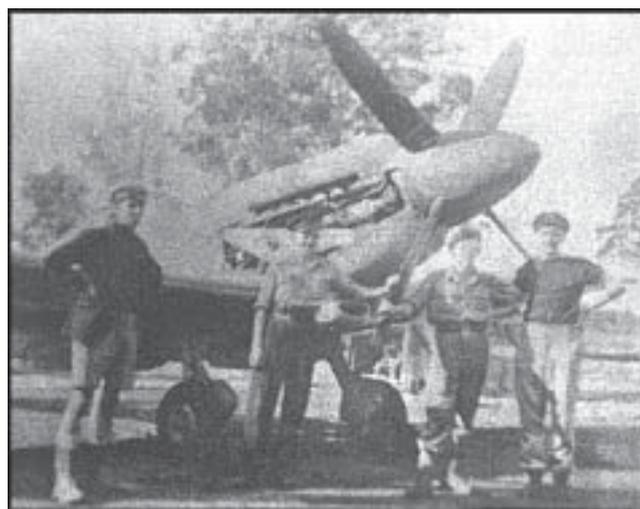
Number 78 Wing Royal Australian Air Force arrived at Schofields a few days before the Royal Navy left the station in June 1946. This Wing transferred from Deniliquin, New South Wales and comprised No 75 Squadron, No 78 Squadron and No 114 Mobile Flight Control Unit. No 78 Wing flew Kittyhawk, Wirraway and Mustang aircraft. Group Captain A C Rawlinson was the Commanding Officer.

On 5th August 1946, No 78 Wing moved to Williamstown, NSW and was replaced by No 86 Wing which comprised 36, 37 and 38 Squadrons flying Dakota aircraft. Number 386 Base Squadron and Number 486 Maintenance Squadron joined RAAF Schofields under the command of No 68 Wing Headquarters.

By July 1949, Number 86 Wing had moved from Schofields to Richmond RAAF Station, leaving behind Number 386 Base Squadron under the command of Squadron Leader R C W Rayson. At this time the place was officially titled RAAF Station Schofields. Also in 1949, Number 30 Target Towing Squadron arrived at RAAF Schofields under the command of Flight Lieutenant W Addison and this Squadron flew Beaufighters, Oxfords and Wirraways.

In 1952, Number 30 Target Towing Squadron moved to Canberra and Number 22 (City of Sydney) Squadron moved from Bankstown to Schofields. In March 1953 this Squadron moved to Richmond with its Mustangs, Wirraways, Tiger Moths, Vampires and one Sikorsky S51 Helicopter. In 1949, the RAAF was notified that 21 huts and a kitchen at Schofields were to be taken over by the Department of Immigration for the use of displaced persons. At the end of 1949 there were 300 migrants accommodated at RAAF Schofields.

After lengthy discussions between the Departments of Navy and Air with a view to securing transfer of the Air Station to the Navy, agreement was reached in 1950 for joint use by the Navy and the Air Force. The migrant population was moved out by April 1951. The joint user proposal was proven to be impractical and the venture was not implemented.



One of the last RN Seafire Aircraft to land at RNAS Schofields  
from RN carriers - 1945 - from 899 Squadron

HMAS NIRIMBA, (RAN Air Station Schofields) commissioned on 1st April 1953, was tasked as a Naval Air Repair Station, so forming a maintenance backup to the operational Naval Air Station HMAS ALBATROSS at Nowra. To support this repair function, considerable sums of money were spent on the erection of an up to date school block and factory building to house the School of Aircraft Maintenance on the eastern side of the airfield adjacent to the Richmond railway line. These buildings now house the Weapons Electrical Engineering School practical training areas.

Significant technical advances, the angled flight deck, stabilised mirror landing equipment, Carrier controlled radar approach aids etc, affected the previous high incidence of flight deck accidents of Aircraft Carrier conducted naval aviation. The justification for a separate Naval Air Repair Station disappeared very shortly after it was established.

Two years after the RAN Air Station Schofields HMAS NIRIMBA ceased to carry out its role, HMAS NIRIMBA (RAN Apprentice Training Establishment) commissioned. So the true birthday of HMAS NIRIMBA, not having regard to specific role, is 1st April 1953. On the same day, 32 years previously, both Flinders Naval Depot (HMAS CERBERUS) and RAAF Station Point Cook (the Air Force Academy) commissioned.

HMAS NIRIMBA is the custodian unit for a number of aircraft today together with associated equipments used in the Fleet Air Arm since its inception. These aircraft are an important public relations asset.

In planning for the 75th Anniversary Celebrations of the Royal Australian Navy in 1986, it is intended to make airworthy one aircraft of the historical aircraft held and to service all other aircraft to a full ground running state.

HMAS NIRIMBA currently holds a Douglas C47 Dakota aircraft (No N2-90), a Sea Venom (W2-937), a Grumman S2A Tracker (N12-13360) and a Bell 47B Sioux Helicopter (A1-640). Although these aircraft are not of great historical importance they will be maintained to enable them to be ground run or placed on static display.

The Dakota held by HMAS NIRIMBA is considered to be the most viable aircraft to make airworthy. Work has commenced on the Dakota N2-90 in 1982 and this consists of inspections and maintenance and repair of components. All the work is being carried out by apprentices under the supervision of senior sailors from the Air Engineering School. The aims of this project are twofold - the apprentices are gaining practical experience in aircraft maintenance and administration and HMAS NIRIMBA will participate with the RAN's Fleet Air Arm historic flight at the anniversary celebrations in 1986.

There has been a Glider club in HMAS NIRIMBA since 1979 and the club possessed an ES52 MK4

Kookaburra Glider until 1983 when the glider, now a vintage aircraft, was sold.

When the RAN Apprentice Training Establishment commissioned in 1956, approximately half of the grounds were transferred to control of the Department of Civil Aviation for use as a private flying field. The Schofields Flying Club operates from the airfield on weekends. Every two years the Schofields Flying Club mounts an Air Show.

In 1983, Australia's biggest and most comprehensive Aviation Display, the Schofields Air Show roared onto the Nation's aeronautical calendar from Friday 18th March to Monday 21st March. Trade displays were held on the Friday and the Monday and the Show was open to the public on the Saturday and Sunday.

The Schofields Air Show, recognised as the showcase of Australian aviation and acclaimed as Australia's No.1 Air Display lived up to its reputation in 1983. Each of the public days featured the Schofields Spectacular - a fast moving and thrilling flying display of five hours duration,



depicting Australian aviation in all its variety and excitement Action packed aerial highlights included daredevil aerobatic displays, nostalgic performances by vintage and veteran aircraft, sports flying in amateur built and minimum aircraft, spectacular sky-diving demonstrations, graceful ascents by hot air balloons and ear shattering displays by military aircraft being put through their paces at breathtaking speeds. Perhaps the biggest thrill in this section was the arrival and flyover of a United State Air Force B52 bomber which came to the show nonstop from Guam.

Every facet of flying was featured at the Schofields 83 Air Show, which, as Australia's Aviation Expo, also brought to the public view some of the world's most sophisticated business and recreational aircraft in exciting and carefully orchestrated aerial performances.

On the ground, a carnival Aviation Fair atmosphere was created by rows of gleaming new display



aircraft, gaily decorated marquees, hospitality tents and colourfully uniformed sales staff. This comprehensive and varied array of static displays focussed attention on the whole range of Australian aviation - from commercial and military aircraft, business jets and helicopters, through to private sports and recreational aircraft, gliders, gyrocopters, minimum aircraft and hang gliders.

HMAS NIRIMBA was practically involved with the Schofields Air Show through the provision of a Navy Aviation Training Display and some physical help to the organisers in running the show.

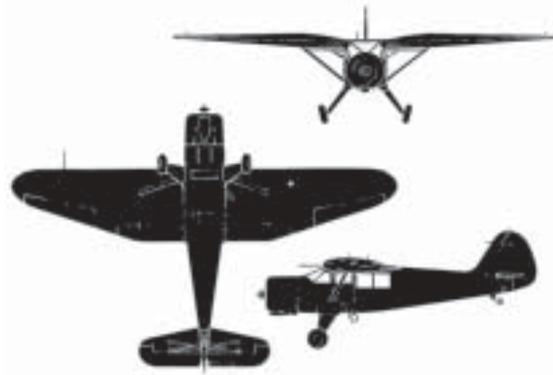
The already strong and cordial bond. between the Navy at HMAS NIRIMBA and the Schofields Flying Club were made even stronger as a result of co-operation at the Show.



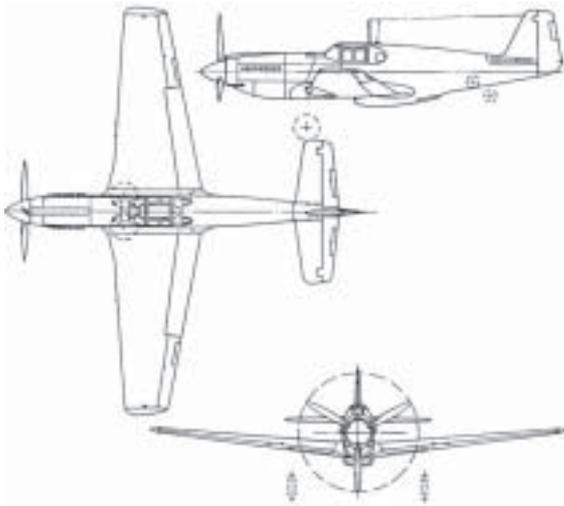
RAAF Caribou at NIRIMBA 1983

WO Coxswain Geoff Carroll, in white overalls, in charge of Apprentices Air Expedition Training

## Some Service Aircraft Flown from the Schofields Aerodrome

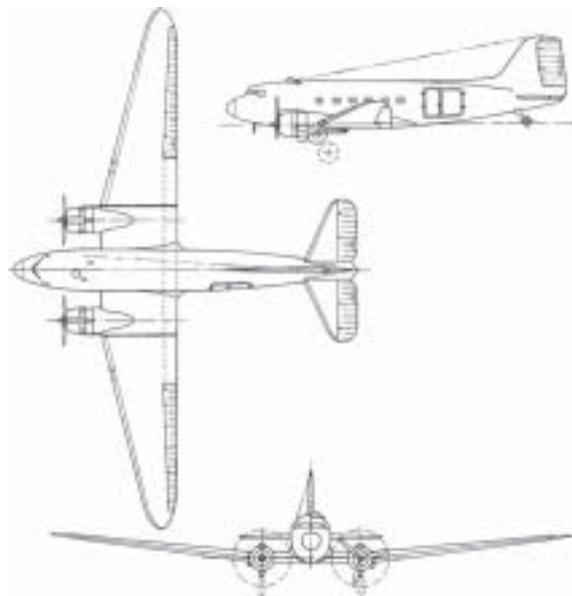


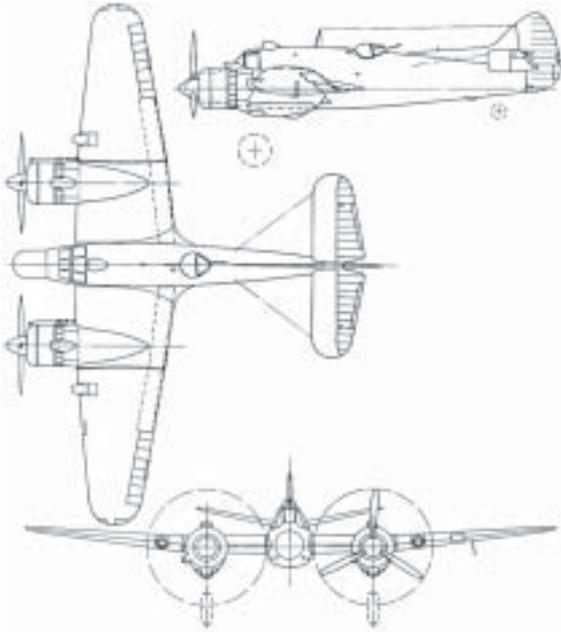
The Stinson RELIANT was a five seat high wing cabin monoplane powered by single 245 horsepower Lycoming engine, the RELIANT had a wingspan of 41 feet, a length of 28 feet, an empty weight of 2,500 lb and loaded weight of 3,700 lb. With a maximum speed of 153 miles per hour, it had a range of 810 miles and was used as a communications aircraft at RN Air Station SCHOFIELDS.



The North American MUSTANG was powered by a Merlin engine and had a top speed of 437 miles per hour and range of 950 miles. A total of 519 of these aircraft saw service with the RAAF and they had a wing span of 37 feet; a length of 32 feet; an empty weight of 7,000 lb and a loaded weight of 11,600 lb. Armed with six 0.5 in guns and the ability to carry 1,000 lb of bomb or rocket projectiles they entered service a little late to actively contribute to the RAAF'S efforts in the Pacific War though their combat record in Korea was excellent.

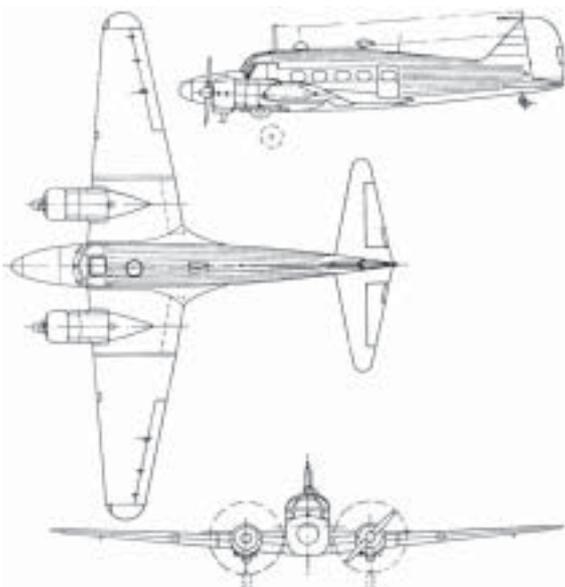
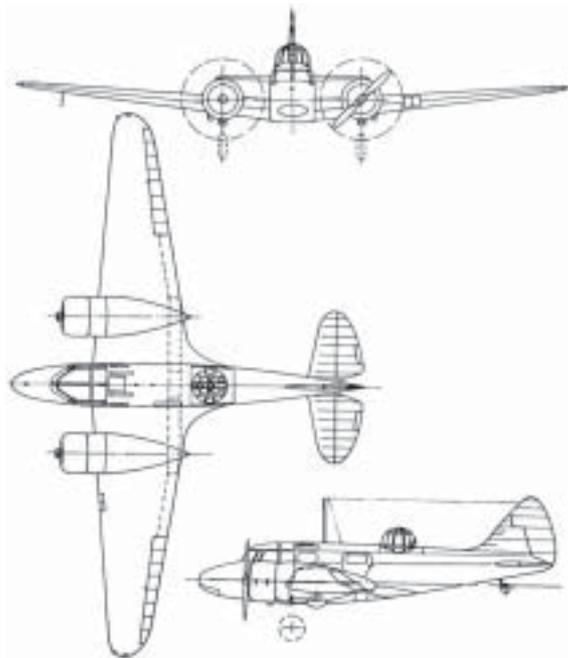
The Douglas DAKOTA was the mainstay of the RAAF's aerial supply train in the island campaigns of the Pacific War. Some 124 of these military transports were used by the RAAF. Powered by two 1200 horsepower Pratt and Whitney Twin-Row Wasps which gave the 95 foot wingspan, 64 feet long 16,865 lb empty, 25,200 lb load, DAKOTA a top speed of 230 miles per hour and a range of 1,500 miles.





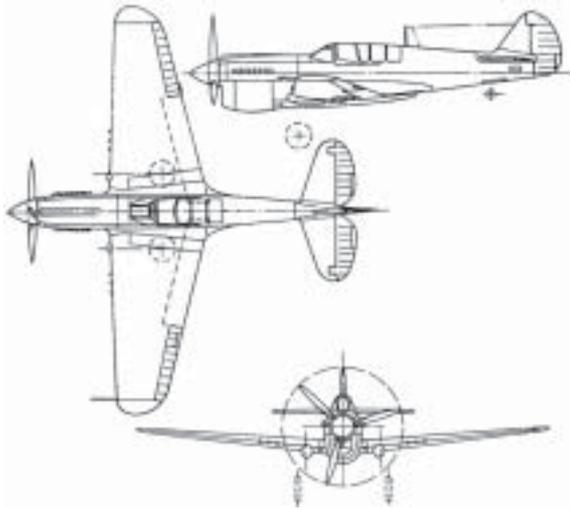
The RAAF had 582 Bristol BEAUFIGHTER two-seat strike aircraft in World War II. Powered by two Bristol Hercules engines, which with a span of 58 feet and length of 42 feet; empty weight of 15,600 lb and loaded weight of 25,400 lb gave a top speed of 320 miles per hour and a range of 1,470 miles. Armed with four 20 mm cannon in the nose, four 0.5 in guns in the wings, an optional 0.303 in gun in the rear cupola and provision for eight rockets or two 250 lb bombs, it could outrun any type of Japanese fighter encountered in the South West Paafic area, so was a most successful aircraft during the Pacific War.

Just on 400 Airspeed OXFORD three-seat advanced trainers were used by the RAAF during World War II. Having two 370 horse power Armstrong Siddeley Cheetahs which gave a top speed of 188 miles per hour to this aircraft. It had a wingspan of 53 feet, a length of 34 1/2 feet, an empty weight of 5,380 lb and a loaded weight of 7,600 lb.



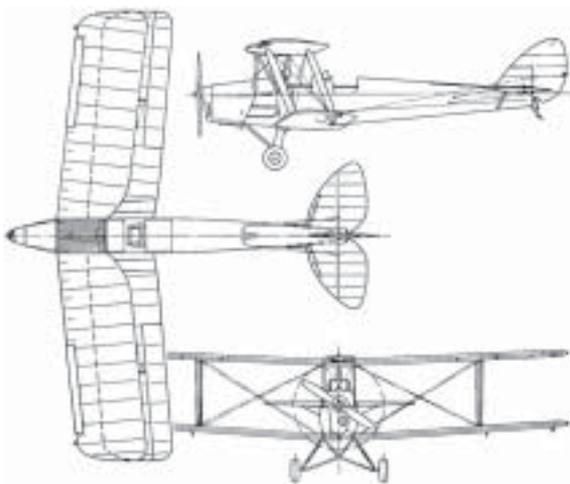
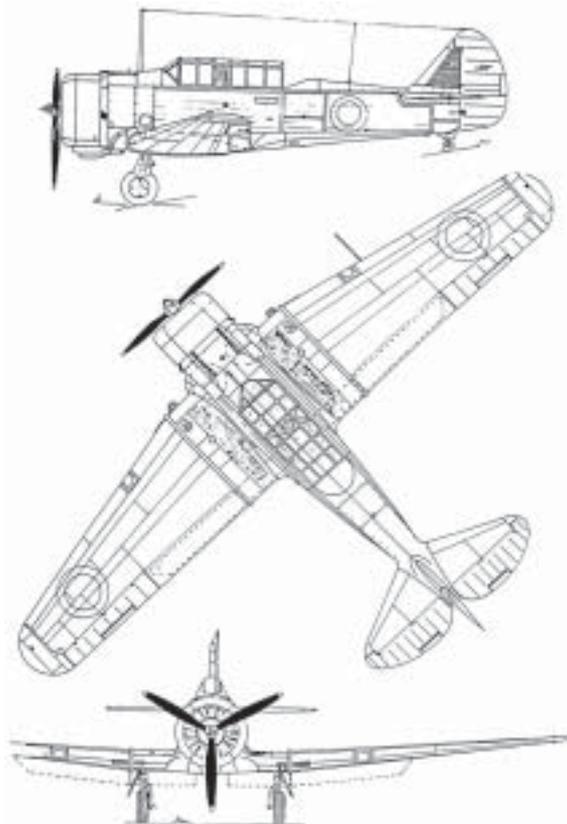
The AVRO ANSON was designated as a general reconnaissance and bomber aircraft and some 982 ANSONS were used by the RAAF mainly for aircrew training and maritime patrol during the Pacific War. With two 350 horse power Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah engines, a wingspan of 56 1/2 feet, a length of 42 feet, an empty weight of 5,375 lb and a loaded weight of 8,000 lb, the ANSONS had a maximum speed of 188 miles per hour and were used at RN Air Station SCHOFIELDS for Instument Flying Training.





Some 850 KITTYHAWKS were used by the RAAF in World War II as single seat fighters or fighter-bombers. With a wingspan of 37 feet, length of 33 feet, an empty weight of 6,000 lb and a loaded weight of 8,500 lb, the Allison engine of some 1,500 horse power gave the KITTYHAWK a maximum speed of about 350 miles per hour. Armed with six 0.5 inch guns and a 1,000 lb bomb capacity and a range of 800 miles, the KITTYHAWK helped to halt the Japanese advance in New Guinea in 1942.

Over 750 Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation WIRRAWAYS were built in Australia. This two-seat general purpose monoplane had a single 600 horsepower Wasp Engine which, with a span of 43 feet, length of 29 feet, an empty weight of,980 lb and a loaded weight of 6,540 lb gave a top speed of 220 miles per hour.



The DeHaviland 82 TIGER MOTH was built in quantities in Australia and some 860 served with the RAAF. This two-seater elementary trainer was powered by a 130 horsepower Gypsy Major engine which gave this 29 feet wing span, 24 feet long, empty 1,115 lb, loaded 1,650 lb aircraft a maximum speed of 109 miles per hour, and a 320 mile range.



## Crests of some RAAF Units which operated from RAAF Schofields





# Ships Associated with RNAS Schofields

## HMS INDEFATIGABLE



Field ..... Blue

Badge ..... Through a wreath of laurel proper, a lion passant guardant gold

Motto ..... *DEO ADJUVANTE*  
(With God's Help)

HMS INDEFATIGABLE, 7<sup>th</sup> of the name. Aircraft Carrier; 26,000 tons; 673 x 96 feet; 16 - 4.5" guns; 72 aircraft. J Brown, builder 8.12.1942. Arrived at Dalmeir to be broken up 4.11.1956.

## HMS SPEAKER



Field ..... Red

Badge ..... The Mace of the Speaker of the House of Commons, Gold

Motto ..... *FACTA NON VERBA*  
(Deeds not Words)

HMAS SPEAKER - ex-DELGADA



## HMS IMPLACABLE



Field ..... Blue

Badge ..... A Tiger's head erased proper

Motto ..... *Fierce Parent of Fierce Offspring*

HMS IMPLACABLE, 2<sup>nd</sup> of the name. Aircraft Carrier; 26,000 tons; 673 x 96 feet; 16 - 4.5" guns; 72 aircraft. Fairfield, builder 10.12.1942. Arrived at Inverkeithing to be broken up 3.11.1955.

HMS INVUNERABLE, 4<sup>th</sup> of the name. Aircraft Carrier; 13,900 tons; 630 x 80 feet; 19 - 40 mm guns; 48 aircraft. Commel Laird, builder 30.12.1943. Sold to Netherlands Navy 1.4.1948, renamed "KAREL DOORMAN" May 1948.

## HMS INDOMITABLE



Field ..... Blue

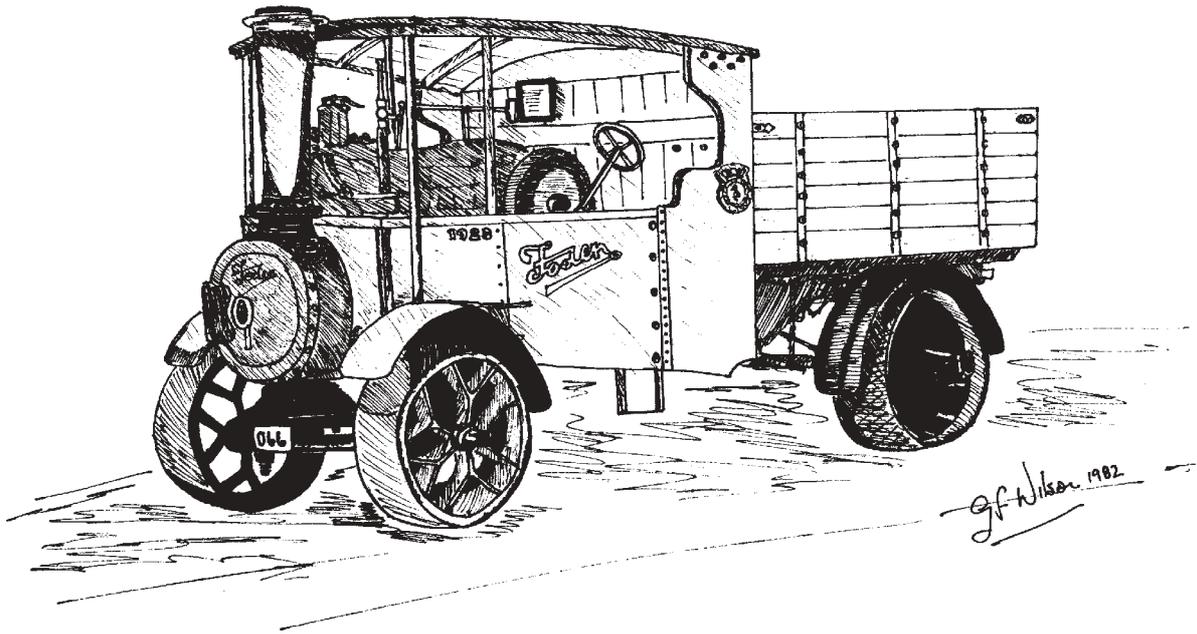
Badge ..... A dexter gauntlet of plate mail, white

HMS INDOMITABLE, 2<sup>nd</sup> of the name. Aircraft Carrier; 23,000 tons; 673 x 96 feet; 16 - 4" guns; 36 aircraft. Vickers Armstrong, Barrow, builder 26.3.1940. Arrived at Faslane to be broken up 30.9.1955.

HMS ARBITER, 1<sup>st</sup> of the name. Aircraft Carrier; 11,420 tons; 468 1/2 x 69 1/2 feet; 2 - 4", 16 - 40 mm guns, 24 aircraft. Seattle, Tacoma, builder 9.9.1943. Lend Lease USN. Returned to the USN 3.3.1946. Sold as "CARACERO".

ATHLONE CASTLE, Registered in London; registered tonnage 15,688; signal letters GYT; gross tonnage 25,564; official number 164625; length 969 feet, breadth 82 feet 5 inches, depth 41 feet 4 inches; machinery - diesel; speed 18 knots

THE FODEN STEAM TRUCK  
IN 1975



Five Inch Railway in use - Open Day 1983





Affinity with steam engines and locomotives and Quakers Hill was consolidated in 1864 when the railway was extended to Richmond to cater for transport of timber being milled in the district. A small wooden platform was built at Quakers Hill in 1872 and the station was named Douglas Siding. Mr Douglas operated a sawmill nearby. Douglas Siding was renamed Quakers Hill on 30th March 1905.

Today, HMAS NIRIMBA possesses a small stretch of railway line on which is driven a vintage steam locomotive. This segment of NIRIMBA activities forms part of a global picture of much endeavour in steam engineering and machinery restoration which has occurred in HMAS NIRIMBA over the past 28 years.

Because of the close affinity between the basic steam engine and naval engineering training, hobby steam engineering has been encouraged from the early days of HMAS NIRIMBA. In the 1960's Lieutenant Graham Vagg RAN, an Engineer Officer in HMAS NIRIMBA, led the apprentices in the building of a workable steam racing car.

In 1960, a miniature steam engine was designed and constructed in HMAS NIRIMBA and put to work hauling miniature carriages for the benefit of visiting children. The miniature locomotive was modelled as a 4-6-2 Pacific class which has no official ancestry. The name came from the wheel configuration of the locomotive. A complete miniature railway with ancillary services of watering point, points, bridges, platform etc, was built by this early band of enthusiasts and the miniature railway still operates in HMAS NIRIMBA today. Leading members of that project were Mr Eric Scanlan, Mr Ron Payne, Mr Ron Sell, Petty Officer Bennetts (now Lieutenant), Mr Bob Meadows and Mr Bruce Brewer.

These activities led to formation of the HMAS NIRIMBA Steam Club. A tremendous amount has been achieved in this area of endeavour in HMAS NIRIMBA and the continued efforts of the officers, civilian instructors, senior sailors and apprentices who have taken part in the club's activities have brought much credit on HMAS NIRIMBA and on the Royal Australian Navy. Such has been the standard of the craftsmanship of the workers and instructors of the Steam club that the club is known statewide and has featured in several television shows on a national basis.

The Steam club made moves to acquire the first of a series of vintage locomotive engines of varying types in 1969 when a badly deteriorated Foden 1923 C type steam truck was located at the Austral Blue Metal Company at Emu Plains, New South Wales. Although the Foden appeared to be beyond hope of repair, the intrepid Steam club members proceeded to acquire it. Enthusiastic support and encouragement was given to the project by Captain J W Stead, Commanding Officer, Commander Jack McNamara, Mr Charles Loines, Civilian Instructor, Mr Bruce McDonald of the Marsden Steam Museum, Goulburn and Leading Engineering Mechanic David Twiss. The latter, underwent mechanician training, was commissioned and returned to HMAS NIRIMBA as Senior Technical Instructor in the Marine Engineering School and President of the HMAS NIRIMBA Steam club. The Foden was brought to HMAS NIRIMBA and restoration work commenced in 1969 under the direction of Mr Bruce Brewer and the Mechanician Class then in NIRIMBA. Work stopped in 1970 and virtually nothing was done until May 1973 when a project group was formed to tackle the restoration job as a hobby. Lieutenant George Polding, Warrant Officer MTP Tony Hills, many of the civilian instructors and apprentices began work in earnest on the Foden's restoration.

The Foden weighs five and a half tonnes and has solid rubber tyres and it is chain driven. Specifications and spare parts had to be obtained from the makers - Foden Pty Ltd, who were still in business at the time. At the time of negotiations for supply of necessary spares, a brief

