



Trainee Air Crew recruits, wielding paintbrushes were “pressed into service” when given the major task to transform the appearance of the enormous, pre-war hangars with camouflage paint.



Rows and rows of “huts” were hurriedly erected to house the ever increasing numbers of recruits to expand the RAAF. Straw filled palliasses, grey blankets, steel framed folding beds, together with a steel cupboard provided the essentials for both Ground Staff and Air Crews.

With the Japanese entry into the war on 7 December 1941 the “Powers to be” in the RAAF decided that our now 40 would be Pilots would not be sent to Africa.

Several following Courses had already been passed onto RAAF Base Cunderdin, Elementary Flying School (EFTS) so our 40 Trainee Pilots had to suffer further delays before they could proceed with their flying programme. Eventually they passed out of Cunderdin with Tiger Moth competency then onto flying Avro Ansons at RAAF Geraldton where they were awarded their Wings. Not many of that group would survive the War in which they had all so desperately endeavoured to take part.

Trainee Pilot “Cleaners”

With Japan’s entry into the war there was some interruption to the normal flow of AirCrew Trainees so that No 24 Course began their I.T.S. at Pearce in February 1942. Progress was under way, when, without warning, this Course of some 120 “bods” were bundled onto buses and driven to a newly vacated Children’s Roman Catholic Orphanage, known as “Clontarf.” Many a youngster of the 1930 era had heard the threat of being “sent” to Clontarf for misdemeanours.

Imagine the puzzled looks on our would be Air Crew when the buses drove in through the large iron gate at the entrance, up the long gravel drive and ordered to line up outside their bus.

When all the volunteers were collectively assembled, the newly appointed Commanding Officer, together with a backing of his Staff, informed the unsuspecting trainees that they were there to clean the whole of the complex and surrounds. This was undertaken to make it habitable as the new No 5 Initial Training School which would take up residence in due time.

Stunned silence and disbelief was the immediate reaction, but youthful inexperience and the often used threat held over Air Crew was, **“you’ll get scrubbed”** if one did not comply with **ORDERS**.

The utter magnitude of the clean up did not manifest until a few days had passed. The C.O. at a parade of all Air Crew, asked for men who had some experience in electrical wiring and painting, for it was deemed highly necessary that those two items were of the highest priority after the cleaning had been completed. Makeshift trench toilets had to be dug after one of the unfortunate would be Pilots, fell into a cesspool of the totally inadequate septic system. Dormitories and all rooms were sealed so that the insecticide bombs could be activated so as to kill all vermin.

The Mystery of the Fairey Swordfish



For a short period Swordfish were used at Pearce for sea patrols,
And communications until ordered to **“Give them back.”**

| Date | aircraft | | Place, or In Field | Sub. Pdn. Yrpt or Passenger | D/O's (Including Rank and Name) |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Type | No. | | | |
| MARCH | | | | | Look Southward |
| 17 | Widgeaway | 420-110 | Solo | Solo | Mr. Taylor - Capt |
| 17 | " | " | " | Sgt. Le Grange | A. S. Pearce |
| 18 | " | " | " | " | A. S. Pearce |
| 19 | " | " | " | Sgt. McNeill | A. S. Pearce |
| 20 | " | " | " | " | do - do |
| 22 | " | " | " | " | " |
| 22 | " | " | " | " | " |
| 24 | Widgeaway | 420-110 | " | " | Comdr. & Lt. Col. |
| 24 | " | " | " | Sgt. McNeill | A. S. Pearce |
| 24 | " | " | " | " | do |
| 24 | " | " | " | " | do |
| 24 | Widgeaway | 420-110 | " | " | do |
| 24 | " | " | " | " | do |
| MARCH, 1942. | | | | | |
| 25 SOL. PEARCE. | | | Widgeaway. | | |
| 1. W. U.S. | | | Swordfish. | | |
| MARCH 20. | | | | | |
| APRIL | 2 | Widgeaway | 420-110 | Solo | Sgt. Le Grange |
| " | 2 | Widgeaway | 420-110 | " | A. S. Pearce |
| " | " | " | " | " | A. S. Pearce |
| " | " | " | " | " | A. S. Pearce |
| Grand Total (Col. (1) to (10)) | | | | | |
| MARCH 1942 | | | | | |
| Total Grand Forward | | | | | |

R.A.E. Taylor (later SQNLDR) went on to fly many
different aircraft during WW2 and remained in the PAF for many years.

The Mystery of the Fairey Swordfish

at
Pearce

On the 17 March 1942 the Duty Officer informed Group Captain “Paddy” Hefferman that a number of aircraft wooden cases had arrived at the Bullsbrook railway siding from the Port of Fremantle. It was assumed that these boxes contained Kittyhawk fighters to re-equip No 77 Squadron and No 25 Squadron was equally excited.

The appearance of a Pegasus radial engine followed by a bulky cockpit fuselage of an archaic Swordfish biplane, caused some deflation of enthusiasm. Hefferman decided to have the aircraft assembled by SGT Wright, who had experience on Wapiti aircraft though no handbooks accompanied the crates. GPCAPT Hefferman flew the first assembled aircraft followed by eager Pilots.

Records show that No 14 and No 25 Squadrons operated six Swordfish with their respective numbers being V4683, V4688, V4689, V4692, V4693 and V4694.

No 25 SQN operated three aircraft on anti-submarine patrols off Rottnest Island and Gage Roads of the Port of Fremantle. All Pilots converted to the Swordfish but it appears that Sergeant Coulter amassed the greatest number of hours while another Sergeant Dudley Irwin (Nav.) later became Minister of Air in the John Gorton Government in 1969.

No 14 SQN was also allocated Swordfish for communications work with regularly flying between Pearce and Squadron detachments at Busselton, Cunderdin and Carnarvon.

Station Headquarters also appears to have used a Swordfish as evidenced by a flight to Cunderdin on the 27 March 1942 flown by GPCAPT Hefferman, FLTLT Kirkman and FLGOFF Kimpton. It appears that on at least one occasion more than one person occupied the rear cockpit.

All pilots who flew the Swordfish found it a most interesting aircraft and gained an appreciation of the Royal Navy Pilots who flew them in combat.

“Paddy” Hefferman later recalled that they all had a lot of fun with their “private air force” before the RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne gave the orders to have the aircraft disassembled and recreated and forwarded to their rightful owners.

Research as to their final destination has revealed no details, but it is assumed they arrived at the Royal Navy Base in Ceylon.

Swordfish

A Royal Navy torpedo bomber brought into service in 1934, had a 690 Bristol Pegasus radial engine, which gave a top speed of 135 mph and remained in service throughout the war.

Crew: Pilot, Observer and T.A.G.



By May 1941 the Nursing Staff at RAAF Pearce had increased in numbers

[Matron N. M. Monger \(centre front row\)](#)

Front (L to R): M Vance (S/N), A Hannah, A Fielder (S/S), A Bennett (S/N)

Rear (L to R): S Butement, M Shephard, J Heney (S/N), P Bryant (S/N), F Shaw (S/N)





RAAF Nursing Service

RAAF Pearce

During 1940, the Matron in Chief of the RAAF Nursing Service, Miss M Lang (ex WW1), arrived in Perth to recruit trained Nurses for the Service.

Miss N Mongers, (Matron of Faversham Hospital) as Matron for Pearce was selected along with Senior Sister Jean Wheatley and Staff Nurses Phillis Bryant, Florence Shaw, Mary Vance and Audry Bennett. As a group they went to Melbourne by train to be kitted out and inducted into the RAAF. In Toorak where they stayed, each Sister visited a tailor to be measured for specially made Field Service dark blue uniform for winter, drab for Summer, and white uniforms as well as great coat and two hats. A sister, S.S.P. Fiedler was recruited as Senior Sister. With their new rank stitched onto their uniforms the now enlarged group returned to RAAF Pearce to commence duties. Later in May 1941 a photograph of all Nurses was taken.

The Station Sick Quarters was then under the control of SQNLDR Roy Greenham and Doctors SQNLDR M H B Robinson with FLTLT E G Strahan and the staff of male Medical Orderlies. There was a small ward for Officers and a large ward for other ranks. A special ward, known as "Glee Club" (V.D. ward) was always looked after by the male nurse / orderlies. Suplha drugs used in the treatment of the "social disease" was to be followed by two bottles of imported Guinness stout. As the young patients were unaccustomed to alcohol, one bottle ended in the patient leaving a spare to be consumed to the more tolerant to alcohol Medical Staff. The sick quarters also had an X-ray, Pharmacy, Outpatients and a dental Section and expanded to four wards. Other doctors were Dr Frank Ahlen and Dr Sam Mecoles.

First task allocated to the newly arrived nurses was to completely scrub out the operating theatre and set up procedures.

As Pearce was an I.T.S. (Initial Training School) for Air Crew selected for health and physical fitness, there were few patients. On one occasion an I.T.S. trainee suffered extensive wounds from a practice bomb, causing blindness. There were other accidents that were treated at the Hospital, along with a variety of General Surgery and minor operations and on some occasions, patients would be transferred to the Hollywood Military Hospital in Perth where RAAF Nurses looked after them.

Operations would be done in the Hospital and the patients recuperated in the Ward under the care of the Nursing Sisters.

After the outbreak of war with Japanese in December 1941 the Hospital was dispersed to a local farm where the wards were set up under canvas and the Sisters lived in the farm house. WGCDR Roy Greenham, Senior Medical Officer, was in charge.

The Base Chaplain, Reverend Esmond New (Presbyterian) was insistent that the Nursing Sisters should learn the art of self-defence. He had had extensive experience in Korea, and, during the Korean War in 1950 he would return there secretly to locate missing Airmen.

During 1942 some of the Staff formed a Medical Receiving Station and moved to Belmont.

In the 1960's two RAAF Pilots set up a base at Pearce to fly a hot air balloon across Australia. One of the war time, but un-used wards was taken over to make repairs to the balloon after several attempts at the flight. It did finally reach South Australia where the flight was abandoned when it looked as if the Crew would be swept towards the Antarctic.

Since the establishment of the Hospital (Station Sick Quarters) in 1938 the Hospital has had a changing role, and in 1994, the current use is for Aviation Medicine. The Hospital Staff treat minor ailments but for more serious problems patients are relocated to Hospitals off the Base.

2002 Role

Vietnam War

During the Vietnam period RAAF Hercules carrying wounded Soldiers and Airmen often staged through Cocus Island from Singapore to Pearce. (Indonesia denied the air space over their Islands). During those occasions the stretcher patients would be taken to the RAAF Pearce Base Hospital where up to fifty patients would be admitted. On these occasions the Operating Theatre was often in action. West Australian patients were transferred to the Perth Veterans Affairs Hospital.

Vietnam Med Evacs



Medical Staff had to be recruited and trained And formed into Teams before taking up Duties in Vietnam.



These RAAF Nurses became Section Officers in 1969. (5th on right Jeanie Harrison would be later Group Captain of Nurses.)



Patients were loaded onto RAAF Hercules air-Aircraft and harness adjusted for the long journey back to RAAF Base Pearce.



There was a period during the Vietnam War that casualties flew to RAAF Base Pearce via the Cocus Islands because of flight restrictions.



A great many wounded and sick were either stretcher or sitting patients.



Treatment of patients was continued during the long flight back to Base Hospitals.

RAAF Nurses also operated on United States Med Evac Flights.



This RAAF Nurse awaits the arrival of the next large group of United States casualties.



Medics prepare for the approaching Ambulances.



It is essential that all Documents relevant to every patient is double checked and identified because of destinations differ.



Unlike the RAAF Hercules the U.S. used different aircraft for Med Evacs but the procedures were similar.



The RAAF Nurse Pam Bell (on the far left) was one of the many Nurses, who, was on Med-evac Flights both to Australia and many United States Bases. Pam also provided all the photographs used in this Section. This Group were at RAAF Base Butterworth waiting to board this RAAF aircraft.

Throughout South East Asia Royal Australian Air Force Nurses tended wounded and ill Service Personnel in Base Hospitals while others accompanied them on Medical Evacuation flights back to Bases in Australia. RAAF Base Pearce was used as a stop over for patients travelling on to the Eastern States.

The current (2002) Health Services Flight at RAAF Base Pearce.

The old Sick Quarters was demolished and today it is a magnificent, well-equipped, state of the art facility.