

# Reflections on RAAF Staff College training and a new era

The 19–20 October 2000 'wake' and a January 2001 're-awakening'

By WGCDR Ted Ilton (Ret'd)\*

Regular readers of *Air Force News* will have noted in recent issues, several harbingers to the impending closure of the RAAF Staff College. The Bulletin Board in the September issue detailed the arrangements for the impending and final reunion program of the RAAF Staff College Fairbairn. While special features were included in both the September and October issues, titled respectively: Australian Defence College Welcomes a New Course and Commandant; and, End of an Era.

The latter represented an overview of the 51 years of the RAAF Staff College, along with the reasons for its closure in the year 2000. At the same time it outlined how Staff College training for each of the Services would, as from January 2001, be conducted at the Australian Defence Force College campus in Weston Creek as part of the new Australian Defence Force Command and Staff College. A campus for which both the joint and single Service aspects of the curriculum will provide for re-awakening opportunities for post-graduate bonding which had obtained in the past, by the added dimension of tri-Service Command and Staff College involvement and philosophy.

As would be expected on such an historic final reunion occasion at the Fairbairn campus, there was an inevitable wake-like air particularly during the first day of the reunion when reflections and nostalgic anecdotes were very much to the fore.

As with most wakes it was also a celebratory occasion for the College's highly successful 51-year record of producing Staff College graduates of a high calibre — many of whom were to enjoy careers leading to the senior management ranks of the RAAF, including one Air Chief Marshal and eight Chiefs of the Air Staff/Air Force.

On the morning of the first day of the

reunion, briefings were given by College Commandant, Group Captain Rod Luke, and Air Vice-Marshal Norm Gray. The former spoke about the impending relocation of the RAAF Staff College and the latter about 'sharp-end' happenings, both present and in the planning stage, for the next two decades.

An excellent presentation of the air war in Bosnia was then given by members of the current staff course (No. 53). The opportunity was also taken for Air Officer Commanding Training Command, Air Commodore Chris Spence, to present a Commander's commendation to retiring staff member, Group Captain Dennis Stubbs (Ret'd) for his 20 years of outstanding Service to the Staff College.

It was also an appropriate occasion for launching Group Captain Doug Hurst's (the younger!) book on the RAAF Staff College history. This book, which arose out of an initiative of the RAAF Staff College Association, has the not inappropriate title of *Strategy and Red Ink*. It is available from RAAF Aerospace Centre. (Phone Sandra di Guglielmo (02) 6287 6563.)

Air Marshal David Evans (Ret'd), former CAS and currently co-patron of the Association launched the book on behalf of the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Errol McCormack, who wrote the Foreword to the book.

The remainder of the first day continued with a spit-roast luncheon at the College campus, the annual reunion day golf challenge for the Air Marshal S.D. Evans Trophy between graduates and members of the course in residence, and concluded with the reunion dinner in the Fairbairn Officers' Mess which enjoyed the recently adopted and welcomed custom of including Graduates' partners.

Seated at the official table were; Air Vice-Marshal Alan Titheridge, DCAF and

reunion is being planned for 2001. The venue will be the Australian Defence College campus with the likely dates being 30–31 August to coincide with the end of the 14-week single Service phase.

The second day was just as enjoyably rewarding as the first, beginning with an introduction at the War Memorial venue by Group Captain Luke in his capacity as Commandant of the RAAF Staff College. This was followed by short presentations from selected graduates who had served in the RAAF's major conflicts during the RAAF Staff College era.

The session at the War Memorial closed with a final segment by Mrs Hingston, who over recent years has provided immeasurable input to aspects of the RAAF Staff College History and in particular, to Group Captain Hurst's book. Jane spoke on her next task, *The History of RAAF Fairbairn*, and sought appropriate input from graduates concerning any personal, general anecdotal or other reminiscences that they may have about the RAAF Base at Fairbairn.

The reunion events to this stage, together with the assistance of the College staff at Fairbairn, including Group Captain Stubbs (Ret'd) and Mrs Hingston, along with the executive committee of the RAAF Staff College Association — particularly the hardworking co-secretaries Mr Frank Kelly and Squadron Leader Mike Powell (Ret'd) — had been orchestrated in the main, and then directed by Group Captain Hurst (the younger) MBE (Ret'd).

Although he had been recalled as an active Reservist by the RAAF for the purposes of writing the history, his moulding from this history book into the Pictures-of-the-Past presentation on the second day was very much his own initiative. An initiative — subsequently applauded generously by all present — which also required an inordinate amount of 'own-time' activities on the task. Activities which, from the viewpoint of those present at the reunion,

endorsed with great credit Group Captain Hurst's delicate handling of the Master of Ceremonies role particularly as each presenter was limited to a short eight minutes or so in which to convey their message.

A delightful luncheon at the Weston Creek Officers' Mess, co-hosted by the Principal of the Australian Defence College AVM Brendan O'Loughlin, AO (Ret'd) and Air Commodore Peter McDermott, CSC the inaugural Commandant of the Australian Command and Staff College, was followed by a presentation by the Commandant in the college theatre and a visual inspection of the nearing-completion new college buildings.

I am sure that I can safely say that this final reunion/wake of the RAAF Staff College graduates at Fairbairn was a more than fitting occasion where reflections were not only on a particular year or a graduate but, and even more importantly, also on the 'set-in-concrete' bonding that undoubtedly resulted therefrom. The occasion was also an ideal one for providing the opportunity for a preview of 'what is to come', beginning in 2001.

The scenario and the script as presented by those concerned during the Weston Creek visit, and the optimism provided by Group Captain Luke and Air Commodore McDermott, whose Service back-ground and tertiary academic achievements (*Air Force News* September 2000), auger well for continued successful staff officer training in the Australian Defence Force.

I for one look forward to attending, in the years to come, reunions of both the 'old' and the 'new' wherever possible and appropriate and, at the same time, look back on an era of the RAAF Staff College in which I was and, to this day, still am both proud and eternally grateful to have taken part.

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