

PATHFINDER



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AWARD WINNING HERITAGE

Since 1987 the RAAF has awarded prizes for works in the fields of arts, literature and photography, which have furthered appreciation and recorded knowledge of the Service's history and heritage. By virtue of the Heritage Awards Scheme, a substantial body of artworks and photographs has been added to the catalogued collection of the RAAF Museum at Point Cook, although normally displayed around Air Force Headquarters in Canberra. Winners of the Literature category, and some runners-up, have made their way into print as part of the RAAF Heritage Series of books.

After a one-year gap, during which competition was in abeyance while the scheme's goal and success was reviewed and assessed, the Heritage Awards were again held in 2005. The Chief of Air Force and his committee of judges and advisers decided to make no award for Photography this year, but in addition to the normal first and second prizes in the Art category, a special award was made to another outstanding entry in the Literature section in addition to the major prize winner. Both manuscripts will be published in the Heritage Series over the next 12 months.

While each of the prize-winning entries in all categories has a story to tell with regard to their subjects, often there is an equally interesting tale that surrounds the circumstances in which the works were created and why, and by whom.

Heritage Art Winners

For instance, the winner of First Prize in the Art category is Lindsay Stepanow from Ballarat, Victoria. Although he is a semi-professional artist, he is also a pilot who owns a Victa Airtourer and has worked as an aircraft engineer. In his art, Stepanow specialises in abstract aerial landscapes, but 'dabbles' in aircraft too. His entry titled *Whispering Death* is a superb watercolour featuring two Beaufighters during a ground strike on Japanese positions in the South-West Pacific in 1943. He has no special connection with this aircraft type, but was impressed by its appearance and wartime exploits, and thought it would make a good aircraft to illustrate speed at low level. The painting

was meticulously planned using sketches to perfect the composition. Stepanow has previously won a RAAF Heritage Award, for Photography in 1992.



Whispering Death

Multi-award winning Sydney artist Steven Heyen won Second Prize with an elegant oil painting titled *Better Late than Never*. This work depicts two Short Sunderland flying boats, A26-1 and A26-3, overflying Sydney's North Head on 12 March 1944, after a 45-day delivery flight from England via Africa and America. Aircraft of this type had been first ordered by Australia in 1939, but were detained in Britain on anti-submarine and patrol duties with No 10 Squadron, RAAF, until six were finally released late in the European War. In their new role with No 40 Squadron, the Sunderlands transported troops and supplies around Australia and New Guinea.

Working exclusively now in oils and with a focus on traditional Australian landscape as well as wildlife and aviation, Heyen has been a regular entrant in the Heritage Awards over the years; he has taken prizes on five occasions, including First Prize in 2003 and Second Prize in 2002. His interest in aviation art derives from having a father who was a commercial pilot and an artist mother. Also a pilot, he was one of the founding members of the Australian Society of Aviation Artists, and is a member of the American society. He is represented in art galleries in Sydney and Victoria, and has been published in *Australian Artist* magazine in their Master Painters section. His works can also be found in collections in New Zealand and the USA.

Heritage Literature

The winner of the main prize for Literature was Adelaide author A.J. ('Jack') Brown for his manuscript *Kata Kana Man*. This is an account of his war service in 1942–46 with the RAAF's top secret wireless units (WU), which worked on intercepting coded Japanese radio transmissions for Central Bureau, General MacArthur's signals intelligence outfit based in Brisbane for most of the Pacific War. Beginning his work as a kana operator (katakana being symbols in the Japanese alphabet or syllabary representing Japanese and Chinese sounds) with No 1 WU at Townsville, Brown moved to New Guinea in 1943, serving at Port Moresby and subsequently Nadzab, Biak and then Hollandia. In October 1944 he joined the nucleus of a new unit, No 6 WU, which was headed to the Philippines and the Leyte landings.

Battling ill health after the war, Brown took a sales job with Harris Scarfe Ltd. before moving into the plastics business and eventually into wholesale jewellery. It became a matter of sore grievance for him that there was little official recognition given within Australia to the major contribution made by Allied signals intelligence to helping to win the war or at least shorten its duration. In part this occurred precisely because of the highly secret nature of the work in which the WUs (with Australian and American Army signals units) had been engaged, which meant that little documentation had found its way into the records.

Specially Commended in 2005 (and awarded a special prize of \$2000) was Jeffrey Pedrina of Brisbane, who wrote about his 12 months' service with Caribou transports in Vietnam during 1966–67 in his entry titled *Wallaby Airlines*. The RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam was the first Australian air unit committed to the war, in 1964, and only changed its name to No 35 Squadron in June 1966 at the time that the Australian Task Force arrived. Pedrina had made his career in the air force eight years before he went to Vietnam, following in the footsteps of his father, Squadron Leader W.A. Pedrina, DFC, who joined in 1938 but was killed by ground fire in a Hudson making a

low-level supply drop near Buna, New Guinea, in December 1942.

In Vietnam, Jeff Pedrina flew 145 hours in Caribous up until March 1967 (at that time a record) and was awarded a mention-in-dispatches. He left the RAAF in 1973 and joined the Department of Civil Aviation as an airways surveyor, serving with the department and its successor organisations until 1989. After flying with Ansett Airlines for two years, he ran an independent aviation consultancy in 1991–2001 and also lectured in aviation management at Griffith University in Queensland.



Better Late than Never

The Heritage Awards continue to provide a significant avenue for recording the rich history of the RAAF across the diverse spectrum of its service to Australia over 84 years, in both peace and war. The entries in all categories cover a range of subjects and eras, and provide an excellent cross-section of the service of the men and women who are or have been its members. The next Awards competition will be in 2007.

Congratulations to these gentlemen, these are fine contributions and are very worthy additions to the RAAF's Heritage Art and Literature Collection.

- Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd,
Chief of Air Force, RAAF, 17 August 2005



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