



SIR DONALD HARDMAN'S REORGANISATION OF THE RAAF



In 1952 Air Marshal Sir Donald Hardman of the Royal Air Force was appointed Chief of the Air Staff of the RAAF. The appointment was immediately controversial because a British officer had been selected over several able and experienced RAAF officers. Yet by the end of his two year tenure, Hardman was widely regarded, both within and outside the RAAF, as having served as an outstanding CAS. His major achievement and most enduring legacy was a thorough restructure of the Air Force along functional lines—an organisational framework that ably served the Air Force's needs for almost half a century.

At the time of Hardman's appointment the RAAF was organised on a geographic basis that divided Australia into five area commands: Eastern, Southern, Western, North-western, and North-eastern Commands. This organisational structure had been developed in some haste during World War II and had been retained after the war by Hardman's predecessor and Australia's longest continuous serving CAS, Air Marshal George Jones. Although it had served Australia reasonably well during the massive wartime expansion of the RAAF, the war had also exposed some serious weaknesses in this type of organisational structure. Hardman had a reputation as a capable and effective organiser and he readily accepted the challenge of serving as Australia's CAS and implementing a fundamental reorganisation of the Air Force along functional lines.

The appointment of another British officer to the position of CAS originated in several approaches to the RAF by the Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, and

several government ministers during 1950 and 1951. Menzies, a thorough anglophile throughout his political career, argued that there was no suitable Australian officer of sufficient age, ability or experience to lead the Air Force. The decision was not well received by the RAAF and the wider Australian community. It was understandably perceived as an affront to those senior Australian airmen who had so recently served with distinction in World War II. Nor was this first time in its relatively short history that the Air Force been subjected to the imposition of a British officer to lead or pass judgment on the RAAF. In particular, considerable rancor still existed over the lacklustre performance of the last RAF officer, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett, who Menzies had thrust upon the RAAF at the start of World War II.



RAAF Area Commands – c.1942-1954

In selecting Hardman for the two year appointment to Australia, the British CAS, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Slessor, chose one the RAF's most able and experienced senior officers. Donald Hardman had joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1917 and by the end of World War I he was a decorated fighter ace and flight commander. After the war he earned a degree in economics at Oxford before rejoining the RAAF in 1921. He graduated from both the RAF and Army Staff Colleges

and by 1939 had risen to the rank of Wing Commander. At the outbreak of World War II, Hardman fought with the British Expeditionary Force in France where he was mentioned in dispatches. He subsequently filled several key staff positions within the British Air Ministry. During the last two years of the War he commanded Allied transport operations in South East Asia and had attained the rank of acting Air Vice-Marshal. After the War he served in several important and high profile command and staff positions. At the time of his appointment to the

RAAF he was serving as the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief Home Command.

As a forthright and outspoken proponent of air power, Hardman set out to change Australian attitudes to the Air Force and its relationship to the Navy and Army. He challenged prevailing orthodoxy that Australia would be defended, first and foremost, by sea power. Aircraft, he argued, had accounted for more than half of the enemy shipping sunk in 1939-1945 and, therefore, the Air Force could take over the protection of the sea-lanes. He believed that the RAAF could do any job the Navy could do, and do it better. The Army, he argued, was simply spending '...a tremendous amount of money training people who [were] of little real use to Australia in a Cold War'. In Hardman's view the RAAF was '...the one force that could quickly strike for Australia's and the Commonwealth's defence in South East Asia'.

His views on air power were central to his rationale for a thorough reorganisation of the RAAF and his arguments drew upon the fundamental axiom that divided air power is weakened air power. It sacrificed economy of force and flexibility, and it denied the ability to concentrate at the decisive time and place. For Hardman, the Cold War had imposed the need for a new form of organisation that would enable the Air Force '...to operate almost anywhere in the world and possibly under the control of a foreign power'. He perceived that the existing RAAF structure made command and control unnecessarily complex through unclear divisions of responsibility between the Department of Air, the Air Board and RAAF Headquarters, and dispersed scarce resources between the various area commanders who could exercise little independent authority. The result, as one commentator observed, was '...apoplexy at the centre and anemia at the extremities.'

Drawing upon his experience of the RAF's functional command system, Hardman established three RAAF Commands. Home Command was responsible for control of all home defence and mobile (expeditionary) task force units. Training Command set training standards including national service training and recruitment into the Air Force. Maintenance Command controlled all equipment and servicing programs. All these Commands were given considerable autonomy

over the resources placed at their disposal. At the centre, he disbanded RAAF Headquarters and merged the Air Board into the Department of Air, creating a single and unified central authority from which all government, ministerial and Air Board decisions were issued to the RAAF.

Sir Donald Hardman forcefully and publicly voiced opinions on air power which few other senior airmen, and certainly no Australian, would have considered prudent and he set out to organise the Air Force in a fashion which would turn those opinions into policy. At the end of his two year tenure, Hardman returned to Britain and was promoted Air Chief Marshal and served out the remainder of his distinguished career as the Air Member for Supply and Organisation on the Air Council—the RAF's senior governing body. In Australia, he left behind a RAAF that was remarkably different from the one had taken over in 1952. By 1954, the Menzies government had declared that air power would be the first line of Australian defence. The expectations of the Air Force had at last rivalled, and even surpassed, those of the Army and Navy and it had adopted a command structure that would provide for the air defence of Australia for the next half century.

- *Air Marshal Hardman's functional reorganisation of the RAAF into operations, support and training commands remained the basis for Air Force's organisation for nearly half of a century.*
- *A clear and congruent organisational structure is an essential enabler for Air Force to deliver vital air power capabilities to meet a diverse range of security challenges.*

Air power is indivisible. If you split it up into compartments, you merely pull it to pieces and destroy its greatest asset—its flexibility.

Field Marshal Montgomery



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