

The Queen & the RAAF

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This special report marks the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and provides highlights of the relationship between Her Majesty and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during her reign.

As the longest-ruling monarch in British history, Queen Elizabeth II travelled widely and visited Australia on many occasions. She took part in significant commemorations, anniversaries and ceremonies, with a sincere dedication to her duty as a figurehead for the United Kingdom (UK) and the Commonwealth.

From Princess to Queen

Born in London on 21 April 1926, Elizabeth Alexandra Mary was the first child of the Duke (later King George VI) and Duchess of York. In December 1936, her uncle, King Edward VIII, abdicated, which led to her father becoming King and Elizabeth as next in line to the throne. Following King George VI's death on 6 February 1952, Princess Elizabeth acceded to the throne, becoming Queen Elizabeth II.

Taking on a plethora of responsibilities including those of Queen of Australia, Elizabeth II began her busy life as the new reigning monarch.

Coronation

A RAAF component, the Australian Coronation Contingent, was initially formed at RAAF Base

Laverton on 20 February 1953, and consisted of 60 officers and other ranks, including three Women's Royal Australian Air Force members and one Nursing Service member. The contingent departed Melbourne on 24 March on board HMAS *Sydney* and arrived in Portsmouth, England, on 5 May to commence drill and training for Elizabeth II's Coronation.



*RAAF Coronation Contingent, 1953.
Photo credit: Department of Defence*

The Coronation ceremony took place in Westminster Abbey in London on 2 June and was attended by many representatives of foreign states. The RAAF component participated along with members from No 78 Wing, stationed at Malta.

On 3 June, the RAAF contingent were presented with Coronation medals at Buckingham Palace.

1954 Commonwealth tour

In 1954, Her Majesty continued the world tour of the Commonwealth which she had

commenced prior to the death of her father. Accompanied by her husband, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, she visited Bermuda, Jamaica, Fiji, Tonga, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, Uganda, Malta and Gibraltar.

Arriving in Australia on 3 February, Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh commenced a royal tour of all states and the Australian Capital Territory. The tour was the first for Australia by a reigning British monarch, and covered seven capital cities and 70 towns in just 58 days.

Her Majesty inspected a RAAF guard of honour which was accompanied by the Central Band at RAAF Base Fairbairn. The royal tour also visited RAAF Base Point Cook, where the Central Band took part in the trooping of the Queen's Colour and Her Majesty inspected static aircraft, followed by afternoon tea at the officers mess with selected representatives from the RAAF. Other RAAF bases around Australia supported the Queen's visit by participating in local parades and lining streets along the routes taken by the royal party.

50th anniversary of Canberra

The Queen's next visit to Australia took place in 1963. Accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, Her Majesty arrived at RAAF Base Fairbairn on 18 February to mark the 50th anniversary of Canberra on 12 March. A 100-person honour guard from the RAAF School of Technical Training in Wagga Wagga, NSW, was included in the ceremonies but, due to inclement weather, a planned flypast of 37 RAAF aircraft had to be cancelled. The event was witnessed by 800 official guests and 3000 members of the public.

On 14 March, the royal party departed Canberra for Alice Springs in the NT, with the

RAAF School of Technical Training forming the honour guard, supported by the Central Band. The tour also involved visits to Adelaide, Melbourne, Hobart, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme in NSW, and the Northern Territory.

While in Darwin, Her Majesty inspected a royal guard of honour which was drawn from all local RAAF units and included a Pacific Island regiment pipe band and Royal Papua and New Guinea constabulary pipe band.

Queen Elizabeth II's next visit to Australia was in March and April 1970. Prince Philip and her children Prince Charles and Princess Anne accompanied Her Majesty on this visit.

RAAF personnel were among the first and last Australians to greet and farewell the royal family during this tour. A No 11 Squadron Orion escorted the royal aircraft as it travelled from New Zealand to Australia on 30 March.

During the visit, the RAAF made more than 200 flights, either conveying the royal family from airport to airport, or providing support aircraft, making the tour the biggest peacetime operation at the time. VIP flights alone totalled 89, while support aircraft flew 106 sorties throughout the eastern states. Aircraft used during the visit included BAC 1-11s, HS 748s, Caribous, C-130s, Dakota C-47s and P-3 Orions.

Opening of the Sydney Opera House

Queen Elizabeth II's next visit to Australia took place in 1973 and focused on the opening of the Sydney Opera House. Her visit began on 17 October at RAAF Base Fairbairn, where Her Majesty was welcomed by a 50-person honour guard. On 20 October, nine F-111Cs, led by Group Captain Newham, Commanding Officer No 82 Wing, swept over the Sydney

Opera House in three 'V' formations, with each of the three in line astern. The flypast was timed to coincide with the royal salute on the arrival of Her Majesty for the opening ceremony at 2.45pm. The RAAF Central Band entertained the crowds during the Sydney Opera House opening festivities and Waratah Festival celebrations.

Silver jubilee

The 1977 silver jubilee tour saw Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh spending most of March touring Australia. Arriving at RAAF Base Fairbairn on 7 March, the Queen was met by a 100-person guard of honour. On 8 March, a mass flyover of 56 Australian Defence Force (ADF) aircraft – most of them supplied by the RAAF, including four F-111s, 12 Mirages, 12 Iroquois and three Chinook helicopters – was a highlight of the silver jubilee parade by the three ADF Services in front of Parliament House in Canberra. It was the biggest parade since the Queen's visit in 1954, with more than 1600 ADF personnel. The Australian Army paraded 64 colours, five banners and seven guidons, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) paraded its Queen's Colour for shore-based establishments, and the RAAF paraded three colours and 17 standards.

Opening of the High Court of Australia

The Queen and Prince Philip visited Australia on five separate occasions during the 1980s.

The first visit took place in May 1980, when the Duke of Edinburgh arrived by RAAF BAC 1-11 from Sydney after flying in on a Qantas flight from San Francisco. Soon after, the Queen arrived at RAAF Base Fairbairn on a RAAF Boeing 707 from the UK. They were greeted by the governor-general, prime minister and other distinguished guests.

On 26 May, the Queen officially opened the High Court of Australia. On 27 May, the royal party were transported to Sydney by HS 748 and returned later that night by BAC 1-11. RAAF Base Fairbairn provided one officer, two senior non-commissioned officers and 34 airmen to mount the Queen's home guard of honour at Government House.

Melbourne CHOGM

In 1981, Her Majesty attended a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Melbourne. No 34 Squadron transported the Queen and Prince Philip to several locations, including Melbourne and Tasmania.

Brisbane Commonwealth Games

On 30 September 1982, the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane at the newly named Queen Elizabeth II Stadium. Earlier, on 26 September, No 33 Squadron had dispatched a Boeing 707 to London to convey Her Majesty to Brisbane via Bahrain, Singapore and Darwin. The Queen closed the Games on 9 October.

Her Majesty and Prince Philip then travelled by No 33 Squadron Boeing 707 to RAAF Base Fairbairn, where they were greeted by the governor-general, prime minister and the Commanding Officer RAAF Base Fairbairn. On 12 October, the Queen ceremonially opened the Australian National Gallery (now the National Gallery of Australia).

During the royal tour, the RAAF transported the Queen and Prince Philip to several locations in Qld and NSW. On 13 October, Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh left for Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG), on a No 33 Squadron Boeing 707. The next day, a

No 34 Squadron BAC 1-11 flew Her Majesty to Mount Hagen in PNG.

Australia Act 1986

In March 1986, the Queen visited Australia once again. The first event was a ceremony held at Government House in Canberra on 3 March, where Her Majesty signed a proclamation that brought into effect the Australia Act 1986, which severed the final constitutional link between Australia and the UK. This document made Australian law independent of British parliaments and courts.

The presentation of the new Queen's Colour at RAAF Base Richmond was made on 5 March. A comment in that April's *RAAF News* read:

Even the most blasé spectator could not have failed to be impressed with the execution and precision of an event which Her Majesty described personally to the RAAF's WOD WOFF Bob Kinnane as 'absolutely marvellous one of the best I've seen'.

More than 900 RAAF members, mostly from RAAF Base Richmond, took part with airmen in white webbing and all male participants wearing the new pattern shirt. Trim waistlines were the order of the day, which brought a comment from Prince Philip, who was attired in his uniform of the Marshal of the RAAF.



Presentation of the new Queen's Colour at RAAF Base Richmond, 5 March 1986. Photo credit: Department of Defence

Later that day, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip travelled by RAAF No 34 Squadron BAC 1-11 to Melbourne. While in Melbourne, they presented a new flag to the RAN, which was celebrating its 75th anniversary. On 7 March, they boarded the Royal Yacht Britannia and sailed to Adelaide. On 12 March, Her Majesty travelled to Whyalla in SA by BAC 1-11. The next day, Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh travelled by RAAF No 33 Squadron Boeing 707 to the UK via Singapore.

Australia's bicentennial

Australia's bicentennial year, 1988, saw the Queen and Prince Philip arrive in Perth on a No 33 Squadron Boeing 707 on 19 April, where they began a three-week visit which included the openings of World Expo 88 in Brisbane, Darling Harbour in Sydney, and Australia's new Parliament House in Canberra.

Nos 33 and 34 Squadrons again provided the royal tour with air transport, providing flights to WA as well as Hobart to attend an Anzac Day service and march.

A No 34 Squadron BAC 1-11 conveyed Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh to Brisbane on 29 April for the opening of World

Expo 88 the following day. This was followed by the opening of the rebuilt Darling Harbour in Sydney on 4 May. After a visit to Albury in NSW, the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh flew to Canberra on 7 May, and RAAF Base Fairbairn personnel mounted a Queen's Guard at Government House.

On 9 May, the Queen opened the new Parliament House in Canberra. Marking the occasion was a high-speed flypast of RAAF F/A-18 and F-111 aircraft, which swept in from the direction of the Australian War Memorial and passed over the Old Parliament House and then over the New Parliament House. The following day, No 34 Squadron conveyed Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh to Sydney, followed by No 33 Squadron transporting the royal couple to London via Bahrain.

A special event occurred during the tour when a No 37 Squadron C-130 flew the Queen's bicentennial gift to Sydney. The gift was an Australian State Coach, constructed in Dubbo in NSW by Mr Jim Frecklington, with the assistance of specialist tradesmen from around Australia. The coach was unveiled in Sydney by the premier of NSW and presented to the Queen during the royal tour.

150th anniversary of Sydney

The 1990s saw a sharp decline in the visits by Her Majesty to Australia, with just one taking place in February 1992. The main purpose of her visit was to take part in celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Sydney as a city.

On 21 March, Falcon 900 aircraft from No 34 Squadron conveyed Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh separately to Dubbo, NSW. One Falcon then returned the Queen to Sydney while the other conveyed Prince Philip to RAAF Base Williamstown to review a parade in

his position as Marshal of the RAAF and commemorate the 50th anniversaries of Nos 75, 76 and 77 Squadrons, and No 2 Operational Conversion Unit. More than 500 RAAF personnel participated in the parade.

The royal visit was supported by No 33 Squadron, with a Boeing 707 conveying Her Majesty to various locations, including Canberra, Sydney and Adelaide.

Federation Guard

Another eight years passed until the Queen returned to Australia. Welcoming the royal party in March 2000 was the first parading of Australia's tri-service Federation Guard. More than 3000 members of the public attended to welcome Her Majesty back to Australia.

No 34 Squadron again played an important role during the royal visit, transporting the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh to various destinations around the country during the two-week tour. Her Majesty passed on (via her assistant private secretary) her appreciation to the squadron for the 'magnificent support' it provided. A letter to Commanding Officer No 34 Squadron, Wing Commander Peter Wood, read:

Her Majesty the Queen has asked me to write to thank you and all those at 34 Squadron for the magnificent support you gave to her and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh during their two week tour of Australia. Such an extensive tour demanded the involvement of many crew and I guess most of your Falcons; it was a credit to 34 Squadron that all the journeys ran smoothly and to time.

Her Majesty has also asked me to thank you for the baseball caps you passed to us for Prince William and Prince Harry which we will send to them now that we have returned. The

Queen has asked me to pass on the enclosed photograph which she hopes may serve as a memento of the 2000 Royal Tour of Australia.

Golden jubilee

Her Majesty returned to Australia in February 2002, during her golden jubilee year, to attend CHOGM in Coolumb, Qld, from 2–5 March. Following the previous year's 9/11 attacks on the United States, regional security was high on the agenda, as was the Queen's personal security during the visit. No 34 Squadron again provided air transport support to the royal party.

Melbourne Commonwealth Games

In 2006, the Queen arrived in Australia to open Melbourne's Commonwealth Games. More than 2600 ADF personnel supported Commonwealth and state security operations to ensure the games were a success.

While in Australia, Her Majesty also opened a new section of the Sydney Opera House and planted a gum tree at Canberra's Government House. The Queen met with Aboriginal leaders and honoured firefighters who had fought the January 2003 Canberra bushfires which had destroyed more than 500 homes.

Final visit to Australia

The Queen paid her final visit to Australia in 2011, landing in Canberra on 19 October. Her Majesty was received by the Australian Federation Guard and a 21-gun royal salute. No 34 Squadron provided air transport to the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, flying them to Brisbane, Melbourne and finally to Perth where Her Majesty attended CHOGM.



*Queen Elizabeth II inspecting the Australian Federation Guard at Fairbairn, 19 October 2011.
Photo credit: Department of Defence*

Close ties with the RAAF

Throughout her reign, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip maintained close ties with the RAAF. Generations of RAAF personnel have supported her visits to Australia, including providing air transport and being on parade.