

THE SKYHAWK YEARS

HMAS *Melbourne* was originally one of six Majestic-class light fleet aircraft carriers ordered for the Royal Navy (RN) during the Second World War. These carriers were intended as 'disposable warships', i.e., to be disposed of at the end of the war or within three years of entering service.

Melbourne initially flew de Havilland Sea Venoms and Fairey Gannet aircraft until these were replaced by McDonnell-Douglas A-4G Skyhawks and Grumman S-2 Trackers in 1968. The TA-4G was unsafe to operate off the ship due to its two-seat configuration resulting in an undesirable centre of gravity (the balance of the aircraft), which prevented the aircraft launching safely if, on landing, it missed the arrestor wires and had to take off on the relatively short flight deck.



A stern view of HMAS Melbourne from the early 1970s. (AWM)

The photograph above shows:

- The 5.5-degree angled flight deck with its light-coloured dashed centreline
- The width of the landing area denoted by the two light lines either side of the centreline
- The five arrestor wires (the black lines on the flight deck)
- The catapult (the line to the left of the line of helicopters)
- The 'round down' where the aft end of the flight deck curves down (between the white horizontal line and the end of the flight deck)
- A helicopter landing spot (the white circle with a number in it)
- The droplight, the vertical line on the right end of the Admiral's Gallery
- The Landing Safety Officer platform at the left rear corner of the flight deck
- The Mirror Landing System to the left of the parked and folded Trackers

The flight deck engineers were involved with hydraulic and live steam machinery. These vital positions were filled by the Engineering Branch of the RAN. Rear Admiral Ruting provided this contribution dealing with his part in getting fixed-wing aircraft off and on the deck. Many an RAN pilot owes him their thanks for getting them off and on with never a problem.