

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to the Skyhawk pilots and maintainers who are sadly no longer with us.

The book came about via discussion on the 'Book of Faces' between a small group of people who flew and fixed the Skyhawks flown by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). 'Wouldn't it be nice if we had a book like *Buccaneer Boys*, about us who flew and fixed the Skyhawks?' 'Yep, we are all getting older and soon we won't remember.'

So, two of us, the self-appointed authors, had a private discussion and decided to make it happen. Between us, one a retired maintainer and the other a retired pilot, we divided up the tasks along the lines of 'I'll do the engineers' and 'I'll do the pilots.' Easy to say, but a lot harder to achieve in practice, particularly as we live in different hemispheres.

The obvious place to start was with the Fleet Air Arm Association of Australia, whose offices have been incredibly helpful. Not only did they broadcast our appeals multiple times, but they made their own archival resources available to us (including the incredible file maintained by Phil Thompson). One Skyhawk pilot, John Bartels, has always been a keen photographer and made his private collection available to us. He also maintains a list of Skyhawk pilots and their last known points of contact.

A key contributor was our own 'Mr Skyhawk', Commodore John Da Costa RAN (Rtd). He has made the first contribution with an essay never previously seen in Australia. Not only that, but when we approached him cap in hand with our request for him to write the foreword, he graciously agreed to do so.

Flying and fixing is very much a chicken and the egg situation. Without maintainers, there are no aircraft to fly. Without pilots, there are no broken aircraft to fix and then fly. Our skills are interdependent.

The two squadrons that operated the Skyhawks in RAN service were VF805 and VC724. VF805 was the operational unit that went to sea as part of the carrier air group aboard HMAS *Melbourne*, our hard-worked aircraft carrier. VC724 was the support squadron that trained the pilots, kept them current, trained the maintainers, kept them working hard, and supported the fleet operating around the shores of Australia. The aircraft and the people were interchanged regularly.

The squadrons were small in terms of numbers, both of aircraft and personnel. The backbones of each were the senior pilots and senior maintainers who had accumulated years of experience. The junior pilots and junior maintainers were trusted to do their jobs to the best of their