

AIR FORCE NEWS

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85

YEARS OF SERVICE



Air Force News would like to acknowledge the help and expertise of the staff at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand while photographing some of their extensive and impressive collection.

Foreword

Rebecca Quilliam

This year we recognise 85 years of Royal New Zealand Air Force service.

Our people today are able to fulfil their roles and serve New Zealand by standing on the shoulders of those who came before them.

The Air Force's genesis can be traced back earlier than 1937, to the bedlam of World War I, to a dusty paddock just outside Christchurch and to the foreshore of Waitemata Harbour at Kohimarama.

During the Great War the Canterbury Aviation Company at Sockburn and the New Zealand Flying School in Auckland were formed. Henry Wigram pioneered the former, while the latter was the brainchild of brothers Vivian and Leo Walsh. The flying schools were responsible for training nearly 300 New Zealand airmen who went on to serve in the Royal Flying Corps during World War I.

In 1923, at the Sockburn airfield, the New Zealand Permanent Air Force was formed as part of the Army. Eleven years later the Permanent Air Force was renamed the Royal New Zealand Air Force, but it remained part of the Army. Finally, on April 1, 1937, under the legislative authority of the Royal New Zealand Air Force Act, it was re-formed as a separate service.

In this issue of *Air Force News* we pay tribute to the personnel who collectively were part of the backbone of what the Air Force is today. Our people's past and present experiences span the past eight decades.

They share stories of their time working as pilots, navigators, signallers, communications specialists, engineers and firefighters. They relive memories of flying in warzones, travelling the world and being on the front line during times of natural disasters. We learn of the challenges some of our first women had while working and rising through the ranks in a male-dominated workforce. And our newest generation of Air Force aviators give an insight into the Air Force of the future.

The pages also showcase just some of the aircraft that engaged in a central role in the Air Force's military air operations and play a crucial part in today's.

We hope you enjoy this special issue.

85

YEARS OF SERVICE

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Chief of Air Force

First Word

Air Vice-Marshal Andrew Clark

This month we mark the 85th anniversary of the RNZAF – a major milestone for our still-young Service. The New Zealand government's Air Force Act 1937 took effect from 1 April that year, recognising that the third dimension was not only a critical element of the country's security, but that it needed distinct specialisation and resourcing. It was an exciting time: advertisements called for 23 aircrew and one engineer – 2,100 young people applied.

With the deteriorating international security environment, expansion was an early priority, but few predicted the urgency and the magnitude that would become necessary. Just seven years after its establishment, New Zealand's fledgling Air Force contained some 42,000 airmen. The mind boggles at this feat of planning and logistics.

In the decades since then, the RNZAF story has become interwoven with the story of New Zealand itself, both in conflict and in peacetime. The diversity of operations has been enormous, spanning **Antarctica**, **Battle of Britain**, **Combat**, **Dangerous cargo**, **Earthquakes**, **Fisheries**, **Geologic surveys**, **Humanitarian aid**, **Insurgencies**, **Joint ops**, **Korea**, **Logistic support**, **Malaya**, **Naval support**, **Occupation**, **Pacific Islands**, **Quarantine management**, **Refugees**, **SAR**, **Tsunamis**, **Underwater warfare**, **VIPs**, **World war**, **Xmas Drop**, **Youth development**, and **Zoo animals**.

You never quite know what will crop up next – which is the whole idea of what we're about. Never quite knowing what's around the corner has, for 85 years, refocused us again and again on honing our tight team of skilled and disciplined professionals – a team that can turn its hand and technology to meet the challenges of the day.

Over the past 85 years, the RNZAF has become interwoven with New Zealanders' lives in another, perhaps even more important way as well. Many thousands of Kiwis have served with us over that time. Many serving today had parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts who served before them. Thousands more across all walks of life in our country have friends and relatives who have served. We are a part of their stories. Kiwis who leave the RNZAF take their skills and ethos back into the New Zealand community and continue to build our country.

In a more normal environment there would have been a bit more activity to mark our 85-year-milestone, featuring (as you would expect) some flying machine activity and some larger gatherings. Instead I ask you to take a moment to consider those who have served before us and who built the RNZAF into what it is today. How will we continue to build and adapt our small team to meet the surprises of tomorrow? And what will your own legacy be to those who will soon join us to inherit the RNZAF from our care? It's worth a thought.

Oh ... and happy birthday!



1930s 1940s

P-40 Kittyhawk | 1942

The P-40 Kittyhawk was the backbone of Air Force fighter squadrons from 1942 to the middle of 1944 when they were replaced by Corsairs. Nearly 300 Kittyhawks equipped eight squadrons and two training units. They were used to train fighter pilots at home in New Zealand and on operations in the South West Pacific during World War II. By the end of the war, there were only 124 Kittyhawks remaining, 20 having been lost in combat, 76 in accidents overseas and another 76 in accidents in New Zealand. During their time at the front, Air Force Kittyhawks accounted for 99 Japanese aircraft destroyed in air combat, with a further 14 probables.





Flying Officer

Arthur “Joppy” Joplin

Served c1940–1946

Arthur Joplin joined the Royal New Zealand Air Force so long ago, he can't quite remember the exact year.

“I don't know, around 1940 I suppose. I think we were given the choice of Army, Navy or Air Force and I chose the Air Force. I don't know why.”

But while the 98-year-old might have forgotten a few details, he remembers his career in the Air Force with stark clarity.

“The reason I ended up being a pilot was a bit of luck. To be a pilot you had to be pretty lucky to get through all the tests they gave you. That's my theory.”

After training at Ashburton in Tiger Moths and with the world in the midst of war Mr Joplin volunteered to be sent overseas, “where all the excitement was”. He flew Lancasters alongside the legendary Dam Busters in the Royal Air Force's No. 617 Squadron.

“Again, that was luck,” he said.

“During training we were flying a big four-engine aircraft, which was a beautiful aircraft to fly. My last bombing exercise was done one night – it really was a perfect night and the aircraft flew very steadily and every bomb we dropped was either very close or a near hit and that was what got us onto 617.”

The squadron was known for its daring dam buster flights, however Mr Joplin wasn't involved in those missions. But he was a key player in helping to destroy Hitler's favourite ship, the *Tirpitz*.

“We didn't know that at the time – it was just a ship up in Norway. But it was a danger, it was the biggest battleship in the world and everyone was scared that if it got out, it would do a lot of damage. Its guns could hit a target that was out of sight. So anyway, it had to be sunk.”

When describing the *Tirpitz*, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, “The destruction, or even the crippling, of this ship is the greatest event at sea at the present time. No other target is comparable to it”.

No. 9 Squadron and No. 617 Squadron were chosen for the mission, to take place on November 12, 1944.

The behemoth Nazi battleship, weighing nearly 43,000 tonnes and 251m long, was the biggest ship in the world – 2,000 tonnes heavier than its sister ship Bismarck.

Remembering the operation, Mr Joplin said a couple of planes landed direct hits and his crew dropped a bomb that landed close to the ship, causing shockwaves delivering a blow to its integrity. The sinking of the *Tirpitz* became a pivotal moment in the war.

“People reckon you can still see the hole where my bomb landed. It must have shaken the earth a bit.”

The following month Mr Joplin's luck ran out as his aircraft crashed on its return to base. Running low on fuel and in thick fog, two of the aircrew died in the crash and Mr Joplin broke both of his legs.

Led to believe the crash was his fault, he received a red endorsement in his logbook. It wasn't until more than 70 years later he learned nine other aircraft crashed in the conditions and he should have been directed to a closer base in Scotland where the weather was clear.

“They rescinded the red endorsement 75 years later, which didn't mean a thing by then,” he said.

“I came home in December 1946. When I came back I wasn't really able to talk about my wartime experiences because most of the crew I flew with were all English in the RAF. The only other New Zealander in the crew was [bomb aimer Flight Sergeant] Loftus Hebbard from Mosgiel in Otago. So we couldn't get together that often. I was really on my own.”

He later told media there was no pleasure in going to war.

“You're doing a job and you just did it. You couldn't think too much about it or you couldn't cope.”



1950s

Vampire T.11 Trainer | 1955

New Zealand purchased five T.11 Vampire trainers in 1955 to equip the Fighter Operational Conversion Unit at Base Ohakea. It was intended that these aircraft would be used to train the RNZAF Territorial Air Force (TAF) squadrons, which were due to convert from the Mustangs. This training began at the TAF annual camp of 1955 and continued until the disbandment of the TAF squadrons in 1957. Fewer Vampires were then required and many were transferred to No. 75 Squadron or were placed in storage.





Flight Lieutenant **Jack Hall**

Served 1946–1967

As the dust settled on World War II, 17-year-old Jack Hall joined the Air Force. He had spent his youth watching Tiger Moths from Taieri fly over his home town of Lawrence, in Otago, training young men who would be sent to battle.

Iknew quite a few of the local boys who joined the Air Force. None of them came home from the war unfortunately.”

Joining the Air Force straight after a war meant Mr Hall saw a shift in morale of colleagues who had joined before the end of the fighting.

“Most of the people who were there had trained to go to war and the war stopped and their whole future collapsed in front of them – especially aircrew. They had trained and were naturally keen to get into action and suddenly it had all gone.

“Everything was run down badly because the Air Force had lost its *raison d'être*, so it was a very flat situation – there was no future mapped out. They were mostly trying to get their people home from overseas. The Air Force didn't have a future in the eyes of the government, because what could you do with an Air Force if there was no fighting going on? Thousands and thousands of personnel left.”

Mr Hall kicked off his career in the post-war service by not getting what he was hoping for.

“I wanted to be an engine mechanic and the lying bastards said to me there was no course available and I would have to wait a few months for it to be available, but they would put me on signals. Well they still haven't contacted me about it yet, so I guess it didn't come along.”

As it turned out Mr Hall enjoyed the signals trade and was posted to Fiji's Laucala Bay base for 18 months in 1947 and 1948. When he came home he was posted to No. 41 Squadron with Bristol Freighters, Hastings and Douglas C-47 Dakotas.

In 1953 he was deployed twice to the United Kingdom, taking a much longer route in a Hastings than would be needed with our long-haul aircraft now. The flight to the United Kingdom went via Australia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Cyprus and Malta.

“It's not generally known in New Zealand, but we took a contingent of New Zealand Police to Cyprus because the Turkish and Greeks were having a bit of a discussion about who owned Cyprus. They had an international police force keeping them apart. We dropped the Police off and carried on to the UK to bring back ex-military personnel who were recruited into the RNZAF.

“My wife came out from the UK in 1952 on a similar deal. She ended up flying in a flying boat to Wellington and on a steamer to Lyttelton and on a truck to Wigram. When she saw me lined up to have my breakfast, she thought, ‘That's the man I'm going to marry’. She didn't tell me until a couple of years later. I was very, very lucky – she's an amazing person.”

In 1954 Mr Hall applied to remuster to be a pilot, but missed out for reasons he's never been clear on.

“I passed my hearing and eye tests, but after a short interview I was told no. So I ended up retraining as a navigator and stayed in that trade until 1967 when I retired.”

He fondly remembered an avalanche of resupply flights to places like Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam, during the war, with No. 41 Squadron while deployed to Singapore. However, he faced his own personal tragedy during the posting when a friend of his was killed after the pilot flew into a mountain on the way to Kuala Lumpur on one of the supply missions.

It was overseas he developed a love for the Bristol Freighter transport aircraft.

“I thought the Bristol Freighters were wonderful aircraft, absolutely wonderful. Two thousand horsepower each side and you could climb from 1,500 feet to 3,000 feet on one engine. I'll never hear anybody say anything wrong about Bristol Freighters, if they do, it means they weren't operating it to its capacity. I did 5,000 flying hours in the Freighter, which is pretty rare.”

But the highlight of his career was as the navigator on board a Lancaster as it flew a three-hour show-the-plane flight around Auckland. The aircraft is now on display at Motat.

“I'm possibly the last serving Kiwi to crew on a Lancaster.”

In 1967, Mr Hall was awarded the Air Force Cross and he said looking back, his lasting impression of the service was the people he worked alongside.

“The companionship, the standard of discipline amongst people in the forces, the fact that everybody's honest and polite and they are people you would like to be with.”





1960s

Bell UH-1H Iroquois | 1966

The Iroquois first entered RNZAF service in 1966, with five aircraft operating with No. 3 Battlefield Support Squadron at Hobsonville. Nine more Iroquois were delivered in 1970. Two aircraft were based for many years at Wigram for Army support and search and rescue duties, and four served in Singapore until 1989. RNZAF Iroquois were used in the Antarctic, the South Pacific and Timor Leste. The Iroquois was withdrawn from service in 2015, and replaced by the NH90.

Wing Commander

Terry Knight

Served 1961–1986

Terry Knight's career as a navigator with No. 40 Squadron took him to war zones and around the world several times.

After graduating from his Wings course at 23, his first aircraft were the Bristol Freighters, which were replaced in 1965 by the modern C-130 Hercules.

"The Bristol Freighters were noisy. They leaked and flew slow, but went to some exciting places. They were the Model T Ford compared to the C-130s, which were really flash."

Not long into his career, Mr Knight was deployed to Singapore where he went on operational and training flights around South East Asia, including to Hong Kong via Vietnam, which was embroiled in a war between the North and South.

"In those days there were just a lot of American soldiers and aircraft, but there was nothing happening. But by the time we left of course, it was all on. So we were involved in it from fairly early on until right near the end."

He ended up flying in both the Bristol Freighters and the C-130s doing supply drops into Borneo during Confrontation in the former and carrying troops and supplies into and out of Vietnam in the latter.

"It was continuous. They were exciting times. The Vietnam conflict had been pretty quiet initially and then all of a sudden it started and just kept on going. The resupply flights kept us busy more than anything else really. We did most trips into Saigon, but then we started doing trips into places like Vũng Tàu and Qui Nhon."

On Mr Knight's return to New Zealand, the travel continued in the new C-130s. The flights spanned the globe, from Antarctica and to Russia, where the crew delivered furniture and other equipment to the New Zealand Embassy in Moscow.

"The Hercs were interesting to fly in. I was alright up the front, but it used to rain on the people down the back. We would carry people back from Singapore or somewhere and flying at 20,000 feet, everything ices up on the inside of the aircraft, so then when we started to descend it heated up and the rain started to fall. The passengers would be in the cargo department with their umbrellas up – it really wasn't built to be a passenger aeroplane."

He also helped deliver milk powder, wheat and rice to Bangladesh's starving population in the wake of the Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistan.

"It was a formative time in history when I started my career – there was so much happening around the world. Never a dull moment. There was still a war-time feel at the time. Quite a lot of the guys I worked with had been in the war."

In 1974 Mr Knight stepped away from his aircrew role and took up desk jobs in Wellington, including as the Commanding Officer at the Shelly Bay air base in 1976.

The Sunderland aircraft had gone by then and Navy patrol boats were regular visitors. A lot of Air Force personnel also lived at the quarters there.

A promotion to Wing Commander and posting to policy branch followed. The desk job didn't last long though as Mr Knight was posted to the Sinai with the multi-national peacekeeping force.

"It was a pretty hostile environment over there in the desert. I was the contingent commander for about 36 Kiwis who were there. There were 15 countries involved with representatives there and that was very interesting."

"In those days there were several fundraising Telethons in New Zealand, so as part of the 1983 episode we decided to run from the bottom of Sinai, where the American base was, up to the top where we were, right through the Sinai Peninsula. I think it took about 24 hours by the time we finished."

On his return to New Zealand, Mr Knight was posted to roles involving officer postings and moving personnel and their families to various bases.

"That was very interesting stuff, I didn't get to travel, but I did get to talk with people about moving places and whether they wanted to go or not. In those days there was no choice, not like now," he said.

"To sum up my career in the Air Force, I thought it was exciting, a lot of fun and doing some reasonably important things on behalf of New Zealand."





1970s

TA-4K Skyhawk | 1970

The Air Force purchased 10 A-4K and four TA-4K Skyhawks in 1970 from the United States. A further 10 surplus Skyhawks were procured from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in 1984. The Skyhawks served with No. 75 Squadron at Ohakea, and later, with No. 2 Squadron at RAN Nowra in Australia, as a multi-role aircraft capable of conducting fighter ground attack, battlefield interdiction, air-to-air and maritime strike operations. The fleet underwent an extensive upgrade in the late 1980s under 'Project Kahu' to improve its operational capabilities.





Squadron Leader

John “JV” Voice

Served 1972–2022

Fifty years ago, at the tender age of 16, Squadron Leader John ‘JV’ Voice joined the Air Force as a Boy Entrant. This year he will farewell the service after a full and varied career.

“I’ve seen a lot of changes over the past 50 years. I joined because a lot of my family had served during the Confrontation in Malaysia – mostly a mixture of Army and Navy. I joined the Air Force because I liked aircraft as a youngster and built all the plastic models I could get my hands on.”

Beginning as an armourer at Base Auckland, Squadron Leader (SQNLDR) Voice worked with weapons used on the P-3 Orions and spent a lot of time at the Kaipara Air Weapons Range where heavy weapons and rocket practice took place.

“I went to Wigram for three months to complete electronics training to enable maintenance of weapons release systems for weapon capable aircraft. Armourers had to be a jack-of-all trades because we had to do a bit of everything.”

After his stint in the armoury and an explosives depot, he applied for a three-year air ordnance role with No. 5 Squadron and ended up staying put for 20 years.

“There were a lot of search and rescues – when we found people it was so gratifying, but there were some where you went out and failed to find anyone at all.

“One of the worst I flew on was during the Hobart to Auckland yacht race in January 1980. One of the yachts, *Smackwater Jack* with four sailors on board, disappeared in heavy seas. On our first sortie below the clouds we had 100 feet between us and the crest of the waves. It was pitch black and we couldn’t see a thing. There were about four or five days searching for the yacht but it had disappeared.”

The role offered some light-hearted flights as well, such as the Christmas runs to drop care packages to the scientists stationed at Campbell Island, about 700km south of New Zealand.

“It was like being Santa. One of the Christmas requests was to deliver two kegs of beer for the scientists’ celebrations. So the crew packed them into containers and delivered them out the back door as we were flying over.

“After the first drop we could hear laughing over our radios from the people below. They described a spectacular scene of the keg falling out the bottom of the container when the parachute opened and it smashing into the water causing the beer to spray in a huge fountain. The second delivery arrived safely.”

By the end of his time with No. 5 Squadron, SQNLDR Voice had racked up 9,444.8 flying hours in the aircraft.

The early 1990s saw a move to a desk job with Director of Defence Intelligence and Security at the old headquarters on Stout Street in Wellington.

“I’m still working in the operations area and work with access and tasking for the Navy’s ships and ground elements. It’s all based around intelligence requirements.”

In late 2000 SQNLDR Voice was deployed for six months to East Timor with No. 3 Squadron as the operations and intelligence officer. While there, there was a shortage of helicopter door gunners.

“So the CO pointed out I was still currently aircrew and an armourer, so I best get my flying kit sorted. So that was another role I took on over there until my deployment ended. I ended up doing 38 flying hours in the role.

“East Timor was a nice place, the locals were very friendly to us. That tends to be the case for Kiwis around the world anyway, we tend to fit in.”

Deployments continued with postings to the Defence Signals Directorate in Australia for two years, with the first P-3 team to deploy to Camp Mirage in Dubai, Afghanistan, and Bahrain.

There had been some dramatic changes in the Air Force over the past five decades, SQNLDR Voice noted.

“One of the biggest ones was when the Air Force downsized and people from across all the Air Force were made redundant. The same amount of work needed to be done but with fewer people. It was not at all well-received.

“We have a really good workforce, everyone does what they need to do to keep the planes flying and the organisation going. I’m due to release in October this year – I’m on my last hurrah.

“When I look back I think about the fun I’ve had, the people I’ve worked with and enjoying the job. If you don’t enjoy the job, you shouldn’t be there. I’ve met some amazing people.”



1980s

P-3K Orion | 1984

New Zealand's Airborne Surveillance and Response Force (ASRF) is provided by No. 5 Squadron's P-3K2 Orion aircraft. While it was bought in the 1960s, in 1984 the original P-3B fleet underwent a major upgrade to its avionics and radio system. The re-designation P-3K was then applied to the aircraft. They conduct a range of tasks, including aerial surveillance of New Zealand's areas of interest such as the Exclusive Economic Zone, the South Pacific and the Southern Ocean. They support Government agencies including Ministry for Primary Industries, New Zealand Customs, New Zealand Police and the Department of Conservation. They are also available around the clock with contingency capability for tasks such as search and rescue and support during natural disasters. A later upgrade to the aircraft saw it designated the P-3K2.

Sergeant

Joyce McGee

Served 1977-1986

Communications specialist Sergeant Joyce McGee was one of the first Air Force women to serve in an international peacekeeping operation.

She was joined by Sergeant Gail Chambers who worked in Administration. They were deployed to join the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai, Egypt in 1984. The mission was to oversee the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

In 1977 the Women's Royal New Zealand Air Force was integrated into the Royal New Zealand Air Force but, while women were entitled to equal pay, roles were still limited. It was this environment that saw 18-year-old Joyce McGee enter the service as a typist. After a short stint she re-mustered and joined the communications trade.

"Like most communicators, we were lucky, regardless of our gender we not only did base work in the comms centres, but we were also sent away on exercises and deployments, including going to Fiji to support the cyclone efforts with No. 3 Squadron," she said.

"I was lucky to go to RIMPAC in 1982, in Hawaii. During the exercise, I worked in a centre on Ford Island in the middle of Pearl Harbor. We mainly worked with the Americans, I think there were some females there, but mostly males."

In January 1985 Ms McGee was chosen to deploy to Sinai, working in the Operations Centre, where she maintained radio contact with allied aircraft.

"We followed all flights of allied aircraft, conducted communications with them and did regular operations checks. We worked with the French, Americans and Australians.

"We also worked with the Colombians, who guarded the runway gate. We had a script to speak in Spanish, for them to open the gates or make sure the goats or other animals were off the runway for takeoffs and landings."

Language barriers continued for the then Corporal, and creative solutions were needed.

"At first I thought it was a joke – but I was told that when we were talking with the crew of the French aircraft and their Operations Centre, we would sometimes need to speak in a French accent so they could understand what we were saying.

"I thought, no, that can't be right. But one day I had to call the operations room and say their aircraft was due in at 1730 and they just didn't understand me until I said it in an accent. They said, 'Oh, oui oui!'"

Due to the environment and type of deployment, there was a serious side to the work of course, potential consequences of not keeping a close watch on the flight could put personnel and aircraft at risk, she said.

Admitting to some naivety, Ms McGee believed that when she and SGT Chambers arrived in the Sinai, they would be able to integrate immediately and get on with the job.

"But there were some logistical issues around where we were going to be placed in the barracks, because we were the first women to stay in them, and also how the showering would work.

"There was a little resistance for a couple of days, but soon the guys got used to us and realised that Gail and I weren't precious, we just wanted to get on with it."

On her return to New Zealand, she was posted to the Navigation, Air Electronics and Telecommunications Training Squadron at Wigram as an instructor. Staying there for a year, she left the Air Force in 1986 after reaching the rank of Sergeant. Eleven years later she returned to the Air Force to work as a civilian for a year in communications.

In that time period, Ms McGee noticed the difference in the way women personnel were treated.

"Being in the comms squadron, most of the time we were treated the same as everyone else. But in the wider trades there was a difference in how women were treated – not only in attitude, but also practical things like dress where fit-for-purpose uniforms matched roles, such as overalls and flight suits.

"By the time I returned as a civilian it was great to see an increase of women at senior officer level."





1990s

Aermacchi MB-339CB | 1990

The Air Force acquired 18 Aermacchi MB-339CBs in 1990, with deliveries beginning in 1991. All 18 aircraft were operated by No. 14 Squadron at Base Ohakea. The MB-339, or 'Macchi' as they became known, provided pilots with the advanced flying training component of their 'Wings' course. It also had a second-line attack capability when equipped with 12.7mm gun packs, bombs and rockets. With the disbandment of the Air Combat Force in 2001, the Aermacchi was retired and put into storage at Ohakea. The majority of the fleet was sold in 2012, with the remainder being allocated to aviation museums around New Zealand.





Warrant Officer

Viti Flanagan

Served 1983 – Current

Over the past 30 years the Air Force has made great strides in encouraging women to enlist and it offers a safe environment for them to achieve their ambitions. But it wasn't always the way.

Warrant Officer (W/O) Viti Flanagan, one of the Air Force's first female engine runners, says she wouldn't hesitate to recommend the service to young women to consider for a career.

"It's a safe place to pursue a career, but to be brutally honest it sure as hell wasn't when I joined. It was terrible. They didn't have safety shoes in our size, we had no female trousers – I had to wear a male uniform."

Alongside that was the open hostility from some of her male colleagues as W/O Flanagan was being recognised for her excellent work and gaining well-deserved promotions.

"There were some men who asked me to my face if I slept with the boss to get promoted. I appreciated that they said it to my face, because I know there were a lot saying it behind my back. I would just say: 'No I didn't, but is that what you had to do? God, that must have been so awkward.'"

W/O Flanagan's humour and support from friends and leaders helped her through those first years and she has since enjoyed a long career with the Air Force and credits the military ethos for successes in her academic work outside of uniform.

"I find that the leadership skills taught – no matter what trade – sets you up really well for other aspects of your life, whether it's volunteer work or sports clubs. And it's exciting. I've gone to some great places that I probably wouldn't have gone to if I hadn't joined the Air Force.

"When I was a Sergeant I did an exchange posting to Canada to a search and rescue squadron. We spent quite a bit of time up in Alaska, which was hard going, but I loved it."

W/O Flanagan grew up in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand, which inspired a desire to have a career involving travel and aircraft. A love of physics led her to the Air Force recruiter.

Success followed and she reached the rank of Corporal while working as an engine runner at No. 5 Squadron – the highest ranked woman in the aircraft technician trade. The role involved numerous safety checks of the equipment after major work had been completed on the aircraft.

During her time with No. 5 Squadron, W/O Flanagan completed a parachute jump course and gained her parachute wings.

"I loved it. They got me to be on drifter duties – which was the first one to jump to see where the landing zone was. What they realised was that if I jumped first, none of the men ever refused to jump after me."

Safety became a passion for W/O Flanagan who was promoted to Warrant Officer and posted into DASH (Directorate for Air Force Safety and Health) as the Air Force's ground safety officer.

"The job I was in responded to safety incidents and doing investigation work."

At the same time W/O Flanagan was doing extramural study for her Masters in international communication. However, working and study became untenable, so after more than 24 years she left the Air Force to concentrate on her academic work full-time.

A welcome invitation back to the Air Force as a Reservist in 2011 brought her back to the service. Among her roles was to manage the Air Force mentoring programme.

"While I was there I researched and wrote the submission for international accreditation, which was successful and as a result of that, Middlesex University invited me to write a chapter on mentoring. I co-authored it with the New Zealand Coaching and Mentoring Centre director Wendy Baker."

Now, she is back in the air safety space and also belongs to the New Zealand and the International Safety Investigators Association.

She looks back on her career and "in general, I remember the highlights".

One in particular was being awarded the RNZAF Gold Sports Badge. "Sport kept me sane while contributing to the RNZAF in that area as a player, coach and administrator."

She also credits her husband for the "resolute support over the years – even if he is Army!"

She was the first woman in any of the engineering trades to reach the rank of Warrant Officer. "Being the first wasn't as important to me as hoping I wasn't the last," she said.

"The experiences I've had are pretty hard to replicate. It's a unique career."



ROYAL NEW

2000s

C-130H(NZ) Hercules | 2005

The Air Force operates five C-130H(NZ) Hercules out of No. 40 Squadron at Base Auckland. They were initially delivered as C-130H models during the 1960s. However, like the P-3K2s, the Hercules also enjoyed a major upgrade. In 2005 the Life Extension Programme began, which involved an extensive avionics upgrade of the flight deck and structural refurbishment. Upon completion, the aircraft was re-designated the C-130(H)NZ. The aircraft provides strategic and tactical airlift as well as participating in international training exercises. Tasks are flown in support of combat, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations.

ZEALAND AIR FORCE



Kim Harrison

Flight Sergeant

Kim Harrison

Served 2001–Current

Working in military intelligence isn't much like a John Le Carré novel. Sometimes it's borrowing a kid's bike to ride around an earthquake damaged town getting as much information about the area as possible.

Flight Sergeant (F/S) Kim Harrison was one of the first non-commissioned officers to join the Intelligence trade – but she didn't quite know what she was getting into.

“You hear the word intelligence and you think super spy stuff – but you don't really know what it is. So I asked my Sergeant if I could go and sit with the teams who were doing the work, for a couple of days. I basically walked into the geospatial area, saw what they did and thought, that's what I want to do. It seemed to be a good fit for me.”

The unit comes into their own during events like natural disasters. They analyse images sent from an Air Force aircraft and provide information that will tell the appropriate agency or government where help is needed most urgently.

They add metadata to the imagery, such as geo-referencing information, which links the image to its location on Earth, before sending it to Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand (HQJFNZ).

F/S Harrison now runs the section and over the past 10 years has seen it evolve.

“Our specialist training largely hasn't changed – we still do a basic course in Canada after the basic course in New Zealand and we do specialist courses when we can, but we moved the way we do things with the platform changes and with our customer needs.”

Her career has taken “a pretty interesting path”, including a two-year posting to Geospatial New Zealand. F/S Harrison has also been deployed to Afghanistan, Australia and the Middle East, along with joining multiple missions with the deployable taskforce.

“My highlight has been the people I've met along the way. For every experience you have, good or bad, it teaches you something about yourself and what you can do. I think the people have been the best part.”

Describing her role can be challenging because of the security constraints, but F/S Harrison has worked out a unique description.

“Sometimes when people ask me what I do, I tell them some days I'm the circus ringmaster, some days I'm the elephant in the room. It's definitely a job where if we do it right, nothing goes wrong and there are no surprises in your day.”

Working in areas where natural disasters had struck showcased F/S Harrison's ability to be flexible in her work.

In the aftermath of the Kaikoura earthquake she was part of the team that established the Defence Force's presence in the town.

“We flew down there and there was a guy about to get onto a private plane to fly out. So we asked what he was doing with his rental car. He said he was just going to leave it there, so we asked for the keys to that.”

Her job was to establish what the team needed in the emergency operations centre and what was already there that could be utilised.

“One of the first things I was trying to do was to sort out what information people had and didn't have and capturing that on a glass window, because we didn't have anything to write on. The window would flex with the aftershocks that came through.

“I have a distinct memory of biking around Kaikoura on some little kid's BMX that he let me borrow in exchange for a ration pack, to try to find maps of the local area and of local services and the police who were there. That was pretty funny,” she said.

“My career to date has been a pretty cool start. And I say that because my career may not end in the Air Force, it may keep going into other things. It's been pretty good – I've enjoyed the ride and I'll stay on it for a while longer yet.”

2010s





NH90 | 2015

Our Air Force has eight NH90 helicopters in its fleet, operated by No. 3 Squadron and they have been in full service since 2015. They are a twin-engine medium utility helicopter featuring a fly-by-wire flight control system, full ice protection system, and fibre-glass composite structure. It provides tactical air mobility operations, including support to special operations, casualty evacuation, and movement of troops and equipment. The NH90 also provides a range of support services to government agencies including search and rescue, police operations, disaster relief and counter-terrorism response.



Pilot Officer

Kiwi Walker

Served 2014–Current

Pilot Officer Kiwi Walker’s approach to life and his career in the Air Force is centred on the premise that the most important things are people and family.

Pilot Officer (PLTOFF) Walker’s iwi is Ngāti Maniapoto and he said Māori culture’s core understanding that people are vitally important underpins nearly everything he does.

“It hasn’t really failed me to date. It’s always been drummed into me that family are important, even now they still support me big time. They help pull me through anything and everything.

“On missions, you can have all the equipment in the world, but if the people aren’t up to scratch, expensive equipment means nothing. I’ve seen how well a team can operate when you focus on the people – you can move mountains if the people are doing well.”

PLTOFF Walker was adamant about a career in the industry and eight years ago he found an opening as an aviation fuel specialist in the Air Force after graduating university with a degree in aviation management

“I was trying to get into the airlines at the time, but I was having no luck. When I saw a role with the Air Force as a refueller, I thought I would give it a go. They took me on straightaway. I’ve always had a passion for planes. I saw my first plane when I was young and I fell in love.”

PLTOFF Walker has now taken that passion to a different level and last year completed officer training in preparation for a trade change to be a pilot.

“I felt I’d reached my peak as a refueller – there was nothing else I could master as a Leading Aircraftman and I wanted to get a promotion. For me there was no other trade more exciting than to be a pilot,” he said.

“I’m open to being posted to any of the squadrons once I’m qualified, but given the option, I’d like to go to No. 40 Squadron with the Hercules.”

Flying Hercules aircraft appealed to the former refueller who also learned to drive trucks and transporting materials in the role.

“I like that aspect of transporting goods – I see the Hercules as a truck of the skies.”

Growing up on a dairy farm in Otewa and Waitomo, near Otorohanga, instilled a strong work ethic in the 36-year-old.

“One thing I learnt on the farm was the value of hard work. It wasn’t easy, but it was very rewarding. It was also great to be part of a small, close-knit community,” he said.

The Air Force provided a unique work experience where no two days are the same, PLTOFF Walker said.

“It’s also very good for job security. But, like any organisation, it ain’t perfect and if you’re not into military discipline, it can be quite daunting.

“However, if you make the most of what the Air Force has to offer, combined with a little perseverance, it can be an amazing place to work.”

Aircraftman

Kanapa Kerr

Served 2021–Current

Being able to hold on to tradition and history while embracing a highly skilled, adaptable and modern Air Force is a reason Aircraftman Kanapa Kerr loves being in the Service.

After graduating at the end of last year, Aircraftman (AC) Kerr became the third generation of Air Force aviators in her family, following in the footsteps of her grandmother, Te Rerehau Racheal Patrick and aunt, Angela Patrick, who served as a Pilot Officer for the supply squadron.

A fierce advocate for te reo and te ao Māori, AC Kerr had been teaching at a Kohunga reo school when she decided she wanted a change in her environment, but didn't want to lose touch with her culture.

"When I heard that my grandmother was in the Air Force that helped me to decide it was where I wanted to be."

Attracted to the firefighter trade, AC Kerr said she enjoys an active job that comes with an occasional adrenalin rush. After graduating she was deployed to work in a Managed Isolation Facility, but is now posted to Base Woodbourne's firefighter unit.

"In the future I see myself staying with the trade, but who knows what will happen."

AC Kerr grew up in Papamoa and was raised by her whaea (aunt) Waka, a staunch wahine Māori, and her matua keke (uncle) Pirini – both passionate about te reo Māori and the culture. She went to Kura Kaupapa Māori, te reo immersion schools.

"They played a key role in supporting the love I have for my own culture. We did a lot of learning outside the classroom going to marae and going to Māori war commemorations. History was always an important thing."

With family ties to Tauranga and Taupō, AC Kerr's iwi are Ngāi Te Rangī and Ngāti Tūwharetoa and Te Arawa. She also has links to Tūhoe and Te Whakatōhea.

"I'm very supportive of the Defence Force acknowledging that an incorporation of Māori culture and language makes for a stronger force. There is certainly a time and place to use te ao Māori but sometimes there needs to be greater understanding – which I guess just gives us more work to do. So there needs to be a bit more work done in that area."

She received her moko kauae before joining the Air Force, but was encouraged that the organisation was accepting of facial tā moko.

"My inspiration to having a moko kanohi are my whaea and matua who both have moko kanohi, and now four of us, their tamariki, have it.

"I see it as something that should be normalised. Whenever I see it in the mirror or someone mentions it to me it helps to keep me grounded in my culture. I don't want to lose my track and seeing my moko kauae keeps me on track.

"I'm pretty stoked that the Defence Force overall is slowly letting Māori normalise facial tā moko in the military. As we're living in modern times, it welcomes old traditions. It pairs up history and tradition with a modern Air Force.

"I stand today, wearing my kauae, and I think that in itself, tells that I am unapologetically Māori. It addresses the history of our people and says I am proud of my ancestors, and where I come from. I am proud to be Māori."



