

FOREWORD

The authors, Lieutenant Peter Greenfield and Chief Petty Officer David Prest, who later served as a Flight Lieutenant engineer in the Royal Australian Air Force, have done me the honour of asking me to write this foreword, despite my 'hands on' involvement being only for the first quarter of the timespan of Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Skyhawk operations.

I guess their request could be justified in that I was the first RAN Skyhawk squadron Commanding Officer and, as a Royal Navy (RN) trained Air Warfare Instructor (AWI), together with my erstwhile Qualified Flying Instructor colleague Lieutenant Commander Grahame King, and our tame United States Navy (USN) exchange pilot, Lieutenant Mike Gump, defined and implemented the Operational Flying School syllabus of training, which remained substantially unchanged over the operational life of the RAN Skyhawks.

The lead author of this book, Peter Greenfield, began his Skyhawk training after I had left the squadron but, clearly, embraced and put into practice the concepts that we, the first instructors, wished to instil. His ability as a Skyhawk pilot is exemplified by his having been awarded a 'Subsunk' by exercise umpires after what I believe to have been the only time an RAN Skyhawk pilot identified a 'hostile' snorting submarine during an exercise and simulated an attack with a Sidewinder missile.

Of course, none of the training, or subsequent operational flying, would have been possible without the dedicated and professional competence of aircraft maintainers such as David Prest. I consider there has not been sufficient acknowledgement of these men, who often worked late into the night, if not all through it, to provide aircraft on the line to meet the often-ambitious flying programmes drawn up by the senior pilots! Skyhawks would not have flown, but for them.

The chapters of this book give a detailed account of all aspects of RAN Skyhawk operations in the RAN over the period of the life of this remarkable aircraft. In that regard, I must say the authors have done superb justice to the aircraft, the aircrews, the maintainers and others who contributed to the 'Skyhawk Years'. The operational commanders who tasked the Skyhawk squadrons could not have been anything other than impressed by how their needs were met.

I think it appropriate in this foreword to look at the history of RAN fighter aircraft from the late 1940s to the early 1980s.

The first RAN fighter was the single-seat, 2,500-hp Bristol Centaurus-powered Hawker Sea Fury FB.11 (fighter-bomber), purchased to operate from the straight-deck carrier HMAS