

THE SHORT ANSWER

When did the "Royal" prefix to the Australian Air Force become official?

It was gazetted on August 13, 1921.

What changes to Air Force ranks have occurred?

The most notable deviation from the rank structure of today was in 1948 when pilot and navigator ranks were introduced. The scheme was abandoned in 1950.

When did the RAAF balloon first fly?

The maiden flight was on May 5, 1990.

What was the first Australian designed and manufactured aircraft to serve in the RAAF?

The Tugan Gannet, which was delivered to the Air Force on November 25, 1935.

■ This feature appears monthly. Send your questions on Air Force history to raafnews@defence.gov.au. Answers by David Wilson, Executive Officer, RAAF Historical, Air Power Development Centre.

Touching base

In our new regular column, **AIR FORCE** News takes a look at the history and traditions of the Air Force. This week, we explore the Ensign.



What's the story on our blue sky flag?

AN ENSIGN is an official flag or banner, normally used by a country or a country's services. The RAAF Ensign is flown in place of the Australian National Flag (ANF) at its various establishments in Australia and overseas, and is used by CAF as his official banner on ceremonial occasions.

The RAAF was formed on March 31, 1921 and the new arm of the fighting services needed its own distinctive ensign. Initially it adopted the Royal Air Force (RAF) ensign. Consequently, it also became the RAAF's ensign as the new force came into being.

In 1948, there was concern that the continued use of the same ensign would create confusion between the two air forces and a design, based on the ANF, was created. The new ensign retained the light blue of the British ensign and the Commonwealth Star and Southern Cross of the ANF, but incorporated the roundel, reduced in size. The Southern Cross stars were rotated 20 degrees clockwise to fit the roundel.

In 1956, the red kangaroo replaced the red circle in the Australian roundel, but the standard roundel was retained. However, the Vietnam War created some confusion as the UK was not involved, so the use of the existing roundel became inappropriate. As a result, on May 6, 1982, the present RAAF ensign entered service.

■ Got a question about the Air Force you'd like us to answer? Email raafnews@defencenews.gov.au

Information sourced from the Australian War Memorial and Department of Administrative Services.



Deputy Chief of Air Force, AVM John Blackburn

Brand Matters

This week, **AIR FORCE** News continues to look at branding and history issues and how they affect you. This week we look at the roundel. Got a question you'd like us to answer? Email raafnews@defencenews.gov.au



Where did the roundel come from?

ONE of Air Force's most enduring symbols is the roundel displayed on the fuselage and wings of all Service aircraft. This comprises an outer blue circle, an inner white circle and a red 'hopping' kangaroo in the centre, always facing the front.

The roundel first appeared on French aircraft at the start of WWI, as both sides realised the necessity for quick identification of their own aircraft, to avoid 'blue on blue' engagements.

The French adopted three concentric circles, using the national colours of red, white and blue in the centre. In October 1914 the British adopted the roundel in royal blue, white and red in the centre.

The Australian Flying Corps adopted the same roundel and retained it after the formation of the RAAF in 1921.

After the start of WWII, a yellow circle was painted outside the roundel. Then, in the Pacific theatre, a RAAF Catalina was attacked by a US Navy aircraft. The pilot mistook the red inner circle for the distinctive Japanese red Rising Sun 'meatball'. From then on, in the Pacific, Australian aircraft removed the red circle.

After the war, the RAAF decided to adopt its own, Australian roundel. Options considered included the Southern Cross, a boomerang and a sprig of wattle. Another was the red kangaroo and this was formally adopted on July 2, 1956.

Fifty years later, the Australian roundel continues to be flown with pride on operations and exercises around the world, and is an easily-recognisable symbol of Air Force's tradition, history and professionalism in peace and war.