

The Royal Australian Navy in 15 Objects

Object 10 Lieutenant Peter Goldrick's Blood Chit

On display in the Australian War Memorial is an unusual blood stained item from the Korean War. It is a rectangular cloth printed on the top half with the flags of the United States, United Nations, Great Britain and South Korea. The bottom half has text in Chinese, Korean and Japanese. The English translation is printed below and reads:

I am an American (UNITED NATIONS) flier.
My plane has been shot down and I am helpless;
but I want to get back and fight again for the peace of the world and
your country.
If you will help me and yourselves by getting me to the nearest American
unit, my Government will reward you well.
Help us and we will help you.



The aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney* operated off the Korean coast between October 1951 and January 1952. It was the only combat deployment conducted by an Australian aircraft carrier, although *Sydney* would undertake a second deployment in 1954 after the signature of the armistice that brought actual fighting in the Korean War to an end. Marked by record breaking rates of effort by the ship's air group and high professional standards, the 1951-52 operations were a milestone in the creation of a seagoing fixed wing aviation force for Australia. This was all the more remarkable given that *Sydney* had only been brought into RAN service in 1949 and the first RAN Air Group was not formed until 1950. For the next thirty years, a fixed wing aircraft carrier would be considered critical to the RAN's

warfighting capability and the navy worked hard to retain it, despite intense pressure on resources and the many challenges presented by evolving aviation technology.

Operations over Korea brought many dangers for the fliers of the Air Group's Sea Fury and Firefly aircraft. Three were killed and one wounded with nine aircraft lost. In addition to having to cope with difficult flying conditions in the Korean winter, heavy anti-aircraft fire meant that the prospect of being shot down, probably behind enemy lines, was a real one. Aircraft were hit by flak 87 times during the 2366 sorties conducted.

The aviators were equipped with several items to help their survival and evasion. Amongst these were what were nicknamed 'blood chits', silk sheets with local language requests to help the survivor get back to allied lines and promising a reward. The 'blood chit' included here ironically carries a bloodstain from the single member of *Sydney's* air group wounded in action, although it was never needed for its intended use. The sheet was carried by then Lieutenant Peter Goldrick, a pilot in 808 Sea Fury squadron. On 5 January 1952 Goldrick participated in a strike on gun positions along the Yesong River, on the north side of the Han estuary on Korea's west coast, close to the neutral area around Panmunjom. He was hit in the right arm by a bullet during this sortie. The bullet was slowed by having first passed through a lead message carrier. Passing through his right arm, it missed the bone but lodged in his upper body. Despite the shock and pain, Goldrick managed to return and land safely on the *Sydney*, a feat which gave a considerable fillip to the morale of Air Group and ship's company alike.

Peter Goldrick was born in Sydney in December 1927. In January 1941, at the age of 13, he joined the Royal Australian Naval College at Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria as an officer cadet. He graduated as a midshipman in August 1944 and joined the British Eastern Fleet, aboard the cruiser HMS *Kenya*. He took part in operations in the Burma campaign and in May 1945 was transferred to the British Home Fleet where he joined the cruiser HMS *Birmingham*. In 1946 he was promoted Acting Sub-Lieutenant and undertook further training in Britain. He returned to Australia in 1947 and was confirmed as Sub Lieutenant. In November 1947 he joined the destroyer HMAS *Warramunga*. On his twentieth birthday he gained his watchkeeping certificate, after service with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japanese waters. Promoted Lieutenant on 1 July 1948, he joined the newly established RAN Fleet Air Arm. After completing over two years of training in the United Kingdom Goldrick was selected as a fighter pilot and was posted to 808 Squadron, attached to the aircraft carrier HMAS *Sydney*. In July 1951 the *Sydney*, with 805 and 808 Squadrons of Sea Furies and 817 Squadron of Fireflies, was sent to Korea and operational flying began in October. After his wounding, Goldrick was sent home to recover and rejoined the squadron when it returned to Australia in March.

Goldrick continued as a pilot with the RAN for several more years, qualifying as an instructor as well as becoming the RAN's first jet pilots, training in Vampires. For the remainder of his career Goldrick held a wide range of posts including the command of the frigate HMAS *Stuart* and participation in the Far East Strategic Reserve in the 1960s. He retired from the RAN with the rank of Captain in December 1977 and died in August 2002.

Location: The Australian War Memorial.