

= RAAF area commands =

Area commands were the major operational and administrative formations of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) between 1940 and 1954 . Established in response to the outbreak of World War II , they underpinned the Air Force 's geographically based command @-@ and @-@ control system for the duration of the conflict and into the early years of the Cold War , until being superseded by a functional control system made up of Home , Training , and Maintenance Commands .

The area commands and their responsibilities evolved over time according to changing circumstances . The RAAF established four commands to begin with in 1940 : Southern Area , Central Area , Western Area , and Northern Area . They oversaw almost all operations , training and maintenance within their boundaries . A concession to functional control occurred in mid @-@ 1941 , when the Air Force formed two groups that assumed the training role of the southern and eastern states ; Central Area itself was disbanded and most of its units taken over by Northern and Southern Areas , and the newly formed No. 2 (Training) Group . The area structure was further revised in 1942 , following the outbreak of the Pacific War . Northern Area was split into North @-@ Eastern Area and North @-@ Western Area , and a new command , Eastern Area , was created , making a total of five commands . The same year , the RAAF formed two functional groups that assumed the maintenance role of the area commands ; the latter focussed on operations until the end of hostilities . A new area command covering RAAF units in New Guinea , Northern Command , was formed in 1944 and dissolved soon after the war .

By the early 1950s , most operational units were based within Eastern Area Command , most Air Force training was controlled by Southern Area Command , and maintenance was the responsibility of Maintenance Group . The area command structure was no longer considered appropriate for delivering the concentration of force necessary for combat , and the Federal government decided to replace it with a functional command @-@ and @-@ control system . In 1953 , Eastern Area Command was re @-@ formed as Home Command (controlling operations) , Southern Area Command was re @-@ formed as Training Command , and Maintenance Group was re @-@ designated Maintenance Command . The three remaining area commands ceded their authority to the functional commands in 1954 , and were disbanded by the end of 1956 .

= = History = =

= = = Origin and purpose = = =

On the eve of World War II , the RAAF comprised twelve flying squadrons , two aircraft depots and a flying school , situated at five air bases . An air force of this size did not require large @-@ scale operational formations such as wings , groups , or commands , as all units could be directly administered and controlled by RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne . With the onset of war in September 1939 , the Australian Air Board decided to implement a decentralised form of command , commensurate with an envisioned increase in manpower and units . The RAAF 's initial move in this direction was to create Nos. 1 and 2 Groups in November 1939 , the former based in Melbourne to control units in Victoria , and the latter in Sydney to control units in New South Wales .

In January 1940 , the Chief of the Air Staff , Air Vice Marshal Jimmy Goble , proposed organising the RAAF along functional lines with Home Defence , Training , and Maintenance Commands , but the Federal government did not take up this plan . Goble was replaced in February by a Royal Air Force (RAF) officer , Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett , who focussed on rapid expansion of the RAAF to meet the needs of the Empire Air Training Scheme and believed that Australia 's huge land mass would make a functional command system unwieldy . He proceeded to reorganise the Air Force into a geographically based " area " system . The roles of each area command were the same : air defence ; protection of adjacent sea lanes ; and aerial reconnaissance . Each area was led by an Air Officer Commanding (AOC) who was responsible for the administration and operations of all

bases and units within his boundary . Exceptions to this policy included aircraft depots and the Central Flying School that trained flying instructors , as their range of responsibilities crossed area boundaries and therefore came under the direct control of RAAF Headquarters . The static area system was primarily defensive in nature , but considered well suited to training new pilots , who could be instructed at flying schools and mentored through their initial squadron postings , all within the same geographical region .

= = = Evolution and control = = =

The RAAF planned four area commands initially : Southern Area , covering all units in Victoria , Tasmania , South Australia and the southern Riverina district of New South Wales ; Central Area , covering units in New South Wales except southern Riverina and the north of the state ; Western Area , covering units in Western Australia ; and Northern Area , covering units in northern New South Wales , Queensland , Northern Territory and Papua . The first two commands established , in March 1940 , were Southern Area , which essentially took over the role and headquarters of No. 1 Group in Melbourne , and Central Area , which evolved from No. 2 Group in Sydney . Western and Northern Areas eventually followed in January and May 1941 , respectively ; pending their formation , units in Queensland were temporarily controlled by Central Area Command , and those in Western Australia , Northern Territory and Papua came under the direct control of RAAF Headquarters .

By mid @-@ 1941 , RAAF Headquarters had determined to form training units in the southern and eastern states into semi @-@ geographical , semi @-@ functional groups separate to the area commands . This led to the establishment in August of No. 1 (Training) Group in Melbourne , covering Victoria , Tasmania and South Australia , and No. 2 (Training) Group in Sydney , covering New South Wales and Queensland . Central Area was then disbanded and its responsibilities " divided as convenient " , according to the official history of the war , between Southern Area , Northern Area , and No. 2 (Training) Group . Western Area retained responsibility for training , as well as operations and maintenance , within its boundaries .

With the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 , Northern Area was split the following month into North @-@ Western and North @-@ Eastern Areas , to counter distinct Japanese threats to Northern Australia and New Guinea , respectively . Southern Area was also considered appropriate for subdivision owing to its size , so Eastern Area was established in May 1942 to take over control of operational units in New South Wales and southern Queensland . These arrangements stabilised the number of area commands at five . Of necessity , the two northerly commands were primarily responsible for bombing and air defence , while the other commands focussed on maritime patrol and anti @-@ submarine warfare . Further convergence of command @-@ and @-@ control responsibilities along semi @-@ geographical , semi @-@ functional lines took place between June and September 1942 , when authority over maintenance units was transferred from the area commands to the newly formed No. 4 (Maintenance) Group in Melbourne and No. 5 (Maintenance) Group in Sydney . Some finetuning of the area boundaries occurred in August : as well as the Northern Territory , North @-@ Western Area was given responsibility for the portion of Western Australia north of a line drawn south @-@ east from Yampi Sound to the Northern Territory border , and part of Queensland adjacent to the Barkly Tableland .

Until 1942 , RAAF Headquarters exercised complete operational and administrative control over the area commands . In April that year , Allied Air Forces (AAF) Headquarters was established under General Douglas Macarthur 's South West Pacific Area (SWPA) , with operational authority over all RAAF combat infrastructure , including the area commands . In September the new AAF commander , Major General George Kenney , formed the majority of his US flying units into Fifth Air Force , and most of their Australian counterparts into RAAF Command , led by Air Vice Marshal Bill Bostock . Bostock exercised control of Australian air operations through the area commands , although RAAF Headquarters continued to hold overarching administrative authority , meaning that Bostock and his area commanders were ultimately dependent on the Chief of the Air Staff , Air Vice Marshal George Jones in Melbourne , for supplies and equipment .

To help overcome the static nature of the area command system , in September 1942 the RAAF

created a large mobile formation known as No. 9 (Operational) Group , a self @-@ contained tactical air force that could keep pace with Allied advances north through New Guinea and towards Japan . By April 1944 , No. 9 Group had become a garrison force in New Guinea and lost its mobile function to No. 10 (Operational) Group (later the Australian First Tactical Air Force) . No. 9 Group was therefore re @-@ formed as a dedicated area command covering air units in New Guinea ; Bostock had recommended calling it Northern Area , before RAAF Headquarters settled on Northern Command . In August that year , RAAF Headquarters proposed to disband the training and maintenance groups formed in 1941 ? 42 and return their functions to the control of the area commands , but no action was taken . The same month , the Air Board recommended carving a new Central Area Command out of Eastern Area , which it considered too large to be controlled by one headquarters . This proposed Central Area would have been responsible for units in southern Queensland but the War Cabinet deferred its decision , as it had when a similar concept was raised in October 1943 .

Near the end of the war , No. 11 Group was formed as a " static command " headquartered on Morotai in the Dutch East Indies , using elements of Northern Command and the First Tactical Air Force ; this freed the latter from garrison duties following the liberation of Borneo . In recommending the Morotai garrison 's establishment , Bostock explained that while it shared the static characteristic of an area command , it differed in that the area commands were part of the permanent structure of the Air Force and situated within the borders of Australia 's mainland and overseas territories , whereas the new formation was a temporary wartime measure , headquartered on foreign territory .

= = = Post @-@ war organisation and supersession = = =

Following the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 , SWPA was dissolved and RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne again assumed full control of all its operational formations , including the area commands . Nos. 1 and 2 (Training) Groups , and No. 5 (Maintenance) Group in Sydney , were disbanded between January and March 1946 . Northern Command , having been re @-@ designated Northern Area in December 1945 , was disbanded in February 1947 . The other area commands continued to function with essentially the same boundaries as during the war , except that North @-@ Western Area no longer covered the Dutch East Indies .

By the 1950s , a geographically based area command system was considered outmoded , and calls came to replace it with a system based on function . With hindsight , the area commands were judged adequate for the organisation of the Air Force in the early years of World War II , but not for the rapid response times and concentration of force necessary to properly prepare for attacks on Australia following the start of the Pacific War , nor for conducting offensive operations from 1943 onwards . Air Marshal Jones , who had retained his position as Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) following the war , resisted pressure to replace the area structure . He was persuaded by his staff to set up a conference to discuss the possibility of change , but participation by the CAS , who had been satisfied with the wartime structure , and the area commanders themselves , whose positions were on the line , was half @-@ hearted at best . Jones did suggest reducing the number of area commands to three (Northern Area to cover Queensland and the Northern Territory , Eastern Area to cover New South Wales , and Southern Area to encompass Western Australia , South Australia , Victoria and Tasmania) as part of a much larger proposal to restructure the post @-@ war RAAF , but this never eventuated .

The Federal government retired Jones in 1952 and replaced him with an RAF officer , Air Marshal Donald Hardman , who was well versed in the functional command system employed in Britain . Hardman believed that restructuring the Air Force would remove inefficiencies and duplication , and permit commanders greater autonomy , allowing more effective concentration of strength in a potential combat situation . He declared that the RAAF was " the one force that could quickly strike for Australia 's and the Commonwealth 's defence in South East Asia " . To this end he identified three major functions : operations , covering home defence and mobile task forces ; training , including all permanent , reserve and national service recruitment and instruction ; and maintenance , responsible for supply , equipment and other logistical services . The three functions were duly

constituted in October 1953 as Home , Training , and Maintenance Commands , respectively .

Home Command was re @-@ formed from the existing Eastern Area Command , which was considered a de facto operational organisation owing to the preponderance of such forces within its boundaries . Training Command was re @-@ formed from Southern Area Command , as it was already the hub of training services , controlling those in New South Wales and Queensland as well as Victoria and South Australia . Maintenance Command was re @-@ formed from the extant Maintenance Group headquarters in Melbourne . The transition to a functional system was completed in February 1954 , when the three new commands assumed control of all operations , training and maintenance from Western , North @-@ Western , and North @-@ Eastern Area Commands . These three area commands remained in existence , but only as " remote control points " for Home Command . North @-@ Western Area Command was disbanded in June 1955 , Western Area Command in November 1956 , and North @-@ Eastern Area Command in December 1956 .

= = = Aftermath = = =

The functional commands established in 1953 ? 54 were revised in 1959 . Home Command was renamed Operational Command , and Training and Maintenance Commands merged to become Support Command . Operational Command was renamed Air Command in 1987 , and three years later Support Command split into Logistics Command and Training Command . In 1997 , logistics management became the responsibility of Support Command (Air Force) , the RAAF component of the Defence @-@ wide Support Command Australia (later subsumed by the Defence Materiel Organisation) . Training Command was re @-@ formed as Air Force Training Group , a force element group under Air Command , in 2006 . Air Command thus became the sole command @-@ level organisation in the RAAF .

= = Summary of area commands formed = =

The RAAF raised eight area commands over the course of World War II , and five of them continued to operate into the 1950s :