

R.A.A.F. SERIAL NUMBER ALLOTMENT
SCRAMBLED SUFFIX NUMBERS, 1950-1952

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Towards the end of 1949, within the Department of Air it is clear that more than usually lunatic proposals were being bandied about, in dealing with perceived problems with security. Various documentation has, over the years, surfaced to enable the interested researcher to see some of the multitude of ideas that were discussed at this time, in view of which the comment is fair. In the post-war period security was an area of such paranoid conservatism as to be almost unbelievable, often leading to extremes that can in today's light been seen as ludicrous - as many of the period also viewed the subject.

Of the few such proposals that came to fruition was one that, "*in the interests of security*", called for an entirely new approach to the serialling of R.A.A.F. aircraft. Until this time, each type of aircraft taken on charge had simply been numbered from 1 onward within the group, a practice instituted at the commencement of R.A.A.F. serialling in September, 1921. During the late war, some block allocations within that system took place, but essentially numerical sequencing continued. One abnormality was of course the use of the number "-1001" for prototypes. Such a simple system allowed an easy calculation of strength.

This new system for the serialling of aircraft was, essentially, the idea that all examples of the newer types received, from the Vampire onwards, would in future be given a random number within the group 1 to 999 as a suffix to their type-identification "A" number. This new policy was advised to the Department of Aircraft Production, *via* Department of Air memo S.A.S. of 12 January, 1950. It was in turn swiftly followed by D.o.A. memo 9/84/14(2) of 16 January, wherein the new serials for the 50 DH-100 Vampires then under construction were detailed.¹ In the case of the Vampires, the first two machines had already been numbered as A79-1 and A79-2 in parallel to their De Havilland airframe numbers 4001 and 4002; the remaining 48 machines of the first contract and the 30 on the second contract were allotted numbers at random from A79-5 to A79-996, this latter being in fact the highest of the random numbers issued.

With the involvement in Korea and the consequent delivery of the Meteors, these also received random numbers. The original machine of this type, the mk.III EE427, had been delivered in mid-1946 and became A77-1. It was only on the books for nine months before being damaged beyond repair, and it was not until February, 1951 that further examples of the type were taken on charge - all examples delivered to July, 1952 receiving "scrambled" serial numbers, within the range A77-11 to A77-982. Exceptions were three two-seat variants sent to Australia for use at the L.R.W.P., Woomera, in the period 1952-1953, which were numbered as A77-2 to A77-4

The next victims of this policy were the Sikorsky S.51s. A80-1 had arrived late in 1947 and been numbered in the old style; the second and third examples arrived in April, 1951 and were numbered under the new system. The two imported Canberras were likewise so numbered, although it is interesting to note that three examples of this type supplied on loan (B.2s) were allotted A84-1, -2 & -3 respectively. The two Winjeel prototypes were also within this random series.

The last type to be included in this system were the first dozen Neptunes, which were received in November, 1951 and given numbers within the range A89-225 to A89-983.

In total, almost 170 of these random numbers have been traced.

As these "serial numbers" had always been primarily intended as "stores identification numbers" it is clear that the system was seen to be ineffective, in this area at least, after a fairly short period. A number of items can be seen to place the dating of a rethink of the use of this random allotting at about July, 1952 - only 19 months after its inception.

A new policy was therefore implimented at this time, wherein each type, as well as having its distinctive "A" number, was allotted a specific block of suffix serials. On 29 July, the four Meteor T.7s were re-numbered as A77-701 to A77-704, and all future Meteor F.8 deliveries (from August) from A77-851 onward. Production Canberras commenced at A84-201, the Winjeels at A85-401, and the Sabres at A94-901. The Neptunes were re-numbered as A89-301 to A89-312.

As well, it was considered that a batch of 36 DH-115 Vampire Trainers would be a good thing; these were allotted A79-801 onward. And it is at this point that the whole system becomes more than just a little on the silly side of things. Two Meteors occupied nos. 802 and 811, which this block of 36 (and an additional five for the R.A.N.) aircraft would "duplicate", and four Vampires used nos. 841, 862, 872 and 876 - which were not "duplicated". The Meteors do not appear to have bothered the powers-that-be, but the four Vampires were re-numbered into the A79-4xx block by the simple expedient of exchanging the 8 for a 4 in the serial-suffix. Seemingly not a great problem, and easy enough to carry out. Then an additional sixty-eight Trainers were ordered, being numbered A79-600 onward, and the identical problem arose. In this instance, the three Meteors, the Winjeel and the Sikorsky S.51 in the block remained unchanged; the sole Neptune having already been re-numbered. The six Vampires, nos. 609, 622, 633, 650, 674 and 687 all joined the A79-4xx block as *per* the method

used with the -8xx series above. To this point then, 10 of the DH-100 variant had been so re-numbered. Some references also indicate A79-227 and A79-83 to have been at least allotted the new numbers A79-427 and A79-443. Both aircraft are thought to have been involved in the mk.32 program, but this particular area still requires more research at present to prove this fact.

Serials allotted from type-number A96, the Convair 440s, in general used either the airframe identification number (or part thereof) as the individual serial suffix, or in some instances, the "last three" from the original military procurement serial number served the same purpose. With minor variations, this system continues in use today.

This data has been compiled from a number of sources available to the author, from original documentation to published works, varying in quality from good to bad. The interpretation made is that of the author.

i "Man and Aerial Machines" : issue 4, page 50 : this memo set out in whole

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The Random Serial Number Suffix List

The listing that follows is, as far as we have been able to determine, the complete run of the "random" serial number suffixes that were issued. The list is of simple style, shewing (1) the allotted serial suffix, (2) the type, (3) previous military identity or the airframe identification number, and (4) any relevant additional notes. Entries that are underlined are considered to be doubtful, in that proof-positive has yet to be found in relation to their exact identities.

	1 - 99							
5	Vampire FB.31	4048	76	Vampire FB.31	4038	157	Meteor F.8/U.21	WE889
9	Vampire FB.31	4070	83	Vampire F.30	4014	160	Vampire FB.31	4064
11	Meteor F.8	WH259	89	Vampire F.30	4025	163	Meteor F.8	WA941
14	Vampire F.30	4029	91	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4057	165	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4030
15	Meteor F.8	WE911			100 - 199	170	Vampire F.30	4010
17	Meteor F.8	WA694	109	Vampire F.30	4013	175	Vampire FB.31	4059
18	Vampire F.30	4020	111	Vampire FB.31	4065	178	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4051
24	Vampire F.30	4012	115	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4037	187	Vampire F.30	4040
29	Meteor F.8	WA938	120	Meteor F.8	WE880	189	Meteor F.8	WA961
31	Meteor F.8	WE903	125	Canberra B.2	WD983	193	Meteor F.8/U.21	WE969
36	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4056	128	Meteor F.8	WE908	199	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4043
46	Meteor F.8	WA746	134	Meteor F.8	WE898			200 - 299
60	Vampire F.30	4044	139	Meteor F.8	WA949	202	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4039
65	Meteor F.8	WH475	151	Vampire FB.31	4075	207	Meteor F.8/U.21	WH251
			153	Vampire F.30	4019			

AUSTRALIAN AERONAUTICAL HISTORY RECORD : MISCELLANEOUS LISTS : R.A.A.F. SERIAL NUMBER ALLOTMENT - SCRAMBLED SUFFIX NUMBERS, 1950 - 1952

215	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4054		436	Meteor F.8	WE971		694	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5110	to A89-309
217	Vampire FB.31	4068		440	Vampire FB.31	4069					
225	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5112	to A89-311	444	Vampire FB.31	4073	ex A79-844			700 - 799	
227	Vampire F.30	4006	to A79-427	446	Meteor F.8	WA783		721	Meteor F.8	WA954	
228	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5094	to A89-306	450	Vampire F.30	4026	ex A79-650	726	Meteor F.8	WA957	
229	Meteor T.7	WA731	to A77-701	453	Vampire F.30	4016		728	Meteor F.8	WA951	
231	Meteor F.8	WA944		462	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4036	ex A79-862	730	Meteor F.8	WA782	
235	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4045		464	Meteor F.8	WA958		733	Vampire FB.31	4079	
236	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5111	to A89-310	467	Vampire FB.31	4076		734	Meteor F.8	WA907	
251	Meteor F.8	WE906		472	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4032	ex A79-872	735	Meteor F.8	WA942	.
258	Meteor F.8	WH254		474	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4050	ex A79-674	736	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5087	to A89-308
263	Vampire F.30	4021		476	Vampire F.30	4018	ex A79-876	737	Vampire F.30	4023	
275	Vampire F.30	4049		484	Vampire F.30	4004		740	Meteor F.8	WA948	
282	Vampire FB.31	4080		487	Vampire F.30	4007	ex A79-687	741	Meteor F.8	WA947	
294	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5093	to A89-303					744	Meteor F.8	WA786	
						500 - 599		754	Vampire F.30	4042	
		300 - 399		510	Meteor F.8/U.21	WE905		762	Vampire F.30	4015	
300	Meteor F.8	WA935		514	Vampire FB.31	4077		777	Vampire F.30	4027	
305	Meteor T.7	WA732	to A77-702	520	Vampire FB.31	4063		793	Meteor F.8	WH252	
307	Canberra B.2	WD939		529	Vampire F.30	4022		796	Vampire F.30	4024	
308	Vampire FB.31	4066		536	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4052					
309	Vampire F.30	4009		550	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4046				800 - 899	
316	Meteor F.8	WA945		552	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4062		802	Meteor F.8/U.21	WA998	
321	Vampire F.30	4028		559	Meteor F.8	WA910		811	Meteor F.8	WA937	
333	Vampire FB.31	4034		560	Vampire F.30	4003		841	Vampire FB.31	4073	to A79-444
343	Meteor F.8	WE274		564	Vampire FB.31	4058		862	Vampire FB.31	4036	to A79-462
354	Meteor F.8	WA934		567	Vampire F.30	4033		872	Vampire F.30/FB.21	4032	to A79-472
364	CA-22 Winjeel	1527		570	Meteor F.7	WE890		876	Vampire F.30	4018	to A79-476
368	Meteor F.8	WA952		577	Meteor T.7	WG977	to A77-704				
373	Meteor F.8	WA936		586	Vampire F.30	4005				900 - 999	
374	Sikorsky S.51	-		587	Meteor F.8	WA939		901	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4047	
375	Vampire F.30	4011		589	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5088	to A89-307	911	Meteor F.8	WA946	
380	Meteor T.7	WG974	to A77-703	591	Neptune (P2V-5)	426-5022	to A89-302	914	Vampire F.30	4017	
385	Meteor F.8	WE918		593	Vampire FB.31	4071		915	Vampire FB.31	4067	
390	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4053		595	Neptune (P2V-5)	426-5021	to A89-301	920	Meteor F.8	WF653	
393	Meteor F.8	WE877						934	Vampire FB.31	4072	
397	Meteor F.8	WE896				600 - 699		942	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4031	
				609	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4055	to A79-409	949	Meteor F.8	WA960	
		400 - 499		616	Meteor F.8	WA956		953	Meteor F.8	WE874	
405	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5122	to A89-312	618	CA-22 Winjeel	1526		959	Meteor F.8	WA909	
408	Vampire FB.31	4078		622	Vampire FB.31	4060	to A79-422	973	Vampire F.30	4008	
409	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4055	ex A79-609	627	Meteor F.8	WE928		982	Meteor F.8	WA950	
415	Meteor F.8	WE900		633	Vampire FB.31	4074	to A79-433	983	Neptune (P2V-5)	526-5086	to A89-305
422	Meteor F.8/U.21	WF750	ii	636	Sikorsky S.51	-		985	Vampire FB.31	4061	
422	Vampire FB.31	4060	ex A79-622	643	Meteor F.8	WE886		996	Vampire F.30/FB.31	4041	
427	Vampire 32	4006	ex A79-227	650	Vampire F.30	4026	to A79-450				
433	Vampire FB.31	4074	ex A79-633	674	Vampire FB.31	4050	to A79-474				
				687	Vampire F.30	4007					

ii

Note - this appears to be the only instance of a "duplicated" number