



BAD GYRATIONS

The tragic crash of Bell 47G-2 VH-AHF, 1966

On December 10, 1966, two film-makers and a pilot were flying in a Bell 47 over Sydney Harbour when there was an almighty bang and the wildly spinning machine plunged into buildings nearby, killing all aboard. **Dr PETER HOBBS** describes the incident and the subsequent legal battle that saw blame shuffled between pilot, operator and manufacturer

IN OCTOBER 1966 the Beach Boys released *Good Vibrations*, their near-operatic tribute to California's emerging hippy scene. Half a world away, in the Ku-Ring-Gai Chase National Park on the outskirts of Sydney, the making of an Australian pop icon was also well into production.

The pilot episode of television drama *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* featured not only the eponymous macropod, but also a Bell 47G-2 helicopter flown by fictional Flight Ranger Jerry King. Emblazoned with fictitious "Waratah National Park" legends, the Bell was leased from Rotor-Work, a Sydney-based charter company led by former Royal Australian Navy Fleet Air Arm helicopter pilot Jim Ferguson. By 1966 Rotor-Work had imported three Bell 47s into Australia. Since the *Skippy*

gig involved overwater operations, floats were fitted to VH-AHF (c/n 668). The storyline for this inaugural episode entailed rescuing an RAAF pilot who had ejected into the kangaroo's densely vegetated domain.

With filming for *Skippy* wrapping up in late November, 'AHF' retained its floats for a subsequent charter, for which the government-owned Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) hired the Bell to capture aerial footage of Sydney Harbour. This was originally intended to document the arrival of famed British aviator and solo sailor Sir Francis Chichester. His coming was delayed, however, so the slot was taken by a team producing *Rich Man, Poor Man*, a documentary about a young millionaire, the filming of which was duly completed.

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