

JACK VERCOE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY



A great mans life

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THE BEGINNING

I was born at Sunnyside hospital Murwillumbah N.S.W on the 15/12/1918. My parents were older than was usual to be having children and it was my fathers' second marriage. We lived on an island in the Tweed River where Dad worked his sugarcane plantation. I spent an idyllic childhood fishing, boating, picnicking and learning magic things about the bush and all the wonderful things therein.

My early schooling was at Carara public. Each day was an adventure as my brother (4years older) and I rowed across the Tweed River then walked about half a mile to a tarred road then a quarter mile to the school. A couple of days a week Dad would row us over then after school we would walk to Chinderah, about a mile and a half, buy meat for dinner, then walk home, about a mile. What fun we had!!

Over the later years Dad underwent a number of operations in Brisbane for hernias etc then when I was about eleven he was unable to do heavy work and we moved to Gosford. Ah the move! A river boat from home to Murwillumbah, train to Byron Bay (where it terminated) a coastal steamer to Sydney then a train to Gosford. We soon settled in and began schooling. My brother was much smarter than I was so was advised to do a course including languages. When I followed on later, Mother thought I was also smart. She and the headmaster decided I would do the same course. Some three months later I showed 'them' that the course was not for me. When I changed to a commercial course I was three months behind the other pupils and I don't think I ever caught up.

At the end of Year 12 there was much discussion about my future. I was all for leaving school. Mother wanted me to stay on and study to be a farmer or a minister of religion!!! Not likely. Mother went on a holiday and on her return I was working in a local garage. I started work at 7:30a.m and finished when the boss said so. The working week included four hours on Saturday - all for ten shillings per week (\$1 equivalent!) A couple of incidents - my Dad was fairly strict so he insisted we boys be home by nine o'clock each evening. I recall on occasion the boss kept me working till nine fifteen. On arrival at our front gate I was met by Dad who gave me a belting for being late home, gee life's tough. I must say a couple of years with this job gave me a great grounding for future learning.

JOINING THE AIRFORCE

However the big city was calling - better jobs, technical training etc. I moved to Wentworthville to live with my widowed uncle and his two boys. A new way of life began. I soon got a job in a service station as a journeyman mechanic. Life was good and I liked the work and was earning 15 shillings per week out of which I bought a weekly train ticket, 3 shillings, and paid a nominal board of 8 shillings per week, the rest was mine!! Then a peculiar thing happened. Times were hard, we got to work at 7.30 the foreman then had us bid for jobs the lowest bidder got the job while the others sat around waiting for more jobs to come in. I was making good progress at Tech and at work when suddenly my luck changed. I was mystified then the dear old [about 35 years old] asked me what was wrong. I did not know why I was suddenly out of favour then she then told me the boss had found out I was of the wrong religion and that it was a catholic firm.

I soon found another job. This was an interesting experience. I was a junior motor mechanic/plant maintenance fitter and I enjoyed this change of endeavour. I made another birthday here then the rep from our association advised I was now due for a rise in wages. I advised the boss accordingly he said he was busy preparing to leave for overseas and would advise his foreman when his ship arrived in Adelaide. So I thanked him for his trouble and when pay day arrived the foreman called me in and advised me I was fired !! He said the firm did not abide by awards nor did they tolerate employees questioning their wages. So onto another job. When my previous boss returned to Australia he contacted me to say he had two weeks wages for me (about 4 pounds 10 shillings). When I collected this he had me sign a release that I had no further claim on the firm. Some two weeks later I received a letter from a Government department that I was to be paid 40 pounds by my recent employer but he had the smart release note I had signed - end of story.

I recall the evening of September 3, 1939 when our Prime Minister announced "England is at war with Germany therefore Australia is at war with Germany". This was a dramatic moment. I was a twenty year old junior motor mechanic and on returning to work the next day all the talk was of war and asking each other what part we intended to play? Most guys wanted to be Spitfire pilots as I did. A few days later I applied to join the RAAF. Some time later I was advised to report to the recruiting office at Ultimo in Sydney. I heard nothing further so decided to have Xmas at home and start again in the new year.

It is difficult to convey the feelings of the nation at this time. Censorship was introduced, also media black-outs and a general air of "what is going to happen" prevailed. Early new year I inquired as to the progress of my application. I was informed that the recruiting office had moved from Ultimo to a new site in York Street and would I please re-apply. Some weeks later was requested to report to a recruiting office at Woolloomooloo and on so doing I was cordially greeted as Mister V and asked several questions re employment, sporting activities, interests etc. and why did I wish to join the RAAF. Then to a medical

examination followed by attestation (swearing on the Bible to faithfully serve God, King and country). To my consternation a stentorian voice said “that man stand to attention”. I realized it meant me and that I had lost my individuality in the blink of an eye!! With several others we boarded a truck and proceeded to Richmond Airforce base. Here we were known as “rookies”. A corporal bloke ordered us to form up and follow him to the Barracks store where we were issued with two blankets, a pillow and a big bag which we filled with straw (our mattress) thence to a tin hut and allotted a bed this consisted of three wooden planks laid on two concaved end pieces. We were now instructed in the manner in which we were to fold our blankets for inspection each morning. After listening to further instructions concerning airforce procedures we were marched out to “the sacred acre” here we began our six weeks of drill instruction. I recall during a break, standing there with my arms folded and the legs of my oversized overalls rolled up thinking what the hell am I doing here and what is going to happen to me? When a stentorian voice yelled out “That man stand to attention” I thought what a strange place people telling you how to stand, I was not left in doubt for long as the voice then yelled “You with your arms folded, if you are not pregnant get them by your sides”.

DARWIN

At the end of this period we were divided into our various job categories and posted to training schools. I and a number of others were posted to Melbourne to No 1 engineering school which located in the local show grounds. Next morning we were paraded in flights and the roll was called. I was amazed when the sergeant called my name and began to berate me as a “bad boy” and I had better behave myself or I would find myself in big trouble. I had difficulty with this as I had only been there a few hours. On asking what it was all about it appeared a man of my name on a previous course had been a real bad boy, a case of mistaken identity!

A couple of amusing incidents- on one of our Sunday route marches around the local streets we came to a fork in the road. The bloke leading our flight veered off from the main group and we disappeared to do our own thing. The Power House club was an amenity for the troops. I was attending a dance there one night and on sitting out a dance with a very attractive young lady in a romantic setting I was beginning an advance when she said 'may I ask you a question?' Why sure I replied. WHY DON'T AERO ENGINES HAVE FLY WHEELS? Well I can tell you that changed the whole romantic scene (it turned out she was doing some sort of a course to help the war effort) it did nothing to encourage my overtures!

A few days later we embarked on a ship at the dock I recall going to Mac's cabin some little time later to find him in bed. “What is up mate” I asked. He replied I am sea sick. I had to tell him we are still moored! Eventually we sailed. I was able to have a couple of hours with my folks in Sydney. Off again on a miserable trip made so by the Major in charge of troops who made sure we were kept fully occupied doing such things as boat drill, kitchen fatigue, PT look watches, etc.

We disembarked and bussed to the civil 'drome to go through the tiresome routine of booking in. Next morning reporting for work, refuelling and generally servicing Wirraway aircraft. Darwin was a dull place in many respects where we mostly made our own “fun”. I was moved into a hut and that night the guys talked me into a game of poker I picked up my hand to find I had five aces, I kept a straight face and bought two cards and I still had five aces!!!

Some weeks later the brass decided we would engage in a mock war. To this end three Lockheed Hudsons from No 13 squadron and four Wirraways from our No 12 Squadron had their tails painted white and dispatched to an island some few miles off the coast. The plot was they would attack Darwin at dawn and the remaining aircraft would defend the area. For dinner that night we had an apple pie made from contaminated tinned apples!!. The invading Airforce thought they had won the war but rumour had it the cooks had lost the war!!!

Time rolled on and we saw most of the sights of Darwin and its surrounds. In the early forties it was a real frontier town' we would go into the local pub, buy X NUMBERS BOTTLES OF BEER (no draught beer) then get out and sit in the gutter to drink it as it was too dangerous to remain at the bar!!!

Two casinos operated in shop type premises. I walk in off the street and play two-up, crown and anchor and various other games of chance. The score for we poor airmen (\$1 pay per day) was to visit a gambling joint, where free cold lemon drink was on tap, drink our fill then lay a couple of bob on the red, make a bit of noise like we had lost a fortune the croupier saw your fare to a taxi home, then we walked home with a jingle in our pocket. On another occasion the Flight Sergeant told us one of our Wirraway's had force landed at Batchelor, a place some distance down the track. We packed the necessary gear and caught the train from Darwin to some distance down the line. No station was visible then we saw the train boiling the Billy beside the track, it was lunch time!! The troops christened the train the (spirit of salts) after the Sydney Melbourne Spirit of Progress.

A large lagoon was adjacent to the strip at Batchelor so after a hot day's work we city kids plunged in to cool off - wonderful until a bloke rode up on a horse and asked "aren't you boys afraid of crocks? Modesty went out the window as we virtually ran on the surface of the water to reach land.

Soon after we moved to join No 13 Sqn on RAAF base Darwin where we operated for the remainder of my time. So after 14 long lonely months without home leave I returned to my family and civilization with a posting to No6 Sqn RAAF Base Richmond NSW. A pleasant Xmas and New Year were enjoyed.

NEW GUINEA

Early in the New Year I was called into the Flight Commander's office. He asked me if I was willing to go to Port Moresby to support four of our Hudson's on a 28 day photo recce. I replied "No", however if I am detailed I will go. After loading the aircraft, packing our own gear, we took off early one morning to fly to Port Moresby via Rockhampton. We landed there at 0600 then on to Townsville at 0900 where we took on more ammunition and armament. We took off at 1345 and soon after the pilot told us to wear our parachute harness and to keep a look-out for enemy aircraft and shipping. We landed on Seven Mile strip at Port Moresby at 1740 hrs, serviced aircraft and dispersed them in teeming rain, had a meal and so to bed at 0330. Next day we spoke to some nurses from Wau who were evacuating to Australia in a Junkers and a Tri-Motor Ford aircraft. They said Lae and Bulolo were under heavy attack.

One of our Hudson's went on a recce to the Rabaul area and was attacked by Zero fighters but escaped OK. On Saturday two aircraft patrolled the Salamaua area and one failed to return. Survivors from this area are trekking to Moresby. After servicing aircraft we spent the day digging trenches. Food was OK, good quarters in wooden huts. Evacuation plans made food caves hidden in the hills. Natives gone bush.

An outbreak of dysentery makes things unpleasant. For some of us we were able to keep on working sans shorts as the need to go time is short! We spent time building camouflage bays for aircraft. Patrols continue and we burnt most of Salamaua. Very wet and mosquitoes becoming more fierce. Two more Hudson aircraft arrived to increase our strength. Enemy aircraft heard nearby caused a mild panic. We were expecting Kittyhawk fighter aircraft to arrive anyday soon.

The weather was getting hotter and more humid with increasing mossie activity. Any time not spent servicing aircraft is spent digging drains and slit trenches and making the area more habitable. We had a couple of false alarms of air raids. This was partly due to our system of warning which is three riflshots. Sometimes the guy was a bit trigger happy.

All our aircraft did patrols so there was plenty of work for us "groundies" to do on their return. The mossies seem to be getting more and more in numbers and more vicious. Heavy rain all day in Wau and under heavy attack. Local air line busy evacuating twenty persons per trip, some of which are wounded.

Tuesday 0245hrs an air raid alarm sounded as five Jap flying overhead for about twenty minutes. We all made for a slit trench and I finished up nude except for a pair of boots and a tin hat. Some thirty bombs fell in our area with no RAAF. Casualties all clear at 0350hrs. When one of my mates arrived back at the tent I asked him how he went. "I was a bit slow in the kuni (a grass that grows to three feet plus) but once I got on top of it I

made good time!!!” After seeing a couple of aircraft off I had the remainder off for a sleep.

There was a lot of panic about setting guards and spotters and I was feeling a bit weary. A couple of alarms in the morning though no action. Continued digging bigger and better trenches.

Another alarm in the morning with five aircraft over. It was one and a half hours before the all clear sounded. No bombs fell on us as they concentrated on the town of Moresby.

Our aircraft continued doing regular recce flights. Oe returned badly shot by three Zero fighters using armour, piercing bullets. One tyre was punctured and also a petrol tank holed. Aircraft landed in a bad slide so worked all night recovering aircraft after this landing.

The CO (Commanding Officer) called a parade which seemed ludicrous up in PNG. He gave us a brief on the situation and directed all personnel to dig trenches and increase the size of aircraft dispersal areas (no bull dozers all hand tools). Bags of rain with aircraft bogged and was hard work getting them out. At long last a bunch of letters from down South. I was suffering an attack of dysentery which most unpleasant.

Our barracks area suffered severe bomb damage so we were busy establishing a “tent city” in a separate area. Our aircraft completed two sorties bombing a Jap convoy and sank a cruiser and two merchant ships. Things were hotting up on both sides so we were busy bombing Jap positions and they were busy bombing and shooting up our assets.

We spent most of the day putting up tents and camouflaging our new site and moving into tents. With the increased flying effort we maintenance bods worked long and hard hours. Not much mail was coming through. We settled into tent OK and now we had a wire bed so no more sleeping on the ground. Wet weather still persisting.

Managed a trip to the twelve mile for a swim. We helped service a tri-engined Ford civilian airliner which is standing by to fly some people to Australia after they had walked in from Wau. Jap radio now broadcasting threats to us and saying bad things about the conduct of people at home.

One of our aircraft returned from an operation badly shot-up with one crew member dead. We worked hard to patch up the plane enough to allow it to fly to Townsville for major repairs to be carried out. There is a lot of looting going on in town by both locals and others. A bit of a panic when four American Flying Fortress aircraft arrived for refuelling as we only used a hand pump to pump fuel from 44 gallon drums to the aircraft and each one wanted some 900 gallons. Our refuelling crew was severely stretched. About lunchtime I was reading a letter from home when the alarm sounded. Ten big Jap aircraft started pattern bombing our area with 500lb bombs and “daisy-cutters” (a daisy cutter is a 250lb bomb with fifteen to twenty foot long steel rod protruding from it's nose”

when the rod hits the target the bomb explodes above it and completely clears a large area of about everything hence the name “daisy cutter”).

We heard that Singapore had fallen and was wondering what may have happened to one my relatives serving in the area. One of our aircraft returned from an operation over Gasmata with one sergeant dead and plane badly shot-up. The pilot made an exceptional landing coping with one punctured tyre, inoperable flaps and leaking oil and petrol tanks creating a fire hazard. We worked all day trying to get the aircraft ready to fly south for major repairs to be made.

Conditions in PNG became reasonable with food OK. There were about one hundred and fifty troops in the squadron. The town has suffered heavy looting and bombing with locals pretty much out of control. Our CO was shot down a few days later and was found brought into camp. I was on the job at 0400 hours as we had a big day of ops ahead of us.

A Jap aircraft came over yesterday and again today at about 1030 am - no action. Probably just having a look however we went to our trenches while there was a lot of ack/ack fire without success.

The CO called a parade of all ranks and gave us a pep talk about the severity of our situation and an even greater effort was required. He explained the improvements to be made to our new camp site with a new undercover mess and orderly room and a few other things. Our toilet consisted of a long trench with a rail running along one side on which to squat. When the contents got to a certain level a couple of labourers would dig a new trench and fill in the old one. On this occasion some allied aircrew were having lunch in our mess when the alarm sounded. One guy took off and not knowing the territory jumped into the first trench he came to which unfortunately for him happened to be the one that was being filled in. When he emerged after the raid he was heard to mumble something like “I was really in the s---t this time!”

The Catalina’s did an excellent job over Rabaul and Gasmata during the week. We had just been to either burn or send home our diaries (to supposedly to deny information to the Japs) last entry –“We had a heavy raid from 1300hrs to 1500hrs they really belted the barracks this time. Burnt out one hut - no casualties as far as I know, we reckon they dropped about a hundred bombs. END OF DIARY.”

Life went on in much the same fashion with the raids becoming more frequent and the enemy getting stronger and closer to New Guinea. As a result the top people running the war decided our squadron should withdraw to Horn Island.

The aircrews flew our aircraft over, while we, the rest packed up then boarded a small ship and had a hairy trip through waters where enemy submarines were reportedly operating.

HORN ISLAND

Horn Island is desolate small island a couple of miles from Thursday Island. The facilities are non-existent. An airstrip (the terminus for Thursday Island) is a couple of buildings adjacent to the strip, a well for water for washing etc and a lot of bush on a nearby hill. So here we go again erecting tents and establishing a camp site, digging toilets a couple of pipes tied to trees with shower heads connected to a pump at the well. So operations began with our aircraft harassing the enemy on the west coast of New Guinea and beyond. Japs were able to return the favour twofold. Life was pretty dreary with half a day off occasionally to wander around the reef or risk a swim, or if lucky cadge a trip to Thursday Island which was under army control. Between our arrival here and our departure in October we suffered some sixty air raids. So much for going on a 28 day operation! Then we arrive home some ten months later without any leave in that time.

CAMDEN

The Squadron returned to Camden NSW and after converting to a new type of aircraft started operating seaward patrols along the east coast. A couple of incidents come to mind—the C.O called me in and said "I need a sergeant to look after our transport section". I advised him I had no expertise in this field, but he said he required a supervisor as the staff there were all very junior. That was now my new job. One man had a fuel guzzling car which I discovered some time later he was driving to Sydney about once a week (a trip of thirty miles each way) and this was in the time of severe fuel rationing. One evening when I was checking the security of the building I found an unlocked window with a five gallon of petrol standing nearby. Being of a suspicious turn of mind I armed myself with a loaded rifle and waited all night for an arm to come through the window all to no avail - the power of the troop's network! When it came to the end of the month and I did the reconciliation fuel usage I found a light truck averaged two miles to the gallon! You did not need to be a rocket scientist to work that one out and imagine the reaction of the accounting officer.

A forty four gallon drum of aviation gas mysteriously found its way into the motor fuel storage tank and the books were balanced.

Some members of the WAAF were posted in and next morning the Adjutant in front of the assembled parade stepped forward to read out the daily orders. In so doing he stepped on the base of the microphone which then smacked him in the mouth. His ensuing language would have done a bullock driver proud.

I was instructed to transport two aircraft engines from Camden to Tocumwal where the big repair base was operating. Taking a rest break at the small township of Jerilderie an elderly asked me what have you got under the tarpaulin on the truck. I replied I was not at liberty to tell him as it was Airforce material at which he became quite agitated and told me to get this war stuff out of the place before the Japs found out and bombed the place!

While at Camden a Squadron of Spitfires were based there before proceeding North. Believe me those young pilots smartened the place with their low fling and other antics.

TOCUMWAL

After a few months at Camden I was posted to Tocumwal. This was a lousy posting. Conditions were basic to say the least catering for the feeding and welfare of 2000+ troops in a hot, dusty stinking place in summer and a bloody cold inhospitable place in winter. It covered a large area to the extent that we were so far from our place of work that a bus took us to work then brought lunch to us by bus where it was served on bare tables in a big tent,. The food was abominable usually something out of a tin or boiled mutton and served half cold in fact on two occasions the troops held a strike and demanded better food and conditions!

The war was at a critical stage at this time. Australia was in great danger of being invaded so the Government of the day met the situation by establishing an imagery line from just north of Brisbane to north of Adelaide as was known as the Brisbane line. All the territory south of it would be defended and held to the last while to the north would be the area to be attacked as required. To this end Tocumwal was established as our front line bomber base and several Liberator four-engined bombers were stationed there.

We worked six days a week with a compulsory church parade on Sunday then had the remainder of the day off! Toc was a small town with a railway station and three pubs so it had little to offer in the way of entertainment. After six weeks of this routine we were given a weeks leave and could choose to travel to Sydney or Melbourne on a troop train. These trains were fitted out with framed diamond wire beds. The trip to Sydney took twenty one hours in overcrowded conditions and some misbehaviour took place to make sleep difficult.,

I recall one of the hotels was operated by a woman, who, if she heard a swear word would turn off the beer and pass out a swear box when a contribution was made the beer would begin to flow again. One day a corporal walked in and ordered a beer then proceeded to tell her some home truths about her skinflint ways and her sanctimonious manner when she passed over the swear box. He said lady I am posted never to return. With all this they were good people and treated us well.

PILOT TRAINING

I still wanted to be a pilot so a few months on I applied for air crew training, I was successful and posted to Bradfield Park, Sydney for assessment and basic training in ground subjects. I was accepted for further training as a pilot.

The change of life style enjoyed as a senior NCO with its freedom and privileges to the bottom of the (RAAF) food chain as a lowly AC2 was a cultural shock difficult to embrace. The drill instructors were reasonable people generally speaking though a couple of little Hitlers “you are at my mercy and you will do exactly as I say” took over at times. We were required to do a fair amount of physical training, also spent a great deal of time learning basic navigation, morse code, theory of flight, meteorology etc. On the completion of this course I was in a group of rookie pilots posted to Temora for a course in elementary flying. After a boring train trip we quickly settled in to our new barracks and next day we were introduced to the wonders and idiosyncrasies of the Tiger Moth aircraft, a twin seat bi-plane with an inline engine. We were assured this was an easy aeroplane to fly. After about seven hours of dual instruction in the air plus classroom theory and time in the Link trainer (a clever stationary device to supposedly emulate the basic characteristics of a real aeroplane) the actions of the pupil are checked by an operator at a desk giving instructions and checking the ability of the student to carry them out.

At last the great day arrives when the flying instructor removes the control stick from the front cockpit and says “you are on your own son, off you go”. Wow, what a thrill to be flying solo!

After much more flying and classroom training including cross-country flying, basic navigation exercises, aerobatics and recovering from unusual situations eg.spins-engine stalls and others we were ready to move on to our next phase.

This meant a posting to a service flying training school situated at Uranquinty. Before leaving Temora I must relate some of the out of hours fun. The people of Temora were wonderful to us homesick, financially poor airmen offering us many invitations to meals and other entertainment.

Service flying training was a much more serious business the Wirraway aeroplane was a heavier and more powerful than the Tiger Moth and we were being trained to become combat pilots this included forced landings, advanced night flying, simulated combat evasive action and more. Nearing the completion of this training and only a few flying hours to Wing Presentation the war in Europe changed the requirement for single-engined aircraft pilots so action was taken to reduce their numbers. Many trainees who were ex ground staff were returned to their musterings. I reverted to engine fitter with the rank of sergeant.

RATHMINES

I was angry and distraught. After a few weeks of this life I applied for and was successful in being accepted for training as a Flight Engineer. So here I go on more training with a posting to RAAF Base West Sale where I successfully completed an air gunnery course. This entailed firing guns from a turret mounted in an Anson aircraft, at ground targets and towed targets. For the first few attempts there were very few hits on the towed target! A very sad accident occurred when a towed drogue was shot free of its towing cable the trailing cable cut off the legs of a girl sunbaking on the beach.

One of the ground staff Warrant Officers had a pet cockatoo. This bird had a quite a vocabulary. On this particular day an inspection party of senior officers from Airforce Headquarters were visiting the base and as they approached the cockatoo it screeched "stuff airboard" loud and clear to the merriment of the troops!!

After the successful completion of the gunnery course I was posted to Rathmines NSW. This base is situated on the shores of Lake Macquarie, a very pleasant area for a Catalina flying boat base. The armed services are well known for hanging nicknames on people these appellations may be from type of employment eg sailor - works with boats; cookie-chips - carpenter etc. Then there is "morf" (morphine) a slow acting dope; swamp head - a bit slow or dull; snow-air haired blue - red hair slim, bones. Then there was this bloke posted in with the name of Glasscock, you guessed it 'brittledick'.

Back to Rathmines, where we completed a Flight Engineers course and awarded our wings we then joined a training crew for familiarisation of our duties and then to an operational crew for operational duties. At this time there were some forty Catalinas based here. Some were moored in Kilaben bay adjacent to the base others were parked on shore. The fleet comprised several types, the Boeing BlackCat, the PBY a craft built by the Consolidated aircraft company and the PBY5A an amphibian also by Consolidated. Now as a crew we did further training including heavy load take-offs and landings and rough water landings. These were practiced at the entrance to Broken Bay, just north of Sydney, also for bombing and gunnery work the Cat was fitted with a couple of point five machine guns as well as the point 303's. For night flying and navigational exercises at the end of this period we did a check out flight from base to Lord Howe island and then air to surface gunnery by shooting at a wrecked ship on Middleton reef before flying to the Brisbane river to drop flame floats in a simulated bombing run. Then a night NAVEX to Bourke and home after approximately nine hours in the air some tired blokes came ashore. My wife was staying close to base and she knew little about air operations. On returning from one of these long flights we arrived over base about 11pm and she waited up to watch the landing this trip. We had a rookie Captain and his first attempt to land he aborted saying the flare path was too close to land so around we went again. Second attempt he claimed the flare path was out of wind so around again. I later learned my wife was having bladder trouble about now! Third attempt he was considering another abort until I suggested if I cut the engines we would land he got the message.

WAR ENDS

At the end of all this we were ready for operations against the enemy. Our crew was briefed with others to lay mines in the China Sea. The aircraft were serviced loaded with mines and other armament. We were to attend a final briefing when news of the Japanese surrender came through so all bets were off and we had a small celebration instead.

The end of hostilities presented many problems both national and personal. The authorities had all this now surplus wartime hardware and more personnel than required for the peacetime situation. It was a huge problem to deal with. To give themselves time to plan for the future, the RAAF formed an interim air force this was to cover a two year period. The first consideration was to reduce the number of people but keep those required to meet the immediate demands of the service. The early dischargees consisted mainly members of aircrew. Another innovation was to introduce harvest leave; this was a month's leave to assist farmers.

On the personal side my good friend, a fitter and turner by trade but a pilot in the force, and myself, a motor engineer, decided we would take an immediate discharge and set up a light engineering and motor repair business. To this end I had arranged the lease of premises. So much for our plans. My friend was discharged immediately while I was retained. I served on, my friend married and took a job in his father-in-law's business. Come Christmas he was given a handsome bonus. This put an end to our proposed enterprise!

In the meantime I took a month's harvest leave and began work as a motor engineer to experience life again as a civilian. Surprise, surprise, the boss was a hard task master. The working conditions most unpalatable - crawling around under dirty rusty vehicles that had suffered the ravages of wartime conditions. The ultimate surprise was at the end of the week when he called me into his office and said "your pay is six pounds and twelve shillings including tax of twelve shillings as I am not paying the tax I will share it with you". I said thank you. I have just left when he complained he had taken on extra work because he had employed me and told me I was an ungrateful so and so I then agreed to work with him until the "extra" work was completed. Really it was not a hard decision to make as the differences in pay and conditions of a warrant officer in the RAAF and a motor engineer in civilian employment were so far apart. I discussed the situation with my wife and we agreed so long as the family could be together then the decision was mine to make - the RAAF won hands down. I was offered a discharge in March 1946 or the option of joining the interim airforce. I chose to stay on as a flight engineer. This was the beginning of a period of great experience and much adventure.

The United Nations divided the western world into sectors and required certain nations to provide air sea rescue services in their area. Australia was responsible for an area covering New Guinea in the east to Borneo in the west and the Halmahera Islands in the north.

INTERIM AIRFORCE

The size of the aircrew was reduced by deleting the armourer, the airframe fitter and the radar operator. This placed an extra workload on the wireless operator and the first engineer. Our captain selected a crew and when we got together and said good-day to each other, the captain gave us a briefing on what he required of his crew a couple of his requirements seemed a trifle strange to us. One was we would prepare the aircraft for flight then he would come out to the aircraft where the flight engineer would hand him the completed maintenance form and say "all is correct Sir". He would then sign the sheet hand it to the coxswain and come on board. This procedure was strange to the coxswain so the first time it happened the cox did it the old way as soon as the captain was handed the sheet he took off for the shore obviously thinking the captain was doing a message! Lesson No 1 for our new skipper. The next edict was that every member of the crew should be capable of doing every one else's job. Great idea. Well soon after we did a trip from Rathmines to Rose bay, shortly after take-off he told the second pilot to have a go on the radar as he hardly knew where the radar was located. He almost went into a state of shock, after a quick brief by the radar operator as he picked up the intercom microphone to give his readings he spotted a small window above the radar set so he went visual and gave a running account of the coastline from there to Sydney Heads. After landing the skip congratulated him on his fine effort this was just too much for me so I "dobbed him in" and told what really happened! That put the cat among the pigeons!

After a few more weeks a posting came for a number of engineers to move to transport squadrons. As a result I arrived to Archerfield base (Brisbane) and reported to the CO. When asked what my duties were to be he said he had no idea as there was no call for a flight engineer to operate Dakota (DC3) aircraft and that I should report to the operations room. The ops officer told me there were two scheduled flights operating one to Rabaul and one to Moratai. I could chose whichever one I wished. I decided to do the Moratai run a round trip of some 35 hours flying time in a DC3 with a crew five. On an overnight stop over at Cloncurry I asked the hotel owner to check my room as I thought an animal must have died there. He said he could not smell anything- my introduction to bore water!

Cloncurry is well known for its numerous goats wandering freely. On one of our morning walks our over enthusiastic radio operator decided he could catch a goat. He took a dive at the goat the goat sidestepped as a result we spent valuable time patching up his gravel rashed hands and face, these are examples of the experiences of town boys visiting the outback.

At Moratai we where convicted Japs had been executed. A peculiar situation existed so far as customs was concerned. There was no customs check at Darwin but we were checked on return to Brisbane. We soon found we could bring in American cigarettes etc. and post them home from Darwin then land in Brisbane as cleanskins. Very handy.

NEW GUINEA AGAIN

After a couple of runs to Moratai I decided to swap to the Rabaul run. This left Brisbane early of a Saturday thence Townsville-Port Moresby-Lae-Finchaven-Rabaul and returning to base on Monday afternoon. The first run was a new experience to all crew members. When we arrived over the landing field, an area of volcanic activity, the captain did a couple of circuits to check the landing area. As he did so an awful stink entered the cockpit. The captain enquired of the second pilot what he had recently eaten, he pleaded not guilty. He then turned to me and asked me if I would like to excuse myself. I denied any input. We then realised it was the smell of sulfur fumes rising out of the ground below us!

On another occasion we landed at Madang. Here I met an old airman mate and after a chat he asked me if I would like a pair of new American style work boots. "Sure" I replied. He took me to a very large shed which was full of new boots waiting to be destroyed as surplus war material. When the skipper saw that he said wanted a couple of pairs for use after his discharge. He nagged me all the way to Rabaul and back to Mandang. On landing I contacted my mate and we filled a kit bag with boots. On boarding the aircraft I was soon asked did you get the boots for me? When I gave him the bag full he was delighted.

Sometime later I was involved in a mercy to operate out of Lae. Some natives were in a bad way for lack of food supplements. We were detailed to carry out food drops to their villages. The preparation for the drop was to put the foodstuffs in a bag then put that bag into an outer bag, so that if the inner bag burst on landing the contents would be saved in the outer bag. This exercise lasted quite a few days in which time we were accommodated in a hotel in Lae. The proprietor asked if we would be kind enough to bring fresh local produce from the gardens at Mount Hagen back to Lae for her. We agreed to do so. After a couple of deliveries she invited the crew to have dinner with her which we accepted gratefully. The evening came and we were joined by her daughter who apologized for her mother's absence. We enjoyed a sociable meal but came the coffee the daughter excused her self saying that will be seven shillings and sixpence each thank you gentlemen! Little thanks for the cost of two loads of air freighted produce; in this life you meet all sorts of people.

On our first trip to Mount Hagen I opened the door to put out the steps to be greeted by about twenty natives in full war regalia with bones through their noses, plus spears, war paint and feathered head-dress. I withdrew and told the captain we had an electrical fault I needed to check and left him to face the tribe who in the event were friendly.

Lae was an interesting landing place as the strip is about two metres above sea level and right at the approach end there was a grounded war damaged Jap ship.

Towards the end of the year I was posted to 12 Squadron Amberley now operating B24 Liberator four-engined bombers. After a short conversion course I was allotted to a crew and we carried a number of sorties. A couple of months later I was posted to Rathmines back onto Catalina flying boats. These moves give some idea of the turmoil that existed in the upper echelon at the time.

My first flight here was to Darwin thence to Dili (East Timor). Dili was an interesting place as it was a Portuguese possession. The local military personnel made us welcome and looked after us in a generous manner. Here we able to purchase ten litre containers of wine. These were very popular with our mates in Darwin. The Australian resident was an ex RAAF Group Captain. This guy was very rank conscious and on exiting from the aircraft we would line up with the captain at the head of the line, the resident would shake hands with him and with a quick glance to see how many officers there were invite that number to lunch and the SNCOS could look after themselves. Imagine our amazement on this occasion when he included the radio operator and yours truly, the flight engineer, in the invitation, two lowly warrant officers. After an introduction to his wife and a quick drink he turned to the radio op and said my wireless is out of order, fix it, then turned to me and said you go down to the shed and show my mechanic what the trouble is with the diesel engine and show him how to fix it. Full marks for his hospitality! (another strange bod)

SON IS BORN

Something on the personal side now. Soon after the war we decided we would add a son to our family of two daughters. The great day arrived when my wife was admitted to a Sydney hospital. At the time I was a student on a senior NCO'S course at RAAF Base Richmond. Unfortunately complications set in and as a result my wife was in a serious condition. I was unable to take leave so each day I caught the 4PM. Train to Sydney and visited my wife for the permitted ten minutes, then a cup of coffee and a sandwich and a train to Richmond arriving there about 9PM. From Richmond to Parramatta was a steam train service then an electric service to Sydney. After a few visits the doctor called me into his office and explained the complications of my wife's delivery and as a result he could either save the baby or my wife. The decision was mine to make then and there I had no one I could refer to in the time I had. After some considerable thought I said my wife should live. He was very annoyed and said the new life should be survive; I believe he was guided by his religious beliefs. Our son was delivered christened and died the next day. Some weeks later my wife was admitted to another Sydney hospital for an operation. The surgeon insisted I be at the hospital at the time of the operation. I applied to my flight commander for leave he refused me saying my personal problems were no concern of his that I was there to carry out flying duties as required. I was in a real quandary. I made a decision. I went over his head directly to the CO who told me to go immediately and report back when the situation was satisfactory. I appreciated the decision but the flight commander made me pay dearly for it for many weeks to come. My wife recovered but remained a sick person for the remainder of her life.

LIFE ON THE FLIGHTLINE

The set-up for the air sea rescue duties was for a Cat to be in Darwin for six weeks then swap over with the crew in Morotai for six weeks then return to Rathmines for a spell before doing it all again.

Some of the ops we did in this area were both interesting and challenging. One such early flight in the New Year was Darwin to Groote Eylandt. This was formerly a base for Qantas flying boats flying the Sydney- London route and it was their first over night stop of the journey. It was a complete facility with a jetty, mooring buoy, mess hall sleeping accommodation etc. On this occasion we took Mr Allan Marshall (Author of "I Can Jump Puddles". He was a paraplegic a person and was to be admired for the effort he put into researching his books.

The English fellow running the place had it sweet as he held school for the native children (for which he received a subsidy) then in the afternoon they cared for an extensive vegetable garden from which the produce he sold. The men operated a lugger for him and also showed a good return.

Our next trip was to search for a commercial DC4 airliner lost somewhere in the territory. After carrying out several search patterns the captain asked me to ask the nav to get on the intercom. I checked the nav table, nobody there! Next I checked the bunk where I found the nav having a kip. I gave him a nudge and told him the skip wanted a position report whereby he replied he had no idea of our position. It turned out he had been a POW in Germany for about three years then repatriated to Australia and posted for flying duties without a refresher course or a chance to swot up on the different nav aspects between the northern and southern hemispheres. The skip then called on the radio op to get a fix which he was successful with but now our fuel state was such that we could not make Darwin so landed at Camowéal. As we were securing the aircraft the refueling contractor arrived with his truck and about nine 44 gallon drums of fuel also a semi-rotary hand pump to dispense the fuel, I said "good-day". He then asked how much fuel I required I replied a thousand gallons, he said "no way I would have to pump all night to put that amount on board". I replied "I will see you in the morning then" and left him to it

On the way into town in the taxi I was thinking to myself a hot shower, a cold beer, a feed followed by a restful nights sleep will set me up for another long day tomorrow. The plans of mice and men, after getting my accommodation, a shower and a change of gear we visited for that cold beer there was a crowd of noisy guys around the bar we got to the bar and asked for a round of beers only to be told "the river is in flood mate and the beer truck could not get through, you can have either a crème de menth or a drambuie". We decided on a small glass (7 oz) of the latter then in for dinner. After we returned to the bar for a nightcap. Well by now they were really away. A guy lurched up to me and said "whose side are you on?". I replied "I am on the Queen's side now b----er off mate". Stepping onto the veranda we were amazed to see many blokes madly attacking each

other in the main road which was red soil and it was raining they were swinging wild punches in all directions with little effect except they were not a pretty site all covered in red soil. So much for a quiet night in Camowear! After another fruitless search next day we returned to Darwin.

Another time we had a rookie second pilot in the crew the skipper decided to give him some practice at circuits and splashes (water landings). The first couple went OK but the next one he stalled the aircraft about twenty feet above the water we hit with a hell of a bump sufficiently hard to cause the failure of several rivets. I looked down from my position to see a number of water leaks spurting to a height of about two to three feet into the aircraft. I grabbed a handful of the nav's sharpened pencils and proceeded to plug the holes; the nav was not amused!

The next big trip ex Darwin was a search for a Mosquito aircraft flown by a New Zealand pilot on a delivery flight from the UK. The aircraft was found on Sydney Island with the body of the pilot recovered to Mornington Island where we picked it up and flew it to Townsville.

On returning to Darwin we had a couple days off before beginning our six weeks stint on Morotai. Our first job here was to do a flying survey of the many ex-jap airstrips in the area and advise Headquarters Darwin of those that were suitable for a Dakota to use as a forced landing strip. At this time the RAAF was operating a scheduled service from Sydney to Japan and return.

We had just left the water on our next trip when there was a terrific bang. It sounded as though a bomb had exploded. It turned out a main wheel tyre had blown out so we landed back on the water where the second engineer and I did a wheel change from a dinghy (no mean feat). Shortly after our tour time was up and we swapped over with the Darwin aircraft.

Our first job from Darwin was to Dili in east Timor and return. Next trip was Darwin-Truscott- Champagne Bay-Truscott-Darwin. On landing at Truscott and delivering our freight an airman asked me if we liked oysters, "of course" I replied. He said O.K. What time will you be back? I gave a him a time he assured me he would have some ready for us. When we arrived back he handed me a two gallon bucket three parts full of oysters shelled! The only container on board was a washing-up dish. In went the oysters as the lad wanted his bucket back. Soon after take-off I asked the second engineer to put a few oysters in each of a number of enamel mugs and with some bread and butter serve them to the crew members - much appreciated.

A couple of days later we were to fly Darwin to Morotai in company with another aircraft. We took off but soon learned the other aircraft had become unserviceable so we were told to return to base. This presented a problem as our fuel load took us above our permitted landing weight. The skipper was agonizing over the thought of flying around for several hours in the dark to burn off enough fuel to be OK. To land a general discussion took place, I suggested we dump the excess fuel. This created a certain amount

of nervousness as there were reported cases of the dump valve sticking open and we would lose all the fuel. I assured the crew I was confident I could successfully carry out the procedure. The skip gave the OK. All went well and that was my one and only experience of a live dump.

Next day we again set out for Morotai. A couple of interesting trips followed. One was to Ternate where we picked up fresh vegetables for the troops at the base. I recall the skipper told the nav to moor up. The nav had very little idea of the procedure to follow. To moor up it was necessary to stand on a sponson about five inches wide then lean out and catch a rope from the buoy and hook it over a bollard on the aircraft. "Dusty", our nav, was not too sure of his safety in these shark infested waters as we taxied to the buoy. He missed grabbing the rope and called to go round again and come up wind to the buoy. The skipper then called on the second engineer to moor up and inferred Dusty was inept. Dusty and Maurie being good mates so when the buoy was approached a second time I saw Maurie deliberately drop the rope into the water without any attempt to moor the aircraft. This made the captain furious. He called me and said for goodness sake show these people how to moor an aircraft. On the way forward, as I passed Maurie, he said if you moor up first go we will chuck you in the drink, however my sense of duty overcame any threat and I moored the aircraft. I think the skip was getting the message that it would be better to leave each crew member to do his own job!

WAR SURPLUS

A flight to Balikpapan revealed another aspect of war. A considerable amount of war surplus material needed to be disposed of so as not to unbalance the economy by flooding the market with a surplus of particular goods. As I recall I saw a stack about 12 feet high x 15 feet wide x 40 feet long being burned. The stack was made up of pillow slips sheets towels and similar goods.

A few days later we were to fly to Sarong which is located on the north west tip of Papua. The Royal Dutch Shell Co owned an oil well here that the Japs had scorched by wrecking the machinery and firing the well. Soon after hostilities ceased the company sought tradesmen from all over the world to reinstate the well to produce oil as quickly as possible. On our arrival and much difficulty in mooring up to a makeshift buoy we delivered our package to the manager who then showed us over the site and later drove us to his house to meet his wife and invite us to lunch. After a delicious lunch he returned us to the central area where he asked us if we would like to visit the shop and on doing so we found a range of goods including our scarce commodity of beer and cigarettes. My mate the second pilot and I checked our wallets and decided we would invest on asking the Javanese man behind the counter the price of the beer he told us no money was needed he made a note of the outgoing to know what to re-order. As there was no movement of people on and off the site, except company employees going on leave periods, their wages were deposited in a bank of their choosing and there was no money used locally except for us as being an exception. Well this was an opportunity not to be missed. As we were deciding how many cases we could take on board the captain said you may take one case each and that is final and the end of our little enterprise as beer and cigs were scarce in Darwin. It was a profitable market.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

This period of duty was interesting. I remember the doctor giving us a lecture on the procedure for delivering a child complete with a practical demonstration with a length of cord ! Fortunately I never had occasion to use it. Back at base, work consisted of a minor servicing of the aircraft and some routine flying. The highlight of returning to Darwin was the mail waiting for us to be found on the table in the crew room. There was some fine dust on some of the letters. After reading his mail, one of the crew members said he had received an urn containing his uncle's ashes. His uncle had operated a vessel in the Arafura sea area and it was requested that his ashes be dropped over the sea on a subsequent flight. The member asked me if I would help him to do the drop. I secured him with the safety harness, opened the blister and suggester he may like to say a prayer as he scattered the ashes. He opened the urn and allowed the ashes to fall. On completion he brought the urn back into the aircraft and asked me if I could obliterate the script on the lid so he could use it as a trinket box! I replied you heathen chuck it out which he did.

Home again for a few days leave then to Rathmines for duty to locate and escort a Hythe flying boat to a landing which was doing local aerial photography around the ACT. Later a search for the yacht "RANGI" took place. She was a competitor in the Sydney to Auckland race and after a seventeen hour search effort without a result a civilian aircraft reported the yacht was moored in Botany Bay and not bothered to report its whereabouts. Thanks very much. Soon after this we were detailed to be part of a Naval co-op task force38 with the US Navy off Sydney Heads. Our participation was to drop "CHAFF" (strips of aluminium foil) to fool the enemy radar in believing they are seeing a number of aircraft on their radar screens. On this trip we had a couple of RAN Officers as observers. During the exercise we hit an air pocket and dropped some six hundred feet before we hit bottom. While we were dropping we were in negative "G" so all loose items were floating on the roof of the fuselage including the female officer who crashed back onto the catwalk and suffered a slight injury spilling an amount of blood. Now followed some local flying including a return trip to Lord Howe Island.

MACQUARIE ISLAND

A few days later we were detailed to fly to Point Cook where we were advised that a diesel engineer had broken through the ice and his body was not recoverable before summer and were to fly a replacement engineer into the base at Macquarie Island as soon as possible as it was imperative to have electricity at all times for communications, lighting etc. As there was no suitable ship available at the time the authorities decided a Catalina should be used for the job. On arrival at Point Cook the boffins fitted four JATO (jet assisted take offs) units to the aircraft, two on the port side and two on the starboard side complete with the necessary wiring and firing device. We then carried a test take-off using JATO which was an exhilarating experience. As soon as the aircraft got on the step the skipper fired the JATO and the old girl leaped into the air and climbed like a jet fighter to about nine hundred feet where the JATO ran out of thrust and she flopped back to her sedate cruising speed of 94 knots. After this successful test flight, new JATO bottles were fitted and we flew to Cambridge airport in Tasmania. We booked into accommodation and waited for the met people to advise us of suitable weather to allow us to fly to Macquarie Island (MI) in the meantime the staff of the Cascade brewery were most hospitable to us. A few days later with a favourable weather report we departed at 0600 hrs. At about an hour after take-off we experienced some instrument failures and returned to the airport.

Normally I was responsible for the rations for a trip however on this occasion a senior member of the Antarctic authority decided he would come with us and would supply the rations. On returning to Cambridge he decided he could not spare the time to wait for our next attempt so he departed and left the rations with us. Imagine my dismay when they consisted of glucose lollies and frozen lobster, just the shot for a meal after a forced landing in the Antarctic!

We returned to Point Cook where the aircraft was made serviceable and thence to Cambridge. Finally the weather was OK and we were on our way after a very early departure. We found MI about 7 hours 45 mins later. The skipper did a couple of exploratory circuits during which time a Wing Commander who had come along as “commander of the expedition”, incidentally tagged “Operation Sinbad”, decided he would rather go to Tasmania than land on a very forbidding sea. Our skip, an exceptional pilot, replied it should be OK. Then he instructed any crew member not on duty to take their crash positions. He then made a great landing.

A whale boat came out to the aircraft to take the passenger ashore. He was not impressed with the local scenery. The Wingco decided he would also go ashore too. The skip tried to convince him otherwise as we could have an adverse fuel situation if the weather deteriorated further.

I had brought an extra anchor. We taxied up to the beach and cast out both anchors (I'll tell you it was B----! cold) neither anchor held so we drifted out to sea for a couple of

miles then taxied back on one engine. We repeated this with the other engine to retain the engine and oil temperatures. About three hours later the wingco returned. He was not popular with the crew. The nav and I did our sums (fuel and weather) and found we could not make Tasmania. A decision was made to proceed to Wigram field at Christchurch, New Zealand. After a JATO take-off we set course for NZ.

After landing at Wigram Field and a warm welcome from the Kiwis we partook of a quick meal and a long deserved sleep followed. The next day the other engineer and I decided to "do" Christchurch. After a delightful stroll through a couple of parks through which the Avon river wended its lazy way we checked a cathedral and a few other points of interest. We discovered an ornate building that proclaimed itself as a hotel. As we were hot and a little weary we decided a beer would not go astray. We entered the saloon bar where a gracious lady asked us what we would like she was dressed in a pleated white blouse with a brooch at the throat beautifully coiffured hair long black skirt etc. On our request for a couple of beers she informed us this is a hotel you require a beer house then directed us to a place a couple of blocks away. How the other half live!

After finding the beer house and ordering a couple of beers the bar keeper produced two warm glasses and filled them right to the top with unchilled beer from a tap on the end of a hose. While slowly consuming our drink we got into a conversation with the barman about serving beer in AUS compared to NZ where upon he invited us to visit the cellar. We found this most interesting. He explained the beer is brought to the site in a tanker then a hose is connected to a receptacle in the pavement then the beer flows into a stainless steel tank where it is put under pressure with air from an engine driven compressor. By the time it is served its not to our taste.

Next day the Wingco was keen to leave for Australia. The skipper on the other hand suggested we might spend a couple days in Auckland. When this was suggested to him he ordered the aircraft be made ready to fly out next day. The skip then instructed me to make the aircraft unserviceable. Later the Wingco ordered me to "fix it". This fiasco happened a couple of times of course the Wingco won and next day we said farewell to our magnificent hosts and departed for home. An interesting and exciting operation.

AIR/SEA/RESCUE

The next month was mainly taken up with local flying except for a search for a domestic airliner later found crashed on the outskirts of Qurindi. Another trip to Darwin with an overnight stop at Cloncurry began our three months of Air/Sea/Rescue (ASR) duties. The first job was a search for a launch (successful) followed by an amount of local flying. At this time we were checking out a second pilot to become a captain. An interesting one we were detailed to take some gear to Yampi Sound which is situated on the far north west coast of WA. After doing what we had to do there we proceeded to Derby for an overnight stay. Now this was an experience. We booked into the local and after a shower we visited the bar. Another guy and I decided on a game of billiards. When we were setting up the table we noticed several places where previous players had poked their cues through the cloth then band-aids were used to repair the damage. This caused the balls to run a little erratically so we abandoned that idea. After a couple of drinks and a good feed we retired for an early night. Imagine my dismay when putting on the light I found a body in my bed. On ascertaining that it wasn't female I suggested he might like to vacate to his own bed he said Jeeze don't be difficult mate there are plenty of B—LY beds take any one. As I couldn't judge the build of the bloke I took his advice. I found an empty bed. Next morning I went to my Room and asked my guest if he had any objection to me getting my shaving gear etc. "No mate go right ahead but I will give you a tip if you want a drink get to the bar before 7 a.m. As that lousy barman closes the bar from 7 to 7.30 and the good Lord himself couldn't get served! The night before, while at the bar, a well dressed elderly man stood timidly by himself having a drink. When it was my turn to shout I said to the barman give the old guy a drink. Next morning as we were checking out the barman /receptionist/owner handed me a parcel from the "old guy". It was a bottle of whiskey. I protested strongly saying I couldn't take it as he was most likely a pensioner and could not afford it where upon I was told the "old gentleman" owned two cattle stations! A point of interest - across the street from the pub was a large BOAB (bottle tree) that in days gone bye had been hollowed out and fitted with a door then used as a one person cell as required.

Our next operation was to land on Sydney Harbour adjacent to the Manly wharf and moor up to a buoy positioned by the maritime services people. Then to carry out flights as ordered in support of a local Mardi Gra. However this was not to be as a maritime services representative advised us if you take-off don't come back as this was not a recognized landing area for flying operations. So we filled in our time assisting with the manning of the airforce static displays. Two of us slept on board each night for a security watch. Carrying out a daily inspection one morning I found an aileron had a hole in its fabric covering. I guessed a bird had put its foot through the fabric and had some difficulty in removing it. This meant a trip to the Rosebay facility to borrow some fabric and dope (paint) to effect a repair.

There followed a period of flying training crew for new aircrew members. After some hours of local flying practicing heavy and rough water landings taxing etc the check-out

flight was a take-off from Rathmines, about 1330, then a navex to Lord Howe Island, air to ground gunnery practice for all members on a wrecked Jap ship on Middleton reef thence to Brisbane to complete a dummy bombing run using flame floats on a stretch of the river to simulate a real run and show the accuracy of the bomb run. A night navex to base via Bourke followed, a fair days work!

I recall one rookie pilot under training who was pretty hopeless. The captain said put your hands gently on the control column but don't move it. On questioning why, the captain replied some one from the department may be watching and question why you are pissed! I am sure he was the most incompetent pilot I ever flew with.

PERMANENT AIRFORCE

All good things come to an end. The period of the interim airforce was completed. I was given the choice of joining the permanent airforce with the rank of sergeant or take a discharge. After a lengthy discussion with my wife I decided to join the permanent airforce. The amount of flying was drastically reduced as the Catalinas were being withdrawn from service.

This decision resulted in a posting to the RAAF school of technical training at Wagga Wagga. What a change of lifestyle. I think I was the only ex flying crew member there so I was quickly nicknamed the Penguin (has wings but can't fly). School teaching was neither my greatest attribute or desire however I made the best of it. In the meantime I made some good friends and enjoying the amenities of Wagga. A couple of other guys there had also returned from active service found it difficult to fit into the local regime so practical jokes were a common occurrence. One such was a warrant officer phoned a squadron leader acquaintance and asked him if he liked seafood. On being told yes he said he would send him down a parcel. As he had just killed a black snake he cut it into pieces, wrapped it in newspaper and had it delivered to the officers mess. The story came back that the squadron leader had invited a couple of his cronies to join him in a drink and a feed of prawns imagine his consternation and embarrassment when he opened his parcel!

Another factor affecting my decision to join the permanent force was I took a month's leave and found a job as a motor mechanic in Sydney. This entailed about an hours train travel each way. At the end of the week the boss called me to his office and said your weekly wage is 6 pounds 12 shillings of which 12 shillings is tax. As I am not paying the tax I will split the 12 shillings with you! I said thank you very much and I'll see you in the spring.

OFFICER TRAINING

After a promotion and three years at Wagga I reached the point where I needed to make another decision concerning my future. The situation that confronted me was on achieving the rank of warrant officer and then receiving a two year increment of two shillings per day I would not be able to increase my income except by applying for a commission or taking a discharge. As I enjoyed service life and the airforce was entering the jet age I applied for and succeeded in gaining a commission. So back to Rathmines as a cadet officer to do the officers training course. To name a few subjects, airforce law, leadership, public speaking and drill. I was in a class of about 22 other people. We had a directing staff of some six senior officers. The first new phase for me was when a team of psychologists moved in for a week to assess us,. We were broken-up into teams of eight and for a week we were at the mercy of these strange people doing various written, oral and field tests. How interesting! One of the field tests I was involved in was to imagine a bottomless chasm with a stack of material on one side that consisted of empty oil drums, wooden planks and rope. The person selected to be leader was required to move himself and all members of the team plus any material used to the other side. There were several tests of a similar nature throughout the week. One very experienced officer made a smart remark about the absurdity of some of the tests and was suspended from further training.

When the week ended we were all detailed for an interview with our team psych. I was woken at 2 am, showered, dressed and reported to his office for this important interview. He informed me there would be only the truth without provocation then proceeded to advise me that I knew very little about algebra. I reminded him this was a bare truth interview and as I had not taken algebra as a subject at school I knew nothing about it where upon he said I would not be capable of becoming an aeronautical engineer. I explained to him I was an aircraft maintenance engineer not a design engineer he began to frown and cluck his tongue. I thought this is not going too well so biting the bullet I asked him if he was a doctor. "Of course I am" he replied. I then asked him what action he would have taken if I had fallen on the stairs and sustained a greenstick fracture of my shin bone. Oh he replied I am a doctor of psychology. I rest my case. Another time we were required to give a half hour talk. I chose a subject and wrote out a brief checked it and pretty well memorized it. A friend in the orderly room asked me what I was doing. When I told him he offered to type it for me. Some time later a member of the directing staff happened by and asked what he was typing when told they were notes for a student he said OK. Then he asked which student? He gave my name and then the officer took both copies and disposed of them. So the course was not all plain sailing with conflicting personalities to contend with.

A couple of asides, the doctor on base was a retired army type. An airman reported with a severe redness on parts of his body. The doc diagnosed scarlet fever and placed him in isolation two days later when the redness turned brown the realised it was sunburn. Another time he charged an airman with insubordination. When the man was paraded before the officer hearing the charge and accused of calling the doctor a "horse doctor"

he replied not true. What I said was I would not let him treat my horse! Case dismissed. In my flying days there I ruptured an eardrum and was admitted to the base hospital where this same doc diagnosed mumps. As my condition worsened the sister-in-charge sent me to a specialist in Newcastle who admitted me to a local hospital. I arrived in the late afternoon and was accommodated in a two bed ward. A staff member asked me if she could get me anything from the canteen, would I care to rent a radio then dinner arrived on a tray with a silver warmer over the plate of delicious food followed by a dessert. I reckon I was on a good thing. The next morning it all evaporated as I was moved to a veranda bed with about ten other blokes. When lunch arrived it was a miserable slice of corned beef with a small helping of mashed spud. After some discreet inquiries I realized the admissions clerk did not recognize the difference between a warrant officer and a commissioned officer. So much for discrimination. What a let down!

Back to the course, one morning we were given a talk on keeping fit and playing sport then the question was asked are there any tennis players amongst you? A few guys put up their hands. The officer said fall-out and report to the officers mess we are having a tennis afternoon and the courts need marking.

A mate and I were both fitters. A member of the directing staff asked if at the weekend we would have a look at his car engine. OK. We finished up grinding the valves and tuning and at the completion of which he said he was very pleased and he would like to give us a dozen bottles of beer each. But as we were on course we were not allowed to have beer in our quarters so we would have to wait until the course was finished before we could receive our reward. Ha Ha! Many years later, by which time I had out ranked him, I caught up with him and I gave him a severe reminder of his obligation and left him to worry about it.

When the psycho's finished their week they joined the directing staff in the mess for drinks. The CO shouted then a couple of the directing staff had a shout. There was a pause while we waited for the psycho's to shout. As no action was evident the CO suggested to them they should have a shout. To our amazement they got into a huddle, counted the number of people present, enquired the price of beer then worked out how much each of them would need to put in to pay for the shout. I ask you are these guys for real?

Soon after it was time for the graduation parade where the CO said a few words then presented each of us with our commission. We were now very proud Pilot Officers with a quarter inch wide piece of ribbon on our sleeves to denote that we were P/O's on probation for twelve months. Following the parade there were interviews with a member of the D/S. I was unlucky enough to have my old friend who had harassed me throughout the course. After a few words he said you know I took a dislike to you from day one. I had had a neckful of this bloke so I took a risk and replied "it was mutual sir". He then asked me to write to him from time to time and advise him of my advancement in the service. This was said with heavy sarcasm years later when I had reached the same as he. I said I had achieved this through hard work and efficiency and I was pleased he still remained in the same rank after all these years!

RICHMOND

I was posted to No 2 aircraft depot at RAAF Base Richmond as assistant chief technical Officer (A/CTO). I liked the job and worked hard at it. The officer in charge of the base (OC) was an officer with a great war record behind him and was a socialite and had a “king of the kid's” attitude to his juniors eg the local railway station boasted one platform, he decreed this was for the use of officers only other ranks would board the train from the ground on the other side! A few incidents to show his form—his second wedding was held on base. My boss advised me that I was to be an usher at the chapel on the following Saturday. I said I had an appointment in Sydney on that day sir. His reply was bad luck son you will be on duty at the wedding. I duly attended. The highlight of the day was when a lady tried to hand me a cigarette and told me to get rid of them. I left her in little doubt as to my duties.

Mess dining-in nights are occasions for officers to get together and for the OC to entertain VIP's. At the top table they are dignified affairs with officers wearing mess dress and squadron banners being displayed. These are normally held once a month. Our OC saw fit to hold them once a week and only an emergency would be accepted for non attendance. He also decreed that each night would be of a different dress standard i.e. first night blue uniform then mess-kit, drabs and then civilian suit. The dress drab uniform was not a free issue. A member was required to order and pay for his own. With a sick wife in Wagga, two girls at school and no increase in my pay I was not in a financial position to buy a pansy drab uniform. Next day my boss told me to report to the OC who asked me if I had a pansy drab uniform. On being told no he said get one immediately. Now here was a problem. After a lot of thought I phoned the suppliers (the Commonwealth clothing factory) saying I needed a pansy drab uniform. The gentleman at the other end said I suppose you want it immediately. I replied no, in about twelve months time. I then explained the situation. He gave me his name and said he would go along with the plot for a detailed supply. Next month I wore an issue drab uniform the OC called me in and asked what are you doing about getting a pansy drab uniform? I replied it is on order sir. With this ploy I managed to delay the delivery of the uniform until my posting came through months later when I rang my friend thanked him and cancelled the order.

I had a call from Wagga to say my wife had suffered a mild stroke and should come immediately, good grief what a problem. I mentioned predicament to a pilot who said I will fly you down. One thing about the RAAF if a member is in trouble they do every thing in their power to put it right. A great service!

Another time I was orderly officer at the time and I was also the officers mess bar member. This was secondary duty as I also had an assistant. I was in the guard room at about 6:30am when the guard sergeant on answering the phone turned to me saying it is for you sir. I took the phone and gave my surname the voice said that is no way to answer the phone. This is the OC. Thinking it was my offsider having me on I replied not likely

at 6:30am. The voice, quell the noise at the airmens and report to me at 0900hrs. Oh my God it was the OC. When I fronted up there was this tubby little guy just a couple of years older than me. Sitting behind an enormous desk on which was his gold braided cap and a leather handled horsehair fly swot. He started off by saying that was a serious misdemeanour you committed this morning as that could have been the Governor calling me. I replied not likely at 0600hrs. He then went on to say when I was a pilot officer, pilot officers were caned. This was too much for me as I visualized myself bent over the desk being whipped with the fly swot. I could not repress a large smile. Well did that go over like a lead balloon, He said that while I was thinking over the misdemeanour I could do a further ten O.O. Duties S.T. I was full of knowledge from my recent course so I advised him a person should only be required to do seventy two hours of continuous duty then must be allowed a rest. I may as well not spoken as he totally ignored me then I was dismissed. I had a torrid ten days between other officers saying thanks for doing all these duties and the troops hinting I must have committed a heinous crime. I looked forward to the end of the term.

WILLIAMTOWN

On completing my probation time I was promoted to Flight Officer and posted to RAAF Base Williamtown with the position of junior engineer officer. This was a challenge as I had no experience of jet powered aircraft or fighter squadron operations. I spent two years in this posting. It was a pretty steep learning curve.

Here are some of the outstanding occurrences of this period. Firstly the big Maitland floods of the mid fifties required the help of our people. Our radio officer was a Flt. Lt Bourke. He placed an urgent demand for a diesel electric power unit and it finished up in the Bourke railway shed. This took sometime to trace and recover. One of our troop had worked through the night assisting people and their belongings to higher ground. He was suffering a headache and asked a local cafe owner for a drink of water and was dismayed when asked to pay for it!! Another troop disappeared on Friday evening without permission then turned up on Sunday morning. The sergeant duly charged him and I heard the charge. His defence was he was a Seventh Day Adventist so his faith did not allow him to work on a Saturday. Religion being a touchy subject I gave him a warning dismissed the charge. A couple of Saturdays later I was on base and saw this guy working on a car. I challenged him as to his recent excuse and he replied I thought you would have been smart enough to check my documents and see I was a Catholic. I then asked him what was all this nonsense about being a SDA? He replied I am with a beautiful girl in town and getting no where as she is a strict SDA. So to make progress I am temporarily a devout SDA but that could change shortly. If so I will work any day of the week. One needs to get up early to catch the Aussie serviceman!

I had a well- built Flt Sgt armourer working for me he was also responsible for supervising the servicing of "E" seats. He frequently drank alcohol at the lunch break. I lined him up and told him his drinking at lunch time was finished as he was endangering the life of pilots to which he replied "who is going to stop me"? So here was a big problem. A senior NCO was challenging a junior officer. To his dismay he learned that all junior officers are not inexperienced in man management and paid the price for his ignorance.

The new Australian built Sabre aircraft was being introduced into the RAAF. At Williamtown to meet this commitment a Sabre trials flight was established. Naturally the "new" aircraft was the wonder of the decade. We did not have a flight simulator so a procedure the CO explained, the scribble was the Queen's, was adopted to train pilots to convert to this aircraft. A major was seconded from the US Airforce where he had operated similar type aircraft. He would give the conversion pilots a series of lectures on the operation of the aircraft and then with a pilot leaning over each side of the cockpit he would demonstrate engine start, taxiing and other aspects of ground operations. When he considered the pilot was confident about the aircraft he sent him off solo. There were some hairy times experienced by these guys.

Our adjutant was not the brightness egg in the dozen. A small committee designed a unit Standard. The design was sent to the college of heralds for their recommendation thence to the Queen for approval which was shown by her signature in the top right hand corner of the parchment. On its arrival back to base our excitable adj. raced into the CO's office exclaiming our Standard is back sir but some silly bugger has scribbled on it! The CO explained that that was the Queen's signature and proceeded to tell him of his ancestors!

If the CO had an early morning flight he gained delight in flying over the married quarters and breaking the sound barrier thus scaring the daylighters out of the occupants.

Another time I walked into a workshop and found an army Colonel having a beer with the NCO in charge and his staff, I conveyed my disapproval to the officer in no uncertain terms and took appropriate action against the F.SGT. Imagine my dismay when attending a dinner that evening to find it was farewell to the colonel after thirty-five years in the army. It appears the drinking was to thank the "boys" for all the "foreigners" that they had done for him.

I mentioned to the CO there was an instrument at RAAF Richmond that I required to make an aircraft serviceable but I could not expect to get it for about a week through the stores. He said get hold of a pilot to fly you down and get the part. Having had little to do with jet propelled aircraft I was looking forward to the trip. I found a pilot, we strapped in and took off. Soon after climb out he asked me if I knew where Richmond was. Of course I replied. He said OK it is all yours. Well here I took the controls and being an engine type the first thing I did was to check the 20 instrument which of course were very different to piston engined aircraft. I looked over the side to see Terrigal then Broken Bay and a quick look back into the cockpit to check the instruments. All OK. A couple of minutes later the pilot asked me if I was sure I knew where Richmond was. I replied of course. He gave a wry smile and said we passed it a while back as he took over and left one red faced junior officer realizing the difference in the flying speed of a Catalina and a Vampire jet

A Vampire experienced an engine flame-out, the pilot called control to say he would do a dead stick landing. So grabbing a jeep I proceeded with the ambulance and fire truck to a position adjacent to the strip the aircraft came in "hot"(too fast) stated his roll-out then when he saw he was running out of strip he ground looped into an adjacent clear area. We raced over to the aircraft to find the whole front section wiped off as we tried to rescue the pilot. He said his ankle was jammed from all this trauma. He suffered only a sore ankle. The Gods do smile sometimes!

Another time the CO said I am about to fly to Amberley and give them a bell to say I expect to arrive about 1300hrs. Being an eager beaver I got on the phone rang the switch and asked for the call to be put through. They replied all lines are busy. Some little time later I tried again same result by now I was getting worried so thinking back on what I had learned on course I remembered the various priorities for emergency use and decided nothing was too good for the CO. Called the switch and placed a (FLASH) priority all and got through straight away "well done Jack". Some little time later the Radio officer

visited me and enquired if I had made a FLASH call. I assured him I had and I got through immediately. He said of course you would. The switch operator on hearing FLASH would break all other connections for your call. This priority is used when the enemy is actually wading ashore I will try and cover for you but never do this to me again!

There was an RN Commander on the staff of the land/air warfare school. He was not generally liked. He approached the senior engineer officer with a request to have a lawn mower wheel repaired. The engo was not interested and referred him to me. He explained what he wanted done and left it with me sometime later. I took it to the sergeant in charge of the workshop and explained what was required and who it was for. Some days later the commander came looking for his wheel. I escorted him to the workshop and asked the sergeant if that job was finished. He said it was done several days ago and was put under the bench. He began looking and shortly after we joined in, all to no avail. Eventually the commander gave up I said I would let him know when we found it. Later I asked the sergeant where in hell is the blessed wheel? He said actually you are standing on it. What do you mean I asked? We were putting in a new section of concrete flooring and I used it as reinforcement. Tell that to the commander? Not likely.

FAIRBAIRN

My two year posting was up and after some very sad farewells I flew to RAAF Base Fairbairn to take up duty as assistant engo of the air transport wing including the VIP flight. I arrived there in mid July. Talk about cold, I was freezing after settling in to quarters.

I visited the mess where I met a few old friends we had dinner and returned to the bar room where a huge fire was giving out a lot of heat. After a chat and a couple of drinks I left for bed. As soon as I got outside I quickly decided the fire was much more inviting than a cold bedroom, so I returned and sat in a very comfortable chair in front of the fire chatting to some members. One by one they bid me good-night, I must have dozed off as it was 1 a.m. when I looked at the time and I was the only person in the mess!!

Next morning I reported in full uniform plus greatcoat, gloves and scarf. The boss had a few words then allotted me an office. I called up the warrant officer and asked if he could get me a radiator. He said you already have one, yes I know, but please get me another one. The boss came in to invite me to morning tea but when he saw all the gear I was wearing he said you can't work like that. I told him if I took anything off I would not be able to work at all! OK. Canberra is a B----DY cold place.

After some time the transport wing moved to RAAF Base Richmond to receive and operate the new C130 Hercules aircraft. That left me in Canberra with the VIP flight which soon became No 34 Squadron. As I was the only ground officer here I had another new challenge, we were equipped with Dakota DC aircraft fitted for VIP work. Later Airforce Headquarters was moved to Canberra. As there were a number of pilots on their staff wishing to do sufficient flying to retain their flying pay and aircrew leave entitlements the squadron was established for a Winjeel and a Vampire aircraft and both were brought on strength.

I was allotted a married quarter and moved my family to their new address.

Some time later the unit brought on strength two Convair 440 aircraft so I finished up with a fleet of aircraft whose country of origin was England, Australian, American and French. Imagine the manuals and varied handling gear this lot required.

Here are a few of the highlights of VIP Ops - one 440 was required to be ready at all times for use by the GG (Governor General). We had a trip to Darwin with some VIP's. A senior minister of the federal parliament required air travel to his home in Victoria told a Dakota would be available and he demanded a 440 This meant the aircraft on the Darwin trip had to be recalled to Canberra, emplane the minister, fly to Melbourne, return to Canberra for a refuel, thence on to Darwin on the Friday for local trips. On Monday I flew Darwin-Canberra-Melbourne, flew minister to Canberra, then empty to Darwin. This sort of thing was a quick way of spending tax payers thousand's.

The Australian constitution allowed for only one GG to be in the country at any one time so it was arranged that the outgoing GG would embark at Melbourne whilst the incoming GG would at the same hour land at Canberra after holding in New Zealand. At the crew briefing they were given an ETD from Whenupai which they translated as When-u up pea on arrival they found they had landed at (phoo-noo-a pie) Ah kiwi place names can be difficult!

We flew a GG to South Australia where he entered his Rolls Royce and with a police escort of four police motorcyclists drove some miles to open a new facility. On arrival the GG walked around to thank each rider. When he came to the fourth rider he said “by the look of your tunic I thought you had cleaned your cycle with it but looking at your cycle I see you haven’t”.

A world champion squash player visited Canberra and gave a demonstration. As a result our OC got the urge to introduce squash to the troops. He asked me if I could convert an old gun butt building to a court. I inspected the building to find it comprised three solid brick walls and a reinforced concrete floor. One of these dividing wall was only ceiling high the other half of the building housed an emergency electricity generating plant used to supply the control in the case of black-out. I took some measurements of the court in town, checked these against our building and decided a conversion was feasible. With a team of airmen we cleared out the building and attacked the floor with picks, all to no avail as they just bounced off the surface. So I called on some nearby army engineers for help. They had a go with jack hammers and with no luck they decided to break it up with explosives which proved successful. The sequel to this was on the following Monday when the bloke from the control tower came to do his weekly check he opened the door to find the ceiling at eye level and he seemed to be upset. It appears the blast went over the top of the dividing wall and blew the ceiling down! The court was successfully completed and was opened with a small ceremony. It was well used by our own people and many others from the department of air.

Prior to a Royal tour a survey flight is carried out. Several senior people from various government departments such as security, protocol, personal services and liaison board the aircraft and fly the route staying in accommodation to be used on the royal tour. Our first stop was Toowoomba. We were booked into a hotel and when we came in for dinner the important people occupied a separate table to the crew members, no fraternizing. I overheard one of the gentlemen beckon the wine waiter and request a bottle of wine which he described in detail with vintage year, variety brand etc. When the waiter returned he poured a taste for the patron. After tasting he declared this is not what I ordered it is not the year. Bring me what I ordered. The next stop was at Mount Isa with a similar set up in the dining room. This same gentleman started going on about the tardiness of the wine waiter. When the batwing doors to the kitchen opened and a coloured lady asked “what do youse want sausages or steak” at last he realized there was another world.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful until we stayed overnight at Rockhampton. Here the security guy on retiring hung his trousers over a chair only to discover next morning that his wallet was empty. Some person had apparently used a fishing rod through the safety bars and hooked out his wallet. A red faced security chief appeared for breakfast.

Prior to a royal tour all the aircraft components are half-life'd to ensure that there would not be any replacements required during the tour period. Also the bulk storage tanks were emptied and cleaned, filled with a special fuel then a 24 hour guard was detailed to guard the area. I was having a quiet think about all my responsibilities with regard to the tour. Though base squadron was responsible for the supply and storage of fuel, I decided I would check it as I was the end user. I called in the fuel tanker driver and instructed him to take an empty tanker and draw off one hundred gallons of "royal fuel". Some little time later he reported that the outlet from the storage was delivering water. I checked this was so then visited the base commander and informed him of the situation. Well he just about jumped out of the window shouting come with me. We proceeded to the fuel outlet where he confirmed the fluid was water. For a short time pandemonium reigned. When it all cooled off I found that during the cleaning process the tanks had been drained then filled with water but the delivery pipe, some three inches in diameter and 120 feet long, was also filled with water but not drained and it was this residual water that we found. All is well. Just imagine the field day the press would have enjoyed had the aircraft with the princess and her entourage aboard and the dignitaries waving their farewells the engines started the aircraft taxies a few yards and both engines quit. OH MY GOD!

The chief of the airforce was soon to make a trip to Paris. He visited our base to draw some clothing etc from our clothing store. He was met by the officer-in-charge who enquired as to his requirements. His first request was for a pair of size 7 shoes. The corporal was sent to find them only to return and advise that the only sizes in store were 8 to 12. He then asked for a size 16 shirt, again the corporal reported the only sizes in stock were 17 to 20. On hearing this the chief very coolly asked the officer would you have a tie my size and marched out. I don't think this episode contributed much to the officer's promotion prospects.

About this time our elder daughter completed her nursing training and decided to venture overseas beginning with a job in Canada.

One of the corporals working in base squadron asked me if I could organize a flight for him as he had been in the air force for some time and had never flown. I had nothing offering I suggested he try the army light aircraft flight next door. Next thing I heard he was in hospital with a broken leg and abrasions. Unfortunately the aircraft he was flying in hit a rural power line and pranged. I visited him to commiserate and cheer him up. Prior to leaving I suggested to him he hurry up and get better and I would arrange for another flight for him. He was not amused!

Our base was also home to the RAAF Staff College. As I had done a few favours they invited me to join them on a tour of the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme. What

an experience! The complexity of the engineering workings along with the forward planning for the various contractors was amazing. For example, one of the proposed dam sites had white markers around the hills to indicate the final water level. People had acquired “Water Front Land” and built boat shed and jetties awaiting the arrival of the water. The huge underground housing to accommodate the inlet pipes and the turbine electric generators was awesome.

While serving in Canberra I was presented with the “Long Service and Good Conduct Medal”-” (twenty years of undetected crime)

BUTTERWORTH

Arriving in Singapore we were driven to a hotel where we refreshed ourselves and rested a couple of hours before boarding a plane for RAAF Base Butterworth.

On the trip up from Sydney we were given a guided tour of the ship. While the guide was explaining the amount of grog and dry goods stored in this particular area I commented that I would like to be let loose in there with a few dollars. He replied what would you like? So I made a few purchases. My wife went off on me saying we would have trouble with Customs and it was a waste of money as we would never see the goodies again etc. As we were to disembark a box arrived at our cabin neatly wrapped and addressed to me at Butterworth. On landing at Butterworth we went to the P&O Hotel on Penang Island and settled in what was to be our home for the next six weeks. The exotic East - all very new and strange to us. Next day off to work and I met my CO. I moved into my office, had a general look around, met a few of my staff and settled into the job of controlling and managing the servicing of 38 Sabre Jets and 2 Vampire aircraft. After a couple of days a Malaysian man knocked on our door and said a parcel for you master. Yes it was the grog! I felt like saying I told you so but for the sake of peace refrained.

Sunday lunch at the hotel was curry tiffin which consisted of a hot curry of beef, lamb and goat. With many side dishes such as tomato, cucumber coconut, peanuts, mango etc we each helped ourselves returning as many times as we wished. My attitude to my present environment was "when in Rome do as the Romans do". I think I enjoyed the experience of my first tiffin even though I spent a couple of hours on the bed trying to get my stomach back to normal!

After about six weeks we were allotted a married quarter on Penang Island and moved into a delightful two bedroom house on an acre of ground in a leafy street in an upper class suburb which was staffed with a cook, an amah and a gardener. The cook and his wife and son lived in a room at the rear of the house, the amah lived out and the gardener worked three days per week. Here again this was something to get used to.

Our cook Samy, with wife and two year old son Rajah, were delightful people and Samy was an excellent cook (British army trained) soon became a friend. The locals did not customarily store food so the grocer boy on his bike called two or three times a day, the butcher called with cuts of meat hanging all over his bike and the baker called with a glass fronted cabinet on his bike carrier. All this was another phase of living in a foreign country. Any thing else we needed Samy went to the market and bought it.

A lot of the locals fed off the "muccan" carts. These consisted of a three wheeled cycle with a platform and a shelter fitted to it. They rode around the streets ringing a bell and calling "MUCCAN" (food). The people would come out and buy their meal with a choice of fish, pork and chicken with rice then take it inside to eat it. The next day they left the dirty dishes on the footpath from where the "MUCCAN" man would collect them

wash them in cold water ready for the next customer. I reckon the locals had a most robust immune system!!

Work was exciting with lots of flying and much to learn. Two squadrons operated 38 Sabre and 2 Vampire aircraft with a maintenance support Sqn. The base was pleasantly located by the waters edge with excellent amenities including its own radio station.

After a few months our younger daughter wrote to say she was home-sick and would like to join us. She eventually arrived and after a short time found employment as a nurse in the RAAF Clinic on the island.

The market was an interesting place as well with all varieties of tropical fruit. They sold such items as freshly made curry paste ranging from hot to very hot, flying foxes in liquid 10 cents each, green frogs which the man would skin alive for you, and many more unusual items.

I attended a talk on jungle survival where they spoke of edible fruits etc to be found. One of which was a pea tree. I bought one from a nursery and planted it in the back yard where it thrived. Sometime later it began to bear pods. One day Samy said "there are worms on the pea tree". I replied all I'm not interested so you give them a spray and keep an eye on them. A little later he reported "all worms gone". I discovered he had sprayed each worm individually until it dropped off (drowned). Time moved on and again he said "worms on pea tree master". I replied it is your job to get rid of them Samy. Soon after with a large smile he reported "worms all gone". Thanks Samy. Then I thought how come? So I went to investigate only to find a stump he had cut down the tree and chucked it over the back fence worms and peas all gone for good!

Samy's wife became very pregnant. I told him when it was time to go to the hospital to give me a call and I would drive them there. About 9.30am there was a knock on our bedroom window. It was Samy, all excited "my wife has a baby girl", he exclaimed. Congratulations but why didn't you call me to drive you both to the hospital? It was too late to disturb you master. Well I asked how did you get to the hospital? On my bicycle Rajah (son) on the bar and my wife on the carrier!

I was in town and saw some Australian canned fruit on sale this was a bit unusual so I bought six cans then told Samy to put them aside. I would tell him when we would like a serving. A couple days later I said we will have some of that fruit for dessert. Imagine our surprise when he brought in a bowl with the contents of all the cans in it.

Ramadan was an interesting time. Samy was required to give sex and salt for six weeks prior to the event. He arranged with the priest to have a number of spears placed into his flesh. The number of spears was governed by the cost @ a dollar each. I remember he bought some twenty odd, each consisted of a length of 8 gauge wire. He spent a lot of time sharpening one end of each on the concrete step. On the first morning of the celebration the celebrants reported to the priest to have the spears fitted through a metal hoop then the spears inserted through into their flesh. Others had fish hooks put into their

backs then attached to a small cart. All this ceremony started at about 6 am. Later they marched about a kilometre or more to the temple to be blessed. On their return the gear was removed from their bodies and the wounds treated with burned cow dung to prevent any poisoning.

Then there was the gardener who was shared by three families. He went by the name of “no rainin”. Each morning as I walked up the path he would ask what will I do today. Two of his most famous days (1) I said cut the hedge – there was a hedge of Hibiscus plants around the block it was about two metres high by a metre across. When I came home from work I found the new hedge to be about one metre high by something less than a half a metre across. I was told he went round the hedge once but as it was not time to go and I had not told him to do anything else he just kept cutting! (2) He decided to water the garden. I came home to find him out in a monsoon storm watering among other things a thirty foot pine tree. A few days later the tree fell over.

Chinese funerals were another interesting aspect of a different culture. If the funeral was of a wealthy man the front lawn would be adorned with a papier mask model of a Rolls Royce car, paper money, food, an effigy of the deceased. All this was to ensure that he would be well provisioned for in the hereafter. In the case of the less fortunate, professional mourners would be engaged. On the hearse was displayed a large photo of the deceased. The mourners would work in shifts with three on each side of the coffin wailing and crying as the cortège moved along. After some distance the next shift took their place and the others withdrew for a smoke.

There was a services club in town managed by a retired English army officer. One of the dress regulations was “shorts not to be worn after 1900hrs”. One of our officers was drinking there when 1900hrs passed. The pompous manager told him you know the rules, no shorts to be worn in the club after 1900hrs where upon the culprit dropped his shorts and continued in his jocks!

There was a Squadron “DO” arranged at the club and as I had a couple of bottles of Aussie wine I enquired if I could bring it to the night. I got the OK. I then enquired if there was a corkage charge “yes \$18 per bottle - the same price as a bottle of their wine”.

About this time one of the young pilots started courting our daughter Beverly. Later they were married. Soon after husband John was sent to Ubon. Bev asked me to change her identification registration so I went to the immigration office and explained to the little man that my daughter had married so she had changed her name to that of her husband. Not good enough you must have a letter. I asked who from and he said you must have a letter. I asked the CO to write and say I was in the airforce and the new card was issued! This practice carried on from the old British administration of a reference being required.

UBON

About this time the Laotian troops were threatening the border of Thailand. The Australian Government under their SEATO commitment ordered a squadron of Sabre jet fighter aircraft to be stationed at Ubon air field, a small town in the NE of Thailand. The overall administration of this unit was vested in RAAF Butterworth. I was responsible for the maintenance of its aircraft. I sent a junior engineer officer to supervise the day-to-day servicing of the fleet. We had a Sabre prang there and I was sent to investigate the cause and provide a fix. I phoned our adjutant and said I required transport to Ubon the next day so please arrange. He came back saying there was no service aircraft available and I would need to travel commercial. OK arrange it. He then said you will need a visa to enter Thailand on a airline aircraft. So get me one. He then explained he would need to travel to Kuala Lumpur to get one. I suggested that was his problem. He then said I will call to your place this evening. He called and no had visa. I will take my passport and don't show it to anyone. Next morning I boarded a Thai airways aircraft at Penang. Soon after the hostie asked me if I would like breakfast. Yes thank you. She gave me a cardboard box with BREAKFAST stamped across the lid but no cutlery. On opening it I found several parcels wrapped in greaseproof paper. Unwrapping one I found two rashers of bacon, followed by one of toast ,then one with a fried egg. Try eating a fried egg with your fingers! Now some coca-cola Sir? "No", I emphatically replied.

Arriving at Donga Muang airport a large man in immigration told me to wait. After sometime I asked him what is occurring and he replied you are an illegal immigrant. I quickly and firmly informed him that I was an Australian citizen and the reason I was in Thailand was to help your country to protect itself from invasion. He replied you wait I will talk to my supervisor to which I replied "and what will he do"? He will put you in gaol until he decides what to do with you! After the initial shock I addressed him as sir and tried to extricate myself to no avail. Well what now? I phoned the Australian Embassy and an officer came down and tried to sort it out. By this time I was pretty browned off so I produced my passport and said "What more do you want?" He exclaimed, "Ah, you have passport" and stamped it with a two year visa. So much for the adjutants advice.

On arrival at Ubon I inspected the aircraft, took some photos and collected statements from various witnesses, one of which was a Thai local employed by the RAAF. He spoke excellent English and gave me a concise account of what he knew of the accident. I asked him to give it to me in writing as I would be compiling a consolidated report on my return to Butterworth. Imagine my dismay on opening the envelope I found he had written his report in Thai!

Another occasion I was told to take the armament officer and board an RAF Helicopter to be taken to the site of a Sabre pranged in a rubber plantation, investigate the cause of the crash, retrieve any evidence and have the arm/officer collect any live armament and make it safe. The chopper arrived over the and hovered. The load master said "one of you put

this harness on be lowered to the ground. As I was senior to the arm officer I told him to go first". He replied you are the leader you go first! As this was the first experience for either of us it was a bit daunting. Donning the harness and without any briefing on signals or procedures I stepped into space and was lowered but my descent was stopped some feet above ground. The loadmaster was making hand signals to me, none of which I understood. Then the chopper began moving down a road while I swung on the end of the cable. I wasn't scared just S---T frightened that I would hit a tree. We came to a clearing where I was landed followed by the arm/officer. The explanation was the trees were too tall for the length of the cable.

PHILIPPINES

Early in the new year my wife Dot and I took some leave which we spent in Hong Kong. We had an enjoyable time dining, shopping, mixing with the locals and learning something of their culture and customs.

Soon after returning to duty I was the engineer of a detachment of eight Sabres to Clarke Airbase in the Philippines to join the USAF in combined exercises. The first evening there I visited our aircraft line to ensure all was in order. Suddenly a jeep pulled up beside me an officer with a revolver pointed at me challenged me as to who I was and what was I doing in a proscribed area. I showed him my ID Tag and gave him an explanation. "Get in the jeep" and was driven to a place where I was lightly interrogated and released. Lesson No 1.

In our leisure time the adjutant and I were able to visit the walled city where the Japs had herded a large number of locals into a church and incinerated them. A visit to Corregidor was interesting and then a tour of Manilla. After the completion of the exercise we returned to base via Singapore.

BUTTERWORTH AGAIN

We and another family had entertained a Chinese family, the husband was an air traffic controller on base and they decided to return the hospitality by inviting us to a dinner in a restaurant (in an out-of-bounds area of George Town). This was a bit dicey for us as over zealous service police patrolled the area. However the main course arrived, a large bowl of some grey looking mess with numerous side dishes of tomato, cucumber, peanuts, coconut etc and a big bowl of rice. Celia (the wife) turned to me saying “you are the guest of honour I will serve you first“. She dug around in the large bowl, filled my dish and passed it to me, Shock horror there was a pigeons head complete with feathers, eyes and beak, looking at me. Closing my eyes I gulped it down (one must always save face with these people). It rather took the edge off the remainder of the evening.

Many aspects of living in a foreign land and observing the people and their culture was both intriguing and interesting. There was fire-walking, amazing visits to the various temples, the snake temple, where numerous types of snakes coiled, rested slept on rafters and branches, the reclining Buddha people came to worship and in doing so applied gold leaf to the body. The “Crab Place” was in an old Jap strong hold where one could select a crab and a short time later it would be served to you with an empty sauce bottle to crack it open. On another occasion I joined an RAF Helicopter medical team to visit several villages in the hinterland to give the indigenous pygmy people shots to guard against tuberculosis.

On another leave we went to a resort up in the hills. It was an interesting change of country and I was amused to see the visitors from the local areas sitting around an open fire with the windows wide open and a temperature of about 28 degrees C. I presumed this was following an English custom.

RETURNING TO AUSTRALIA

After two years plus the time has come to pack up and to return to Australia, with some regrets and good memories but pleasant expectations of returning to greet friends and relatives. The local method of packing was unusual, two Chinese men arrived with two large containers and lots of newspaper. They put all our china and glassware on the table then wrapped each piece in newspaper and literally threw it in a heap on the floor from where they recovered it and packed it tightly into the container. I thought this will require an insurance claim but not a piece was even chipped.

Our family (cook, wife, children and amah) were all very sad to see us leaving and made a big fuss with tears and hugs as we prepared to embark. The amah gave me a potted orchid as a going away gift.

While we were in Malaysia our elder daughter, who had been working in Canada as a nurse, flew to Germany and met up with her fiancée who had flown home from Canberra. They were married in his home town. They flew from Europe to India, shipped their car to Australia and came and spent time with us. This was enjoyable as we were unable to attend their wedding.

The trip home to Sydney via Perth was quite pleasant we were accompanied by our younger daughter and husband. Daughter was pregnant but travelled O.K.

In Sydney we were welcomed by excited relatives and friends. I had declared my orchid and so fronted the quarantine bloke. I asked him if there was any way I could keep it? He replied "No trouble at all mate. All you need do is to carry it through our 400 deg/C oven and it is all yours". I said "I bet you have the best garden around here" to which he replied "Of course". It was good to get back to some Aussie humour.

AMBERLEY

I had applied for and got a posting to RAAF Base Amberley in QLD where I was appointed officer in charge of Aircraft Repair Squadron in No 3 Aircraft Depot. This meant another round of meeting people and getting to know another type of aircraft. I was responsible for the major inspection of Canberra and Sabre aircraft. At this time we were operating Canberra aircraft in Vietnam. When they became due for major servicing they would be flown to Amberley and a serviceable aircraft would be ready to return. When one was due to go back I usually advised any families who had people serving in Nam that an aircraft was going up, then some of them would bring a parcel for their man. I recall one wife came down and said "I have a chocolate cake, my husbands favourite". It is so fragile I would like the pilot to carry it on his lap (what for the whole nine hours!) and also he likes his beer cold so I have packed six bottles ice in the esky. Very well madam I will look after that. When the boys finished off the cake and the beer the problem was solved.

I had a New Zealand officer posted in on exchange duties. John was a most likeable person and soon fitted in to our lifestyle. Besides being an excellent officer, he and his family enjoyed the social life of the airforce families. We dined at each others homes of which barbeques were a popular pastime. John would occasionally entertain with his own Beer Brand, Hakka. This consisted of much stomping while reciting the merits of various brands of beer - highly original and amusing over the term of his posting we became great friends and later paid each other visits in NZ and Aus.

The CO called me and said there is a visiting Shooting Star aircraft on the tarmac, come over and we will have a look at it. We each had aircrew wings on and got talking to the pilot. He asked the CO if he would like to take a ride which he accented "OK". On his return he said to me "How about you Sir. Would you like a ride?" By all means I replied. Soon after take-off he said "handing over". Well now here was an opportunity for an ex flight engineer to demonstrate his lack of skill as a pilot. I enjoyed myself for a short time but the pilot apparently feared for the safety of his person and his aircraft and said taking over. I enjoyed the experience. Another time we were invited to visit an army training unit on the shores of Moreton Bay where we boarded a hovercraft that proceeded to demonstrate its capabilities. This was early days in this form of transport so it was pretty exciting and interesting.

In lighter vein—Our RAAF Padre usually held a service in a nearby hamlet then returned to base for another service. This particular day his car quit on the return journey so he lifted the bonnet to see if there was an obvious cause. Just then a passing corporal pulled up and asked if he could help? He soon found the trouble and got the engine started turning to the padre he said that will be \$6 thank you to which the padre replied I don't have any money with me but if you would care to bring your mother and father to the chapel I will marry them!

We took some leave to Bundaberg where I suffered a fierce tooth ache. I went to a local dentist who soon fixed the problem. He asked me who I was and what I did. When I went to pay him he said no charge you don't want to be spending your money on dentistry when you are on leave. It made my day to meet some one so thoughtful.

I was the OIC of the sergeant's mess on the occasion of the inspection by the Air Officer from Command HQ. He commented on the water feature with a statue of a female being the centre piece and how pleased he was to see the members appreciated their new building and took the trouble to make it more pleasant where upon the W/OFF piped up and told the story of the origin of the statue. One of our sergeants was visiting a suburban hotel and on taking a stroll in the overgrown yard came across the statue attached to a rusty piece of water pipe. He freed it then asked if any of the blokes in the bar and wanted to do a trip to Amberley for five pounds? He soon had a taker.

We suffered a fatal aircraft crash and the custom was to hold a wake in each mess to raise funds for the widow(s) to tide them over until their money came through. So again a smart sergeant rose to the occasion and organized for a poker machine to be borrowed from a club in Tweed Heads (NSW) as they were illegal in QLD. On the night it was a popular money spinner and was returned very early the next morning. Later it was learned the local inspector of police had attended and phoned the OC to complain about the pokie being in QLD. The OC advised him it was operate on commonwealth property!

About this time my son-in-law resigned his commission and joined Qantas where he progressed to captain rank flying international routes.

The OC called me and said he had an invitation for some officers to visit the Canungra army training facility and who would care to join them? I accepted. We boarded a Pilatus Porter army aircraft. This is a STOL aircraft (short take-off and landing capability), with power applied we virtually leapt off the runway then flew low level to Canungra. Very different to any prior experience. On arrival the General welcomed us with morning tea and explained the setup of the training course with its booby traps as used by the Vietcong. He advised us to stay on the track and observe all signs. He went on to say it is customary to begin by breaking the flag thus indicating that the course is in use. He invited the OC to do so and on pulling the release rope there was a loud flash bang and the OC was enveloped in a cloud of red smoke. The General commented there are many more surprises ahead.

The CO of NOAD was group captain Jim Rowland later to be Governor of NSW. Here I had my first experience with the new breed of junior officer. Three of them were posted into my squadron. I gave them the usual introductory talk part of which was no drinking of alcohol at lunch time one of them spoke up saying he had seen a senior officer drinking and he would the same. I said this now an order and if he disobeyed it he would suffer the consequences. As an aside I phoned the senior officer who was a friend of mine, told him the situation and said no more drinking at lunch time. His reply is not printable!

Another of them came to me a few weeks later and said he thought he would charge the Warrant Officer in charge of Canberra servicing. When I asked on what grounds he said "he said bad language to me". I suggested he make up his mind whether or not he was going to proceed with the charge and if so then I'll have two vacant cells at the guard room ready, one for the W/O was in one and one for you.

In my spare time I built a fifteen foot half cabin cruiser. Apart from a lot of pleasure from using it I had a couple of incidents. One of which was I took a friend on a trip to the Sunshine Coast to do some outside fishing. We launched into the river where we slept on board. Early in the morning we moved to the river bar as my mate was also an experience boatee I made him captain for the day. We crossed the bar into a pretty rough sea. I suggested we turn back and try later. He replied damn it I am looking for some flat water to make a turn! About this time we had some great holidays at Noosa with great fishing. One leave we did a pacific cruise with friends and had a fantastic time.

The Governor of Queensland came to look over the base. As part of his visit the OC organized a Phantom aircraft to do a low level high speed fly pass. As the aircraft flew past the end of the hanger, where the admin. Officer's office was located, the admin officer stepped out for a look on his return there was a shard of glass from his window buried in his chair. The aircraft had touched Mach 1 and the pressure wave had shattered the window.

MELBOURNE

Now came a posting to Melbourne to RAAF Support Command so after 27 years in the field with active people and real aeroplanes I am now to be a shiny-bum and rapidly adopt a civil service attitude! What a transition. I was now a TSR2 (technical spares assessor second in command) wow! What an honour. My job was to direct a couple of officers and a staff of some forty civilian employees, RAAF and WAAF personnel and the task was to assess the spares requirement for all RAAF airframes and engines on the inventory. A good job with little experience in this area I soon found I had a group captain boss who was virtually retired and spent the best part of most days at the ST Kilda yacht club.

We were allotted a married quarter in Mount Waverley and settled into what was a suburban neighbourhood. RAAF Houses were located among civilian occupied houses. I soon joined a car club and this was something new to me. Each Friday we had the choice of going straight home or going to a nearby pub where we mixed with some civvy blokes. I was introduced around then one of them asked me if I was interested in football to which I replied yes. He asked which team I barracked for. When I said Parramatta he began to splutter as he only recognized AFL and I was talking league. We had a beer and sorted that out. Talking of AFL I had a civilian female employee who was an ardent follower of the Melbourne Swans team. Their colours were red and white. This lady had red and white symbols in her car, on her desk and on her clothing. She had a vast knowledge of the players, their families and careers and was so passionate about the team I was nervous about going to work on Mondays if the team won. She would rush into my office and almost hug me with the words WE WON and wanted to replay the game to me at which point I told her to get back to work. If they lost the same antics in reverse. I went to a number of AFL games and eventually became an ardent Hawthorn Fan. Another time a mate suggested we go to a game at the MCG. As we entered the grounds he suggested we should each buy four cans of coke, bit bewildered I agreed. We took our place to watch the game but found we needed to stand on our Coke to see all the moves. After quarter time three big blokes moved in front of us. When the game restarted my mate told the guys we had come to see the game not the backs of their necks to which one replied "Quieten down grandad you will be OK" where upon my mate pulled a Biro out of his pocket and stuck it in the bloke's neck. They moved off and let us enjoy the remainder of the game.

I had a sergeant posted in. After the preliminaries he took up his place and got to work, Next day he came in and dumped his suitcase on my office floor. When I asked him what he was about he told me he had left a sick wife in married quarters in WA and she had a month's notice to move out. As a result he had little cash for accommodation and he would be sleeping in my office if I did not find him a bed as the RAAF was contracted to feed, cloth and accommodate him when he enlisted so what was I to do about it. I sent him back to work then phoned the camp commandant for him to sort it out. Later he told me there was nothing available at any of our nearby bases. I then phoned the Principal

Air Chaplain of his faith, made myself known, explained the situation and asked him to offer the sergeant temporary accommodation. He got real uppity and told me it was not his job to go around looking for beds. I gave him a bit of a run down on his church and his sympathetic manner. The RAAF finally accommodated him and all was well.

On leave we did a lot of exploring of the state of Victoria visiting a lot of interesting places and meeting some great people. One particular trip remains in my memory and that was when we drove the length of the great ocean road. Fantastic.

On another occasion a mate and his wife suggested we join them on a trip to an isolated disused goldmining site for a few days camp over Easter. They said they would meet us there and since we would probably be the only people there so we would no trouble finding them,. On our arrival the place was packed with cars. The only camp site left was next to a stand of blackberry bushes. We made the best of it. Next day we set out to tour the nearby wine growing district. My mate suggested we buy a nine gallon keg each, however as I was expecting a posting soon I said I would settle for a few bottles. On returning home I found I had more than nine gallons! Bad luck.

AMBERLEY AGAIN

So after two years in a job that gave me little satisfaction I was posted to Amberley as OIC, maintenance No 86 Wing. Here was yet another challenge. The Australian Government had ordered 24 F111 Strike aircraft in 1963 but after much squabbling between American Airforces, plus many modifications, delivery of the aircraft to foreign powers was delayed. As a fill-in we were offered and accepted 24 F4 Phantom aircraft. Here again I found myself with the responsibility of maintaining 24 aircraft of which had little knowledge so a lot of hard work and study was required to get up to speed on type. I recall the arrival of the aircraft that had flown non-stop from America with the aid of in-flight refuelling. The press was all over this particular pilot the moment he stepped out of the aircraft with questions about trip. One question was "what was the worst aspect of the flight?" he replied I have a numb bum.

We had a great team of blokes in the squadron and as a result of their loyalty and hard work we were able to maintain a serviceability rate of 83%. A problem that arose with our training flights was practice bombing. The ranges previously used now had residential housing encroaching on them and residents were complaining about the noise factor. The alternative was an annual camp to Darwin for a few weeks to do practice bombing offshore. On the subject of training the OC received a letter from a farmer in the Dalby district to the effect: I don't mind paying taxes for these young blokes to joy around the sky but when they fly through the gum trees and scare my stallions to panic and jump the barbed wire fence and I finish up with a mob of geldings well enough is enough.

I organized a flight in a Phantom and we flew to Evans Head gunnery range where we made six passes at ground targets using live ammunition then pulling out of the dives at 6G (six times the force of gravity). After the gunnery I asked the pilot to climb to about forty thousand feet and fly through the sound barrier. This he did and asked what else I wanted to do. I suggested we go to mach 2. He said it would take awhile to get there so we quit and returned to base. I was pleased that I had travelled at about seven hundred miles an hour.

I had driven with my trailer from Victoria and had to go through the tiresome business of registering it in Queensland. This meant it had to be weighed and measured in about three directions. About time I bought four blocks of land at Corindi Beach for \$300 per block.

Life in general was pleasant with plenty of social activities. One in particular was when the mess members organized RAAF Edinburgh to buy a keg of red wine from a local winery and ship it to Amberley on the C130 Hercules courier run. On arrival it was put in the simulator room where the temperature was held at 72 degrees. While it was cooling the duty squadron would design and print the labels, new corks were purchased, a corking press (locally made) set up all in the mess barbecue area and on a selected Sunday the officers and their partners would gather for the bottling ceremony. The committee would

bottle the wine and then the wives would stick the labels on, then a sell off between drinks, followed by a delicious barbie. An event enjoyed by all.

With another couple we enjoyed a Pacific Island cruise on an Italian ship. Great service, terrific food and a really good time. We were lunching in a cafe in Villa Villa where the menu was in French. Across the aisle from us were a couple of beautiful French girls. Jack being the great prince charming moved in with a request could you please help me with the menu? To which one replied “turn it over where it is in English!”. The perfect squash.

During this time I was studying externally for a diploma of horticulture which I successfully completed.

COFFS HARBOUR

After a warm farewell from the RAAF we retired to Coffs harbour to take the position of manager of the RAAF Recreation units. This was a three story building comprising eleven units and situated one block from the sea front. It was the re-entry to civil life with intriguing tradesmen who were unbelievably casual, also a number were below standard in practicing their trade. I joined Legacy, golf and the ex-services clubs.

Like a lot of service departments the control of the units was complex. It started with an executive in Canberra, a working committee in Penrith and an on-site manager. Time-to-time an inspection party would visit. I recall one visit I had a prior call from Penrith by a female officer that a visit was due and what accommodation was available. I explained what was available and said it would be necessary for she and the male Group Captain to share a double she was horrified. As I owed her one I told her to calm down you can only expect to become pregnant or be promoted, visit cancelled! Another aspect was Victoria did not have poker machines so they were a novelty to Victorian visitors as the units were adjacent to a bowling club. I arranged that all my guests should be honorary guests. I was amused at times when a guest would exclaim we won a jackpot. I would ask what did it cost you the reply only twenty cents. They did not count the money they had lost previously.

I scouted around to find activities and visits for them. One of the more popular ones was an outside fishing trip. After a few outings as their guide I became his boatie. On days off I enjoyed many trips with him operating the boat, instructing clients the correct methods of rigging their lines, fixing bait and generally helping them to catch fish and enjoy their day. Also he had the contract to service the light house keepers on Solitary Island. This proved interesting and at times exciting, especially in rough seas as there was no wharf and all the goods had to be lifted off the deck by a crane about fifteen feet above sea level.

Another surprise we had was concerning our cleaning lady. She worked each Saturday from 8am to noon. Suddenly her male friend began calling for her to leave anytime from 11am onwards. I had to let him know the score. Some days later I met him up the street and after saying good-day he said you and your misses better come to the wedding. I accepted then asked the time and place. 12 noon at the aero club. OK. My wife, used to the formality of service life, bought a new frock and a gift. On the day we turned up in our finery only to find the dress was informal. As I parked the car the bride and groom parked beside me I congratulated them on their marriage to which the groom replied we are not married yet. We gathered in the club where he announced there is beer in the tub and wine on the table, help yourselves there, beer is \$2 and the wine is \$1. We were the only people with a gift, all others had brought a plate, so taking the gift to the car and removing tie, coat, hat and gloves, we returned to the club and joined the fun. Soon after the bloke announced “come into the ops room for the wedding ceremony” after which there will be a barbie. So for another side of civvie life.

After a couple of years on the job we had a holiday in NZ. An ex airforce mate and his wife joined us there touring in a hired car. We took in a number of attractions including an agrodome, the cave of fireflies and many others. A great holiday.

CORINDI BEACH

After seven years in the job it was time to move on. I built a house at Corindi Beach where I established a commercial vegetable garden. Soon after settling in the local councillor became ill and resigned from council. The local people asked me to stand for election. I was reluctant as I had other pursuits I wished to follow. I eventually agreed to represent them and so joined the Ulmarra shire council. We were responsible for a large area but with a small population. The area was divided into ridings, my area of responsibility was "C" riding. We held a full day meeting once a month and sub-committee meetings as required throughout the month. After a couple of months I got up to speed with the conduct and business procedures of the council. I was intrigued with the spread of vested interests and nepotism that was being practiced among councillors and staff.

I was appointed as a delegate to the area bush fire committee and also the area library committee. I found the work interesting and very time consuming. I set two goals, one was to put in place a reticulated water system for the Corindi Beach area and to have its main street curbed, guttered and sealed, both of which I achieved during my term in office.

A couple of funnies as related by an old timer. Council received a request from the local hall committee to provide a candelabra for the foyer of their new hall. After much discussion with one dissenter the president finally asked him why are you against it. He replied who is going to play it and what will he charge? Another - an outlying hamlet put in a request for reticulated water and an electricity connection. After considering the specifications and the costing figures they were in two minds as to whether they could afford to do both. After a few suggestions were offered, one old fellow suggested instead of two separate pipelines why not run the electric cable through the water pipes! Yet another, the members were discussing a request for the provision of a urinal at a sports ground. At last one bloke said he would agree providing we built an arsenal at the same time to save future costs. Yes it was a real rural council.

At this time I was looking for a part time occupation. I looked at the proposition of opening a bottle shop but a nearby publican beat me on that one. Then I decided to grow vegetables commercially. I prepared the land, had a bore put down and installed an irrigation system. I soon had it well started when I saw an advert - fowl manure for sale. I phoned the company and asked if I could have two cubic metres only to be told the minimum sale is a truck load. OK. I spread a large area of plastic sheeting ready for the delivery, imagine my consternation when the truck arrived with a five cubic metre load. Well I had to take it but then there was a frantic effort to dig in as much as possible and cover the rest before the neighbours complained about the stink. The undertaking was successful and the sales satisfactory.

While we were living at Corindi my wife, elder daughter and grand-daughter had a trip to Britain. Soon after their return our daughter died.

We managed a few trips about this time. One in particular was to Adelaide via the great coast road then a tour of the local area – the Barossa valley etc.

My GP sent me to a Sydney specialist who diagnosed Paget's disease in my left elbow and advised treatment. I requested him to give me a full medical check as a result he found I was suffering an aneurysm of the aorta and this required immediate surgery. The operation was successful with a lengthy recovery period.

My wife accepted the presidency of the Coffs harbour Eisteddfod society, a job she enjoyed for some three years. She was also a Cub leader so between us we were kept fairly busy with a number of trips to Sydney and Canberra to visit our daughter and their families.

In 1989 my wife had a black-out and fell down a flight of stairs and suffered a serious spinal injury requiring immediate hospitalization. After several weeks in a Sydney hospital she was transferred to the Coffs harbour hospital, then later to the Legacy nursing facility where she died in the following year.

FINAL YEARS

After a sad period of trying to readjust I decided to do a world tour and make a new start. I flew out of Sydney to Hawaii and Vancouver. In London I booked in to Trafalgar Tours for a tour of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I reported to the depot at the appointed time, booked in and was later directed to a coach after a short time of travel. The tour director handed each passenger a map of Europe. I thought this rather strange as I was booked to Scotland. Then he went on to converting our money to Belgian francs. I asked why Belgian money was used in Scotland as my ticket gave Edinburgh as my destination? He yelled at the driver to return to the depot where it was all sorted out and I was put on the coach to Scotland. While there I did an escorted tour of the Queen's summer palace. The guide stopped to explain an exquisite tapestry depicting the Queen in her full regalia and wearing a particular decoration, the same as Prime Minister Menzies had been invested with. The guide said you may notice Her Majesty is wearing this honour, one of your Prime ministers has a similar Honour can anyone tell me who that is to which a teenage boy piped up “Yeh Bob awke” ocars abroad!

After many weeks of wonderful experiences it was time to return home. Soon after I settled in with friends and quickly became involved with Legacy, golf and fishing etc. Audrey and I began having outings and these soon developed into a deep friendship. I was asked to join a Catalina reunion safari –Brisbane-Darwin-Broome-Kunnanurra-Perth-Albany-Perth-home. As Audrey had no experience of the back country this tour was an eye-opener and we had a pleasant time. A number of other trips we did over the next few years included Singapore, Tasmania and Lord Howe Island-Norfolk Island.

About this time we decided to marry which we did in a ceremony at Annanuka resort followed by a short honeymoon. So we began a very happy and exhilarating period for us. We bought a week-ender house in North Beach and spent many enjoyable week-ends, making the house our home and exploring the area with fishing, boating and swimming taking up the slack.

Audrey was in business and a conference was organized to be held in Boston. We decided to participate so we flew out of Sydney to LA and Boston. We booked into the Ritz Carlton and between sessions we were able to sightsee and visit several eating houses including Union House - a celebrated seafood servery- a bit disappointing after Aussie sea food. A visit to the witches of Salem display was interesting as were many other places and things.

A weeks stay and then to Rhode Island, New York for a few days where we attended another session of lectures, one of which was a breakfast talk in the roof restaurant of the World Trade building (later destroyed by terrorists flying an aircraft into it) .

After a couple of days of sightseeing we flew to Hawaii for ten days of rest and pleasure. A most enjoyable time was spent swimming, eating, walking and touring the island.

TIME TO RETURN TO THE REAL WORLD. On the flight home Audrey felt a bit off. Soon after returning to work she collapsed, was taken to hospital where she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Some radio therapy put her into remission.

We made the best of the situation by spending a lot time with friends dining and travelling. We had a trip to Winton (QLD), another to Canberra for an RAAF Beaufort Squadron reunion, then onto the coast to visit friends. Then back to RPA Hospital for an interview with a cancer specialist, then home. Audrey's health was stabilized for the present.

Audrey had not previously cruised so we decided to cruise around the north island of NZ. We flew to Auckland, boarded an Orient line ship and sailed down the west coast of the south island, sailing by night and usually doing a land tour by day. This was magical. We cruised Milford Sound thence up the east coast calling into many ports. Arriving in Auckland we hired a car and did a leisurely tour of the North Island, spending a few days in Russel from where we sailed the Bay of Islands and learned a lot of Maori history.

Audrey's health deteriorated to the extent that we could no longer tolerate the situation in our two storey house. We moved into a unit in a retirement village. Audrey was now in and out of hospital on regular intervals. A few weeks later Audrey passed away. I was heart broken, a beautiful lady - a great wife - and a wonderful friend snatched away.

Now eight years later my darling is sorely missed but is ever in my thoughts.

Audrey's daughter, Liz, and family were most supportive. Eventually I got back meeting up with old friends and enjoying a game of golf and some fishing. Later I joined an ex-airforce mate for a tour of Alaska. We had a wonderful time. Returning home I got into a routine of golfing, socializing and housekeeping.

Sometime later I was invited to a wedding in London. I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion.

My grand-daughter Sarah married John in Noosa and some eighteen months later produced a beaut boy by the name of Charlie. They have visited me, a loving happy family.

Jack Vercoe
AUG 09