SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

To Fly or Not to Fly

by Peter Taylor- Mirage Sumpy, 3SQN, 481 Maintenance SQN, 77SQN and ARDU

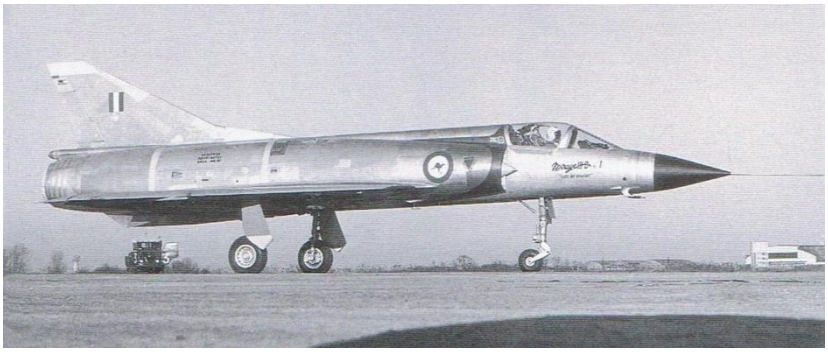
I never wanted to be a pilot, I just wanted to get my hands on these magnificent aircraft and help keep them flying. Having completed 2 1/2 years at RSTT Wagga as an apprentice engine fitter and having seen all those aircraft as training aids; Neptune, Vampire, Winjeel (had my very first flight off the ground in one during 1965 – it was interesting), Sikorsky and many others, the idea of being posted to 3 SQN at Williamtown and getting my hands on the new front line fighter, the Mirage, was as exciting as it could get.

I was posted into 3SQN in July 1967, however a familiarisation course and Atar engine course at 481 (M) SQN were prerequisites to actually being in the squadron. I was on the 3SQN roll before they had any aircraft and when A3-52 turned up on 27 July, I just had to go and have a look. Thinking at the time it was on loan from 2OCU, it was many years (like, only 55) later, while compiling the Mirage Compendium, that I found out it was direct from Avalon as a brand new bird. The first people I met were two FSGTs, a 'Framie' and a 'Sumpy'. Little did I know then, that one of these men would be my mentor over the next 12 years and for whom I had, like many others, great respect. 'Darky' Clark was a one off in my 20 years (nine on Mirages); I had known others, but he was the stand out.

Interestingly, the other was Homer Parker, who I never saw again after I left the SQN in Feb 68 (downgraded medically due to an eye condition – not fit to go to Malaysia), yet many years later (this time only 33 years) I was a Legatee with Perth legacy and an attendant Legatee to the Northern District (widows) Laurel Club. The President was Helen Parker and when she gave a talk about her life with husband Homer in the RAAF, the penny dropped.

So, 3SQN went to Butterworth in 1969 and I was in 481 (M) SQN Engine Repair Section (ERS) learning all about the Atar engine; doing P servicings, which included removing the top half of the compressor and doing blade creep checks, removing the turbine assembly, blending out small damage nicks to the intake section and compressor blades. For a kid from the bush who had a good mechanical knowledge but only ever worked on his beloved 1925 ute'd Chevrolet, this work was mind blowing. I found it hard to realise that this multi-million dollar aircraft and its engine were entrusted to my care…under supervision of course.

from this…



...to this!

Although I never got to be the operator in the engine run up cell, I spent a good deal of time around the engine. Setting it up with its multitude of test pipes and lines and making adjustments as called out by the operator. But the big thing was the POWER at full afterburner. The sound, the vibration, the physical site of this thing straining against its tie down points was mesmerising. However, even better was yet to come.

Jumping ahead a bit, I was finally posted back to 3SQN in November 1970 and in September 1972 I had a back seat ride in A3-107 with pilot Nick Ford. That feeling of power was again evident during the take-off. Woo-hoo I thought, this is great, but wait, even better was to come; in the air that is! We climbed to 22000ft and did a slight dive to the south of Song Song Island and reached 1.2M. As Nick had told me, just watch the blip on the altimeter and we are supersonic; big deal I thought, no sensation and quite disappointing. At the bottom of the dive, we levelled out behind Penang Island and I was told we were doing a slam acceleration from 300kts to 600kts and it should take slightly less than 30 seconds. Well, talk about a number 12 boot in the middle of your back trying to go through you, that was my most memorable feeling of power (in the air that is). The rest of flight was enjoyable and I thank Nick to this day for ride. Did I now want to be a pilot? No, I had something better.

Jumping back to Willytown in 1969, I was still in ERS and was then posted to 77SQN, once again before they had any aircraft, this time located in the recently vacated 3SQN hanger over the road from ERS. I was one of the first sumpies posted in, along with FSGT Nugget Murphy and my old mate Dennis Archibald (appy intake after me) and one or two others whose names escape me. We were unpacking test equipment and small GSE and the like from a multitude of wooden crates; there were troops from all trades in there. One day a bloke brought in a small black and white TV; when it was turned on, we watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon. That was 29 July 1969, a very memorable day.

We eventually moved up to the top most hangar, over the parking area to 2OCU and eventually after an engine change, I got to go to the runup revetment for a full ground run. If I thought the engine run up was great, THIS was even better!! To see the aircraft rolled onto large steel chocks that were located in inground railing and a nose wheel cradle fitted, was building up the excitement. Then, when the Sumpy (I think it was CPL Paul Findlay) started the engine, the aircraft nose dipped a little and the main wheel moved up a bit harder against the chocks. What I was not expecting was how much the nose wheel dipped and how high the main wheels rode up the chocks when full dry was selected. WOW! Then he lit the burner!! Holy Dooley, the roar was deafening, the nose cradle was as flat as it could go and the main wheels seemed to be half way up the chocks. Fuel leaks complete and now full burner for what seemed like ages. Now the main wheels looked like they wanted to climb over the top of the chocks, the aircraft was straining at every point to be set free. NOW I wanted to be in that cockpit.

Lots of practice in the hangar going through the start procedures and then a dry vent in the hangar to keep the fuel system fully charged as it was a sensitive main control unit that relied on fuel for lubrication. Engines that had been idle for about 11 days from memory, required a vent. This was starting to get exciting. This kid from the bush was now going to be in charge of this beast.

When I produced the two books; *Introducing the French lady – A Compendium of RAAF Mirages*, followed by the *RAAF Mirage Family* between 2022 and 2024, I had the opportunity to sit down with quite a number of old knucks (pilots) and asked them to tell me what was the one thing about the Mirage that was memorable to them. I received many responses, in the main being their first journey to Mach 2, gunnery and bombing, tight formation flying and all that, but a common comment was that she was a bitch or a sweetheart. Most told me each aircraft had its own personality and they all had their favourite. She was a constant hands-on aircraft to fly and when the Hornet came into service, those who flew them said it was like a comfy armchair ride but they still loved their time on the Mirage. I've not had one comment saying they didn't like their time on the French delta wing.

So, I said, let me tell you my favourite experience on the Mirage. Particularly as the instructing back seater when a new troop is about to do his first complete installed engine run. The aircraft is chocked as mentioned earlier. The troop has his ground run sheet on his lap and I say let's go. It's a good start, the blokes outside are doing their leak checks and give the thumbs up and I now say go to max dry. Sitting in the cockpit is a far greater feeling of power than standing on the outside watching. The noise, the slight nose down attitude, this feeling of something behind you trying to get you to move out of its way and when we get the thumbs up for leak checks, then I say, 'lift the handle'.

I can't repeat the expletives from the front seat that I have heard many times as the nose dips violently, the rear feels like it is going rise over you and the deafening roar is remarkable. This is no number 12 boot, this is Mack truck pushing you from behind. Now go to full burner for 30 seconds, there is no further dipping of the nose wheel, it's as flat as the cradle will allow, however the rear feels like it still wants to climb over you. Count the gallons off on the debit meter, should be around 27/28 depending on how well you catch the whirring numbers. Reduce to mini-AB and then back to Max Dry while the sumpies on the wing do their T4 (JPT) checks and then you go back and forth checking all the parameters with any adjustments required. At the completion of the run reduce to 6000N (RPM) for a minute or so to let the T4 stabilise, return to idle and shut down.

How I wish I'd had a camera as we climbed out of the aircraft and I saw the biggest smiles I have ever seen from these troops after their first engine run; utterly amazing and memorable. I could do this every day of the week!

Ground engine run; obviously Butterworth noting the 'tropical' uniform.

One pilot said to me after my explanation; 'That'd be bloody right Pete, we're up there working our arses off and you're down here having fun!'

YEP!!! Now you may understand why I never wanted to fly.

My apologies to fellow sumpies if I got anything wrong. It's been a while!!

C-130E Navigation Systems Over the Years

From Phil Creagh

I wanted to write a few articles about my experiences at 37SQN, to capture some of the historical context about my time there and mix in some technical tidbits; a few things that worked out well and some others that might bring back memories. This first article will concentrate on the early days of the C-130E, and its navigation suite.

When the twelve C-130E aircraft were delivered to the RAAF in 1966/67, they were fitted with navigation systems that were typical for transport aircraft of that era: doppler navigation radar that fed a mechanical 'distance to go' computer, a LORAN (long-range navigation) system, a radio altimeter and a periscopic sextant, as well as the E-4 autopilot (reportedly from the WW2 B-29 bomber). Not fancy, but with a suitably trained navigator, you could travel the world.

LORAN equipment

I've never had anyone adequately explain the navigational function of the radio altimeter that was at the navigator's station in the C-130E, and was still operable in 1995 when I left 37SQN. The Loran navigation system receiver originally fitted was a large unit on the right of the navigator's station (under the upper bunk) for 'long-range navigation'. In the 60s and 70s, Loran was considered a fairly good navigation tool but it only ever offered patchwork global coverage and required specialised charts to plot the fixes. That Loran system (since relabelled as Loran-A) was developed by the US during WW2 with 'chains' of HF transmitters grouped in particular regions of the world. It only provided coverage in the vicinity of the chains of stations, where they provided fixing accuracy of two miles by day, but less accurate fixes at greater ranges by night. Most of the Loran ground stations were in the northern hemisphere so for 37SQN, the most common usage of Loran was on trans-Pacific flights north of the equator. At best, it could provide a position line that added to other lines to form a fix, proving only marginally useful. In about the late 70s the Loran receivers in the C-130E were apparently disabled but left in place; being removed some time later.

The US-operated Loran stations were gradually decommissioned between 1977 and 1984 and most other nations that operated their own stations followed suit. From 1977 onwards the US began transitioning to the Omega navigation network, as it offered truly global fixing with less operating limitations. I gather that in the early 80s the RAAF decided to install an Omega receiver in the C-130E. The Norton Omega receiver had a stated accuracy of two miles by day and four miles by night and it should have had global coverage. In 1986, the software in the receivers did not recognise the Australian Omega station in Woodside, Victoria that had been transmitting since 1982. Without that station, the receivers were less accurate and every time we landed in Canberra, the Omega's display would freeze with weird hieroglyphics on it. Once turned off in Canberra, it would restart normally and operate without further problems. Belatedly, in 1987/88 all the Omega receivers in our aircraft were modified to recognize the Australian Omega station, so suddenly they were much better. The Omega receivers were still

fitted to the C-130E in 1995 when I left 37SQN. All eight Omega transmitting stations around the globe were permanently shut down in 1997, as by then, GPS had become the new global navigation standard.

Doppler navigation radars usually had a radar head that was turned by a motor to align with the aircraft's track over the ground, as the system was deducing the drift angle of the aircraft. When that drift angle was applied to the aircraft heading, it could calculate the ground track of the aircraft. The doppler radar could also determine the aircraft's groundspeed from the doppler shift in the radar's returns, hence the name. The C-130E's doppler radar read-out was at the navigator's station, and when the system was operating correctly, the pointer motored over a range of two or three degrees as it was continually slewing the radar head to calculate the drift of the aircraft. The groundspeed would also be constantly going up and down a few knots. For both the drift and the groundspeed, the navigator had to observe them for a few seconds in order to average the readings.

The mechanical 'distance to go' computer had two 'legs' (akin to two waypoints) and required the navigator to input the desired track and the distance of the upcoming flight leg. When passing a waypoint, the system would automatically toggle to the other leg and begin counting down the new distance to go. Also, the computer calculated the across track error of the aircraft. The 'distance to go computer' errors were approximately 2% of distance flown, which may have been adequate in the 60s but by the 80s was decidedly sub-par. The aircraft's old autopilot was capable of coupling to the mechanical distance to go computer, but it had a nasty habit of constantly weaving along the track which could induce a good case of airsickness. Instead, the pilots coupled the autopilot to the desired compass heading calculated by the navigator.

By far the worst shortcoming of the C-130E's doppler navigation radar was that when flying over tropical waters at normal cruising altitudes, the doppler beams would 'skate' across the water's smooth surface as there were insufficient return signals for the radar to operate. It would spend hours searching for a lock-on or the navigator would switch it off in disgust. As most of 37SQN's international flights involved flying over tropical waters, the doppler would be next to useless for major sections of international flights. Usually, the navigator had to revert to manual airplot navigation techniques that were from the 1930s, plotting the aircraft's heading and distance flown every 20 – 30 minutes and then fixing the aircraft's position either by ground navigation aids or by sightings of the sun/moon/stars using the sextant to calculate the wind vector.

The longest flight I had on a C-130E was from Honiara, Solomon Islands to Hickam AFB, Hawaii on 24 Feb 88. It was 11 hours and I think we started with 60,000 lbs of fuel and very little payload. While the other crew members were augmented on such a long flight, the B Flight brain's trust decided not to put a second navigator on the flight! As the doppler was out to lunch from about top of climb until just before descent, manual air plot was the name of the game for the better part of 10 hours with a sun shot every 30 minutes. Needless to say, I was slightly tired by the end of the flight. When we had the chance to chat to USAF Herc crews in the 80s, they usually asked us what navigation systems were onboard the RAAF C-130Es. They couldn't believe that we had no INS and were using the 'sun-gun' and manual air plot to traverse the Pacific Ocean.

The next article will be about a training flight at the end of 1986 that showed the status of the navigation system in the C-130E at that point, before a series of major changes happened.
If you have any comments, corrections or feedback, I would be happy to receive them via the editor or via my email: pncreagh@gmail.com.

Old-School Blues

From Phil Creagh

In the last article, I described the state of the navigation suite of the C-130E in 1986 when I arrived at 37SQN. This article is about one interesting flight that occurred that year.

In late 1986 I was told that the squadron would put on a Navigation Trainer flight on 8 – 12 Dec and that FLTLT Andrew (Weekesy) Weekes and I would be the navigators on it. While I had never heard of the squadron putting on a training flight for navigators before or since, and although unsure why Weekesy and I were chosen, I decided to put my mind to what we could do on the flight to: a. make it memorable, b. learn new skills, and c. confuse the heck out of the pilots. The captain for the flight was FLTLT 'Volleyball' Vollebreght, and the copilot was FLGOFF Steve (Ackers) Ackerman.

Until the 70s, navigators would graduate from the 'Basic Navigator's Course' at the School of Air Navigation and be posted to a squadron, then 18 months later they would return to East Sale for the 'Advanced Navigator's Course'. The syllabus for that course included old-school navigation techniques such as grid navigation and the like. Weekesy and I decided to use some of those navigation techniques and for the duration of the NAVEX, the flux valves (the things that slave the compasses to magnetic headings) would be off and the compasses would be in either true headings or grid headings.

We also decided to split the workload so that one of us would be the main navigator on a flight and the other would be using the sextant for sun, moon or star shots. Sometimes, we'd swap at half-time. We had the 'distance to go' computer, so that would also be in true or grid but overwater, the doppler navigation radar might or might not be operating, so there might be occasions when we would be doing manual air plots.

The flight took off from Richmond for Darwin - an easy first leg with the compasses in true, and the sun shots and ground-based navaids for navigation. We also took sightings of the sun for the compass heading checks. I was the main navigator on this first leg, and I was relieved to find that the biases in the two compass systems were well within their gyro limits of two degrees per hour, so we were able to compensate for those errors so they didn't drift far off the correct true headings. We found Darwin exactly where we all expected it to be.

The next day, we took off from Darwin, heading for Cocos Islands with Weekesy in the seat and myself wielding the sextant. Again, we were in true, but this time it was more fun with less ground-based navaids and more sun/moon shots, with the navigation using Most Probable Positions when there was insufficient fixing information. Ah more fun for the navigators, which was in keeping with the idea of each flight becoming progressively more difficult. Weekesy continued to refine our knowledge of the biases in the compass systems which would become important for the upcoming flights.

Before we left Richmond, we had arranged through the Meteorology Office at Richmond for 'd' values for both Cocos and Pearce to be sent to us at Cocos Islands on the morning of 10 Dec, so we could use that for pressure pattern flying. Back in the 50s, when turboprop airliners were plying the routes between the US and Europe, pressure pattern flying became fashionable as it saved a few minutes when there were crosswinds and tailwinds. In short, the clever little formula using the 'd' values at the departure and arrival airfields allowed navigators to calculate a single heading to be flown for the whole flight. While the aircraft would get blown off track initially, it would eventually get blown to the destination so the aircraft would be using the winds rather than fighting them. For the flight from Cocos Island to Pearce, we started with the heading to the right of the direct route and for a while the light crosswind from the left blew us further right of track. However, as the flight continued south, we started picking up the westerly winds from the right and that blew us left toward Pearce.

We made this sector more difficult for ourselves by having the compasses in grid rather than in true. As the name suggests, grid navigation can be explained as having a flat, rectangular grid placed on the earth. As folks north of the equator conceived many of the compass ideas many years ago for polar flights between the US and Europe, they made it easy for themselves. Classic grids involved the grid 'touching' the globe at particular latitudes on the prime meridian (the meridian that runs through Greenwich in the UK which is 0 degrees East or West), so grid flying for the folks in the UK is very simple. For them, there is hardly any difference between true north and grid north. In Australia however, when the grid pattern is folded almost half the way around the globe to Australia, grid north is approximately 120 degrees different to true north. Some navigation charts have a grid printed on them but for our flights, we used virtual grids. We calculated what the difference between grid and true north was at each location, so we didn't need the grid printed on the chart. It was a way to make it a bit harder for us, but it also helped us learn more about the nuances of grid navigation so these techniques could be used on any chart.

For this flight, I started as the main navigator with Weekesy on the sextant, and we swapped jobs mid-flight. By the end of the flight, we had mastered keeping the compass gyros accurately aligned with the theoretical grid north. We typically fixed the aircraft position every hour and checked the compasses on the half-hours. The pressure pattern technique worked well and we found Pearce, even if the pilots were somewhat confused by flying approximately 270 degrees from Cocos Island and arriving in Pearce. Of course, we were kind to the pilots and turned the compasses back to magnetic as we arrived in the Pearce area so they could do a normal approach.

The last sector from Pearce to Richmond was to be the coup de grâce: we wanted to do night astro navigation so we decided to take off at about 8pm so that the stars would be out when we got into the cruise, but if we flew directly to Richmond we would have arrived before 7am when the airfield opened. Instead, we flew a big dogleg:

Pearce – Tennant Creek – Richmond. To make it a bit harder, we decided to do grid again and rotate the grid from its usual orientation so that the track from Pearce to Tennant Creek would be grid north. Simple enough, but once we did the big turn at Tennant Creek to fly to Richmond, we would change the orientation so that the new track would also be grid north. On top of those concepts, we decided that whenever we gave the pilots a heading to fly to stay on track, the heading would be grid north. We had to keep a running tally of the offset that we were using as it was frequently changing.

So, off we went with Weekesy in the seat and myself keeping busy on the sextant. After we cleared the Perth airspace, the compasses were set to grid north and off we went through the night sky. When we approached Tennant Creek, we received the VOR and the pilots dialled in the course to the navaid, but the problem is that the needle was pointing nowhere near the nose of the aircraft. Even so, the cross-track deviation showed that we were on track but it was hard for them to conceive how we weren't deviating off track as our heading was almost perpendicular to the VOR radial. I jumped into the seat just before we arrived overhead the VOR and I spun the compasses to the new heading so that grid north would take us directly to Richmond.

All went well, and we had great practice doing night astro, the theoretical grid work all panned out (and thoroughly confused the pilots) and we did have some memorable flights. The one unexpected thing I learned was that at that time of year, the track from Tennant Creek to Richmond is fairly closely aligned with the direction to the sun as it rose. Our bleary eyes were burning from the big ball of fire on the horizon at about 6am. I took refuge behind the curtain at the navigator's station but the pilots, even with their cool sunnies were really hurting. Shortly after sunrise, I took pity on the pilots and turned the compasses back to magnetic for the arrival into Richmond.

The best recap of this flight sector was given a couple of days later by the copilot, 'Ackers'. With his typical dry sense of humour, he related to those in the Nav Planning Room that we took off from Pearce, headed due north to Tennant Creek where we turned right 90 degrees so we were heading due north…and ended up in Richmond. Mission accomplished – confusion reigned supreme.

If you have any comments, corrections or feedback, I would be happy to receive them via the editor or via my email: pncreagh@gmail.com.

The Ultimate Airman
Dr Ron Houghton DFC, FRAeS, HFRIN, Legion de Honneur

From Robert Creelman

Ronald Charles Creffield Houghton was born in Sydney in 1924. He had a dull office job as a junior clerk when the Battle of Britain began in earnest in 1940. Ron wanted to fly Spitfires but he was not old enough. Nor did he know how to fly for that matter, but he was not deterred. Ron enlisted in 1942. He made the initial cut for RAAF pilot training. He did his elementary flying in Tiger Moths followed by his service flying training in a Wirraway. Ron was then sent to the UK for his advanced flying training, following which he was streamed for bombers not fighters. Ron was required to take the air war to the heart of the Third Reich. He flew the Handley Page Halifax III in Bomber Command. Ron had survived 30 operations in Bomber Command by early 1945. He was taken off ops and could have been re-trained as a heavy bomber conversion instructor. However, he transferred to Fighter Command to fly Spitfires and Hurricanes. His DFC was gazetted in 1945 for his 'skill and fortitude in operations against the enemy'. By the end of the European war, Ron was a liaison officer in General Eisenhower's Ops Centre at RN Portsmouth, for he had a unique perspective on both fighter and bomber ops. Following his discharge at the end of 1945, Ron served in the RAAF Reserve. He then worked for Qantas where he worked his way up to executive level. After QANTAS, Ron worked for several Asian airlines before retreating

to academia. Ron then studied for and completed his PhD in aeronautical engineering at Sydney University. He then served as President of the Bomber Command Association of Australia.
Dr Ron Houghton DFC passed away in 2024 at the age of 99 years, a few weeks before what would have been his centennial birthday.

Lest We Forget.

Biography contributed by Maurice Kissane

There have been numerous tributes to Ron after his death in April 2024. At the time of his death, he was President of the Bomber Command Association in Australia, a position he held for decades. Such was the esteem in which he was held, RAAF Richmond sent a detachment to be pallbearers at his funeral. The funeral was also attended by the Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Stephen Chappell, DSC, CSC, OAM and Air Chief Marshal (Ret'd) Sir Angus Houston, Patron of the Bomber Command Association in Australia.


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL AWM2017.520.1.2547

Ron wrote the forward to my book *Severed Wings* published 2015. We became good friends, and he had many stories to share from his flying years. His logbook lists 44 different aircraft types he had flown, both civilian and military. An overview of his history was related in the tributes and eulogies at the time of the funeral. I want to share two stories he shared with me, each best classified under the heading of near misses.

The first occurred in 1944 when Ron was in a Halifax Squadron. Returning one morning after an operation deep into Germany, Ron and his crew slotted into the circuit awaiting clearance to land. Fuel was low and everyone was anxious to be on the ground – one more operation completed for the 30 required for a 'tour'. Ron finally was instructed to land and began final approach. Without any warning another Halifax barrelled in front and displaced Ron. Various expletives were exchanged, but Ron chose to return to the circuit; he thought that perhaps the interloper might have wounded on board, or perhaps mechanical problems. Ron watched the Halifax on final approach, and a few minutes before it touched down, a stream of tracer emerged from the darkness behind the Halifax. The cannon shells struck the now committed Halifax, and one engine began to burn. Slowly the crippled bomber began to roll and burst into flames as it struck the ground.

A dark shape passed over the brightly burning aircraft; an intruder had struck. Immediately landing lights were extinguished and the bombers were instructed to land at alternate airfields; a scary prospect when fuel is low. It was the practice of the Luftwaffe to position their long-range fighters into the returning bomber streams, striking when the bombers were vulnerable – final approach when flaps are down, the pilot concentrating on touchdown - an ideal time to attack. Ron thought about this incident many times; he could have been the victim - the interloping Halifax had saved him.

Ron completed his 30 operations and was offered the choice of a desk job, or to begin another tour: another 30 operations. Many did another tour because they wanted to continue flying. For Ron there was an alternative. He had heard of a posting to Fighter Command where he would fly Spitfires to teach Bomber Command crews tactics to avoid being shot down by German fighters. He took the posting and flew Spitfires, thus becoming a rarity; someone who served in both

Bomber Command and Fighter Command. This posting involved hours of intercepting Halifaxes and Lancasters, and instructing the pilots how to survive. He commented that he understood then why so many of the inexperienced crews were perishing over Germany; they urgently needed this type of training. Ron loved the Spitfire; it was his favourite aircraft of the 44 he flew. He later intimated to me that his favourite civilian aircraft was the Boeing 747: I think he was conflicted about what was number one of the 44.

Ron left the RAAF to fly for decades with Qantas. He began with the flying boats, moving onto the array of piston airliners then flown by Qantas. The list of aircraft types grew; DC-3s, DC-4s, the legendary Constellation and the Super Constellation. He then participated in the transition to jet aircraft, culminating with the 747. Qantas had a mandatory retirement age, so Ron had to leave Qantas, but his flying days were not over.

He flew cargo and passenger planes for some of the Asian airlines and was an examiner for their air crews. He tells of these airlines flying excessively overloaded freighters; a task he refused. There are good reasons for the weight limits as well as the weight distributions – either could be fatal. I lost a friend flying a Beech Baron out of Goroka in PNG that was incorrectly loaded. The rear cargo hatch was overloaded, and the forward hatch underloaded. The nose pitched upwards on rotation and the aircraft stalled.

Now to the second near miss. One dark and stormy night (good start to a horror story), Ron was examining a crew member for promotion to first officer. The 747 approached the airport with insufficient flaps at a speed that would be difficult to manage on touchdown. Ron intervened and insisted on aborting the landing and go around. After a now successful landing, Ron questioned the First Officer and was told he had had only three months experience on the 747, insufficient hours to be in command. Again, Ron was the teacher – the Asian airlines are now very professional, and Ron played a part in their development.

Ron at the controls of a T28 Trojan taken about 10 years ago - another addition to the aircraft types he flew.

The many years of commercial flying in jets gave Ron a special skill; whenever a commercial jet passed low overhead, either on take-off or landing, Ron could tell you which company the aircraft belonged to even though he was inside and couldn't see the aircraft. This was based on the engine settings, different for each company; the individual company training programs ensured the flight crews were 'branded'. Ron was familiar with them all – family and friends tested him many times by running outside to check. His score was 100%.

One very curious event in the early days at Qantas was the appearance of very experienced pilot claiming to be Dutch. Although he was a very competent person, Ron had a curiosity as to his background. The man was reluctant to chat about his past, but finally Ron worked on him and the truth emerged. He was German, and had flown the Messerschmitt Me 262, the first jet fighter, as well as the Messerschmitt Me163, the first and only rocket powered fighter ever built. No wonder he was so competent. Ron had a shared past with the German pilot – old enemies make good friends.

Not so Top Secret

From Lorraine Folkes

Back in the 60s I worked at 2SD in a room where the files were held in metal boxes on long tables. The sergeant in charge was a lady and a bit of a character, even though she didn't put up with any nonsense. There was a very British flying officer who worked there as well.

One day, this flying officer walked into the room with about ten new recruits and commenced to show them what we were doing. Next thing he jumped onto one of the tables with a file in his hand, calling for the recruits' attention and then said, 'Now I want you to take particular attention to what I am about to show you. It is top secret and shows you all our latest equipment'. With that he stood on the table showing us the "latest equipment". Everyone kept looking at one another and trying not to laugh. The new recruits didn't know where to look as the pompous officer slowly turned the file from side to side to make sure everyone could see it. He then turned the file around to face him and gasped in horror, exclaiming 'Oh no, what a dirty trick to play!' He then jumped off the table, storming out and taking the bemused new recruits with him.

The lady sergeant had stuck a picture of a naked woman on the front of the file.

Fighterworld Recalls Last RAAF Boots on Ground in Vietnam

From www.defence.gov.au/news-events, 7 May 2025

Fighterworld general manager, Air Commodore (ret'd) Jack Fanderlinden, right, listens as Wing Commander (ret'd) Hugh Holt recalls flying Hercules aircraft with him in 37 Squadron during the Vietnam War.
Photo: Leading Aircraftman Kurt Lewis

Only three RAAF aircraft were in Vietnam on Anzac Day 1975, just days before the fall of Saigon. A Hercules flown by Flight Lieutenant Sam (Dave) Nicholls and Flight Lieutenant Brent Espeland departed Tan Son Nhut, leaving only the backup aircraft piloted by then Flying Officer Jack Fanderlinden to pick up the stragglers. Stragglers included embassy staff who'd missed the earlier flights, Vietnamese war orphans and their nurses, South Vietnamese allies, nuns from a nearby order…and four Airfield Defence Guards armed only with pistols as the Viet Cong approached.

One of the ADGs, then-corporal Ian 'Spike' Dainer, recalled there were also a number of 'nuns with hairy legs…one even had a moustache', among the crowd trying to board that last plane. 'My job on the day was working out who was entitled to get on and to search luggage to make sure the flight was safe,' Mr Dainer said. 'We had a group captain trying to hurry us along paying lip service to security, but he changed his tune when we found grenades in one of the bags.

'We were trying to get as many people aboard as we could and things became contentious because the embassy staff were taking a lot of personal possessions; there were cartons of whisky, Persian carpets, porcelain elephants taking up seats. "It was at that point that the captain of the aircraft (a 23-year-old Jack Fanderlinden) said, 'I need you to take some of that stuff off so that we can get more people on board'," Mr Dainer said.

The Hercules pilot, Air Commodore (ret'd) and general manager of RAAF Base Williamtown's Fighterworld, Jack Fanderlinden, held a reunion on April 30 at Fighter World for his crew and their families to mark the 50th anniversary of the event. Mr Fanderlinden recalled the missions leading up to the evacuation of Saigon. He and Mr Dainer remembered the incongruity of South Vietnamese civilians going about their daily chores as rocket and gun fire got ever closer to the

airfield where their Herc was loading. "There were people painting 'Tan Son Nhut' on the airfield tower and they kept on painting even as we were taking off," Mr Dainer said. Mr Fanderlinden added: 'I shared lunch with some Vietnamese workers who were just glad that the war would be over.'

Evacuees on the last flights out of Vietnam during the fall of Saigon tested the capacity of Hercules aircraft.
Photo: Australian War Memorial P05608.005

After citing statistics of Australians killed and wounded in the conflict, with nearly 30 per cent of the 35,000 veterans alive today suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, Mr Fanderlinden outlined the fates of some of the rescued war orphans who overcame adversities to lead successful lives in Australia. It was important to remember the human costs of war, he said.

Aircrash Memories – Relived

From Peter Taylor

I took my son and two grandsons, aged 10 and 14, to Melbourne at the end of March 2025. The plan was for the boys' time together to enjoy all things aeronautical. Firstly, on the Friday, a trip to the Avalon Airshow, Saturday to the RAAF Museum at Pt Cook in the AM and onto Moorabbin Museum in the PM. Sunday to Werribee and the restoration of the B-24 Liberator in the AM, then home to Perth in the PM. It was, in the main, a great weekend.

At Avalon Airshow; they did things differently this year. Gold Pass holders (that's us) were given our own parking area and entry to the show. Not only that, we got in on Friday at 9am, three hours before the general public. The four main exhibition halls were open until 12 midday when the flying program started, and then halls 1, 2 and 3 were closed to the general public. How lucky were we? Our gold passes saw us on the second top row with a grand view of the entire airfield. We had planned to view some of the flying; needless to say the F-35, Hornets, ADF show; boy those Spartan and C-17 short landing and take-off capabilities were very impressive.

We didn't intend watching the aerobatics by the Pitts Specials, but a delay in the program and the RAAF jets running low on fuel saw the Pitts starting to overheat as they had been sitting at the runway holding point for a long time, so the order was given for them to go ahead. A very impressive aerobatic display: we saw the orange Pitts break away to do a series of solo aeros which included a couple of very low passes, one of which was with smoke that billowed off the ground for what I thought was about 40-50 metres at ground level. I turned to my son and said something like 'that bloke has a death wish'. An unfortunate choice of words, as his next manoeuvre saw him misjudge his height and at the bottom of his turn and he crashed in a billow of dust. Stunned silence.

Before the crash

Looking at the dust plume, I then saw in my mind's eye a huge, black cloud of smoke and heard a thundering crash. I was back in 1967 as I watched Tony Karpys scarcely miss the 76 SQN flight line and barely get over the hangar as he barrel rolled once and started the second when he crashed. Many people have eye witness accounts of that accident which may differ from my account, but that is what I remember standing on the wing of the last 3 SQN bird at the end of the southern line. I believe I had a bird's eye view of that; he was THAT low.

As I sat in stunned silence, another thought crept into my mind; that of a young Sabre pilot at Williamtown, who after dropping the tow line to a banner, was on finals leg when he turned too sharply and too slow, stalled the wing and crashed in front of us just south of the Medowie Road and Nelson Bay Road intersection. I was in a car pool with three other blokes about 100 metres from the corner when a bloke in the back said 'get the f*** out of here'. The pilot died in that crash.

As these thoughts were going through my head, I heard my eldest grandson say to his dad 'Am I going to get PTSD out of this?' What a question! His father was in the Army at 18 in a UN peacekeeping role in Morocco (Minursa) in 1990/91 and saw things no 18 year old should see. He discharged from the Army some seven years later and joined the WA Police Force. He had related some of his thoughts and feelings to his son, which I think was the catalyst for the question. A lady sitting behind us was involved in the Pitts crew and she was hysterical. A number of people tried to calm her down, advising her to take deep breaths.

As I sat there, other memories came flooding back. Again, refuelling a 3 SQN bird, again at the end of the southern line facing SW, a Sabre was about 2/3 of the way down the strip on take-off being chased by two huge rolling balls of fire. Apparently, he had selected gear up a bit too soon and for one reason or another the bird sat back onto the tarmac on its large drop tanks. The pilot survived that one.

With my mind now back at the airshow, I contacted my old mate Tassie Sharp (we were on 19 Appy intake together) who was one of the head honcho tarmac controllers, and asked if he knew anything about the fate of the pilot; I really wanted to assure my grandson that he didn't have to worry about PTSD if the pilot was alive. Luckily all Tassie could tell me was 'He's alive and talking, Pete' What a relief.

As I now sat there reflecting on what had just happened and my recall of the RAAF crashes, I was again taken back to 2017 and the Australia Day celebrations on the Swan River in Perth that I

was watching live on TV, when a Grumman G-73 Mallard flying boat banked sharply before crashing into the water. Instant recall to another Sabre crash; too slow, too steep a turn, wing stall - crash. The pilot and his girlfriend passenger died in that one.

On the same subject but on a different topic. I am the author of two Mirage books: "*Introducing the French Lady-A Compendium of RAAF Mirages*", a 320-page expose of the aircraft itself, and a 600 plus page book entitled "*RAAF Mirage Family*". There are some 750 of each book out there among the Mirage fraternity. What this is leading me to is that of the 370 pilots who flew the Mirage in Australia, 14 lost their lives in this aircraft. That was about 3.8% of the pilots. On the other side of the coin, of the conservative number of 10,000 plus airmen that worked on, in and around the Mirage, to the best of my knowledge, not one member lost their lives as a result of a workplace accident. Yes, some died going to or from work, but NOT on the job.

100 year old RAAF Airman Recalls Hunt for WWII U-boats in Vickers Wellington

From www.abc.net.au/news, By Gavin McGrath

A RAAF 458 Squadron Vickers Wellington MkXIV refuelling and rearming ahead of a sortie. (Supplied: Australian War Memorial, accession no. ME1771)

Long hours of boredom broken up by moments of terror. Such was life aboard a Wellington bomber hunting for the elusive U-boats in the Atlantic Ocean in 1945 during World War II. John Herbert "Bert" O'Leary celebrated his 100th birthday in Melbourne in January. But 80 years ago, he was a young warrant officer working as a wireless operator and tail gunner aboard a Vickers Wellington.

Much of his time in the air was spent trying to find lone-wolf submarines trying desperately to avoid detection. 'The U-boats would come to the surface at night-time to refuel,' Bert said. 'Our job, which was like looking for a needle in a haystack, was to fly around the Atlantic in a certain pattern and try to come across a U-boat that was on the surface.'

On the rare occasion a German raider would appear on a bomber's radar system, things would instantly become tense. 'We had a dirty big searchlight (a Leigh-Light) in the middle of the Wellington; the idea was to lower that and try to make sure that you weren't homing in on a trawler or something else,' Bert said. 'When you lowered it down, the whole plane shook like crazy, I kid you not, that was the most fearful experience you could possibly imagine. 'The idea was…to fly over the top of the U-boat and drop a depth charge (explosive) near it. The depth

charge had to be fired up and ready to explode. It's a scary business knowing you have a fired-up explosive in your aircraft with you.'

Bert celebrated his 100th birthday in January.
(Supplied: 458 Squadron Association)

The Royal Australian Air Force's 458 Squadron was formed at Williamtown, New South Wales, and served in Europe, the Middle East and Mediterranean Sea. This year, 458 will commemorate the end of the World War II with a reunion in Malta. Mr O'Leary, one of three known living 458 Squadron veterans, said he would not attend as he was now in a nursing home. The two others are Bill Wake, another wireless operator-air gunner, and ground crew mechanic Charles Humbles, both of whom live in the United Kingdom. 'I would have liked just to talk to some other guys, I suppose, I can't imagine anything better than just saying hi,' Bert said. 'I am told there's no-one else in Australia, so it might be a lonely conversation.'

Bert said it was important to remember not only what happened eight decades ago, but also the people who were involved. 'Not to glamorise it, the last thing you want to do is glamorise it,' he said. 'It has to be remembered we were just ordinary blokes from civilian life…we put our lives on the line, but we learned stuff too.' 'When you're growing up as a teenager, you think you're immortal. It didn't take long for me to realise that it ain't so. I learned to value each day and that's still with me today.'

Bert enlisted in the RAAF at the age of 18, and admits he was naive. 'In those days, it was just par for the course, if you were not in an occupation necessary in ordinary life, you would be called up into the militia, or you joined the army, or the air force or the navy,' he said. 'I don't really know why I chose the air force at the time, I think it seemed a bit more glamorous, but (being part of a bomber crew) was not glamorous at all.'

Bert O'Leary (kneeling in front) with the rest of his flight crew in 1944.
(Supplied: 458 Squadron Association)

Each Wellington's six-man crew consisted of a pilot, co-pilot, navigator and three wireless-air gunners. Bert's skipper was experienced former commercial pilot Ken Rosen, the co-pilot was Sydney Cookes and the navigator Daniel Roberts.
But his best mates were fellow wireless-air gunners Syd Hamilton and Frank Reed.
'We alternated between three spots — the radio, or the wireless as we called it, the radar, and the tail gun,' he said.

'After about 40 minutes we changed positions, the gunner would go to the radar, the radar to the wireless, and the wireless back to the gunnery position. We worked it out between ourselves.' 'It (the Vickers Wellington) was very, very reliable. I don't know if it was true or not, we were told it would even float if you went down on water.'

While the 458th served throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean after transferring from Britain, Bert spent his entire tour of duty based at Gibraltar. 'We couldn't get out of it quickly enough. It was the most claustrophobic place because most of the civilians, particularly the women folk, had evacuated,' Bert said. 'There was nothing to do except sightseeing or go into town.'

Over the course of its war service the 458th was decimated. Of the 1,764 men who served with the squadron, 195 were killed. By the time Bert was in Gibraltar, the threat of marauding Messerschmitts - planes that formed part of the backbone of the Germans' fighter force - and other Axis fighter aircraft, had largely disappeared.

RAAF 458 Squadron launched sorties against U-boats in the Atlantic from its base in Gibraltar.
(Supplied: Australian War Memorial, accession no. 128342)

The one time he did see a U-boat, the submarine was trying to be found. 'It was quite spectacular, at the end of the war there was a U-boat that wanted to surrender,' Bert said. 'This one was coming into Gibraltar and we had to escort him back, flying around all night for eight hours. I was told it was officially the last mission of the war. He (the U-boat) was on the surface, of course. We had to do that because it could have been a suicide mission. It wasn't.' 'When she got in, we were still spectators. We watched the commander come out and be greeted by the Gibraltar commander, shake hands, salute, and all that sort of stuff. After that, we slept for the rest of the day.'

With the benefit of hindsight, Bert admitted he was thankful his Wellington never stumbled upon a submarine willing to shoot back, let alone an enemy aircraft. 'At the time, when you're young and stupid, you don't think so,' he said.

The scariest thing that happened while Bert was overseas occurred during training. 'I nearly lost my life,' he said. 'I was in Palestine, which was where we went to form the crew - you were given time to form one yourself and if you didn't make it the people in charge would form one for you. Anyway, [when] Frank and I looked at Ken Rosen and the experience he'd had, we said, "That's the bloke for us."' Bert described the skipper as 'a good-natured sort'. 'One night, one of the (other) pilots needed to get his hours up - they would take off, fly around the airfield, and then get ready to land, and before they finished landing, they would take off again,' he said. 'They wanted a couple of wireless operators to go with them and that was me, with Syd.' But the training flight didn't go as planned. 'We looked out the window and saw the port wing and the port engine was on fire [and] we were absolutely helpless. We were in the hands of the pilot, of course,' Bert said. 'He brought it in and he made a magnificent landing but, as she hit the deck, she burst into flames.' Fortunately, where Bert and Syd were down the back of the aircraft, there was an escape hatch. 'Syd opened that and I was pretty quick those days…I ran 30 metres in record time, turned and saw the plane was engulfed in flame from tip to toe,' Bert said.

All men on board survived that night, but many others lost their lives in training during the war. 'If you go to the War Memorial in Canberra and have a look at the number of people in the RAAF on the honour board who were killed in training, it's phenomenal,' Bert said. 'You were taking young men who were amateurs out of civilian life and, after a very short time, putting them into aircraft which weren't all that great in those days. It's little wonder that a lot died in accidents in training.' 'I was diagnosed with PTSD after the war, but I'm still here.'

In the early days of developing the Trent jet engine, engineers at Rolls-Royce in Derby built a gun which fired a chicken carcass into turbine blades to assess the damage caused by bird strike.

Engineers at Boeing heard about this and asked if it would also work for testing windscreens. Rolls-Royce thought it would. So, Boeing bought a chicken gun from Rolls-Royce, shipped it to the USA and tried it out.

The result was disastrous.

The chicken carcass flew straight through the cockpit windscreen, smashed instruments on the flight deck, smashed through the partition into the toilet, crashed through to the galley and ended up in the passenger cabin.

Somewhat distraught, Boeing contacted Rolls-Royce and asked what they would recommend. The engineers back at Rolls-Royce pondered Boeing's problem and came up with a three-word reply: 'Defrost the chicken'.

If a quiz is quizzical, what is a test?

C-27J Spartan Hits 10 Years in RAAF

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A C-27J Spartan fires flares during an aerial display at the Australian International Airshow 2025, Avalon, Victoria.

Story by Flight Lieutenant Deanna Ellick. Photo by Leading Aircraftman Ryan Howell.

From the rugged terrain of the Australian outback to the tropical jungles of Papua New Guinea, C-27J Spartan has proven to be an essential asset in the Royal Australian Air Force air-mobility fleet. With a decade of RAAF flying operations under its belt, the C-27J, operated by 35 SQN, has often been the first on the ground, delivering vital supplies, personnel and equipment to those who need it most.

To mark this milestone, the original crew of the first RAAF C-27J training flight reunited at RAAF Base Amberley on 27 February to conduct a sortie. The crew included Wing Commander Mark Seery (pilot), Flight Lieutenant Glen Foster (pilot), Warrant Officer Steven Burrows (loadmaster) and Warrant Officer Geoff Smith (loadmaster). The reunion was particularly significant for Wing Commander Seery, who returned to the squadron in 2024 as its Commanding Officer. 'Being the Commanding Officer of 35 SQN is an extreme privilege; it was my first choice for command and the place I really wanted to get back to,' Wing Commander Seery said. 'To be able to return and contribute to this phenomenal culture and witness how it's grown over the years is really exciting.'

The day was also a reminder of the unique camaraderie that Royal Australian Air Force aviators share. 'It's like all things in Defence: you separate, you get back together and it's like good old times and things haven't changed,' Wing Commander Seery said. The first of 10 C-27J Spartans arrived in Australia in 2015 from prime contractor L-3's Waco, Texas facility. With its rugged durability, advanced avionics, self-protection systems and impressive payload capacity, the C-27J has become a primary platform of the ADF's airlift capabilities. The aircraft enables personnel to deploy quickly and effectively to any corner of the globe, including in contested environments.

Widely known as 'Wallaby Airlines', the aircraft bridges the gap between the Army's rotary-wing assets and Air Force's larger fixed-wing aircraft. 'There's definitely crossover in role and

performance capabilities between the C-27J and the C-130J Hercules, C-17A Globemaster III and the CH-47 Chinook, but it has a very unique and niche capability now widely valued in the ADF as well as our regional allies and partners,' Wing Commander Seery said. With a high operational tempo, the squadron's support to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions has built a powerful and positive reputation both within Australia and overseas. 'The rate of effort is consistent and keeps us quite busy, particularly our operations out of Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Southwest Pacific,' Wing Commander Seery said. 'We work hard on this platform day in and day out to deliver effects for the Australian Government and other nations that we support. The culture here is phenomenal – the team look after each other, everyone enjoys deployments together, getting after it and getting the job done.'

Vietnam: 9 SQN Royal Australian Airforce

From Chris Beazley, supplied to me by Keith White

In the first week of June 1966, 9 Squadron's eight UH-1B Iroquois helicopters and a small maintenance party sailed for Vietnam in the Navy transport HMAS SYDNEY. The remainder of the squadron flew to Vietnam in a Qantas aircraft. HMAS SYDNEY anchored off Vung Tau on June 12, 1966 and the Iroquois were flown off the ship to Vung Tau airfield, the squadron's new home.

Operations began the next day when the squadron received a request from 5RAR for an urgent resupply of ammunition. While it was not expected that operations would begin so quickly, the request was complied with. Two helicopters delivered the ammunition and returned to Vung Tau without incident. This first mission was to mark the beginning of six years of combat flying for 9 SQN. On July 10, two Iroquois undertook the 'hot extraction' of a Special Air Service (SAS) patrol which was in contact with the Viet Cong. While descending to the landing zone the helicopters came under fire. The Iroquois crew returned the enemy fire while the troops were embarked and whisked to safety. Neither helicopter was damaged in the action. Five aircraft were airborne on July 25, to evacuate 22 Australian casualties during 'Operation Hobart'. Again, the Viet Cong attempted to interfere with the proceedings and it was necessary for one of the helicopters to remain overhead, suppressing the enemy's fire with its machine guns while the other four landed to pick up the dead and wounded. The mission was successfully completed.

The use of helicopters in this role resulted in casualties receiving medical treatment much quicker than had been the case in previous wars. As a consequence, the death rate of the wounded in military hospitals reduced from 4.5% in WWII to just 2.6% in Vietnam. Casualty evacuations (Dustoff) were also made in support of the local population. In one early incident of this nature, FLTLT L.O. Hindley's crew evacuated a badly wounded six year old girl from Binh Gia village, despite considerable ground fire being directed at their helicopter.

During the Battle of Long Tan, the embattled Australian D company 6RAR, ran critically short of ammunition. An urgent resupply was requested. Despite conditions of torrential rain and failing light, two Iroquois, captained by FLTLTs F. Riley and C. Dohle, located the friendly position and ignoring the very heavy enemy fire being directed at them, delivered their cargo just as the troops were emptying their magazines. When the helicopters arrived some of the soldiers were preparing to continue the fight with bayonet and machete. Without the ammunition delivered by the two Iroquois, D Company's chances of survival were practically nil.

9 SQN suffered its first casualties on October 18 when Iroquois A2-1018 struck trees and burst into flames while putting down in a very small clearing. Despite being burned on the head and arms, one of the crewmen, Sgt G. Buttriss, dragged his injured companions from the wreckage.

The aviators were quickly rescued by another helicopter and flown to hospital. A2-1018 was totally destroyed in the crash.

After representations to Australia, the decision was made to partially equip 9 SQN with 'gunships' - armed attack helicopters. It had long been recognised by Army and RAAF officers both in Australia and Vietnam, that this was better than always relying on the Americans for fire support. Official approval for the purchase of four gunship modification packages was granted in March 1969. However, on July 2 1968 an 'Aussie scrounging mission' was flown by FLTLT B.L. Dirou from Vung Tau to Vinh Long, Dong Tam and Phu Loi. The Iroquois was loaded with Victoria Bitter and Tarax soft drinks. These were exchanged for rocket pods and mini guns which were then used to make the first RAAF gunship. Four Iroquois were converted into gunships, (named 'Bushrangers') and were grouped into a separate flight from the remaining 12 troop lift, or 'slick' helicopters.

Official Bushranger operations commenced on April 11 1969 and proved immediately successful. The gunships usually worked in pairs, referred to as light fire teams, although if more firepower was required, three or all four gunships could be used in the same action. Inexperience was obviously a problem and this was highlighted soon after they became operational. A Bushranger was being flown at low level 25 kilometres from Vung Tau when its crew located a group of Viet Cong in a clearing. The door gunners immediately opened fire and a number of enemy troops were hit. As the captain manoeuvred to continue the attack with rockets and miniguns, the crew was dismayed to see smoke grenades ignited by the men on the ground identifying them as 'friendlies'. The attack was broken off at this stage. As events transpired the soldiers proved to be troops of 6RAR who were setting up an ambush when they were attacked. Four Australians were wounded in this incident and this highlighted the need for positive identification before attacks began.

A 9SQN 'bushranger'

FLGOFF T.K. Butler (RNZAF) led a more successful mission on May 9 1969, in support of an ARVN battalion in trouble after contacting a large enemy force in the vicinity of Long Green. Intense and accurate fire greeted the gunships over the target and Butler, whose Bushranger was hit early, called for a third Bushranger to assist. After repeated attacks the enemy broke contact. The ARVN later told the squadron that at least seven Viet Cong had been killed by the gunships.

Many individual acts of heroism and daring were carried out by the men of 9 Squadron and they can't all be mentioned here but the following story shows the sort of men they were.

Late afternoon of April 17, Iroquois A2-767, captained by flying officer Mike Castles, was scrambled for an urgent dustoff in the Long Hai Hills. Due to the location, two Bushrangers escorted the lightly armed dustoff helicopter on its mercy mission. On arriving in the area, it was found that there was no clearing. It was necessary to hover the helicopter so that the winch and stretcher could be used to extract a south Vietnamese soldier, who had both legs blown off at the

knees by a land mine. The wounded soldier had just been strapped into the stretcher on the ground when the Viet Cong opened fire on the helicopter, hitting it repeatedly. Despite this fire CPL R.A. Stephens started the winching operation while LAC Roy Zegers returned the enemy's fire. The Iroquois took more hits and all of a sudden there was silence as the engine stopped and the doomed helicopter fell out of the sky. CPL Stephens watched with horror as the legless soldier got out of the stretcher and crawled away from the falling chopper. The chopper crashed into a boulder strewn area occupied by Vietnamese troops and their advisors resulting in one American and one Australian soldier being killed by flying debris.

Dustoff Chopper on the ground

The two pilots and LAC Zegers managed to get clear of the burning wreck. However CPL Guillespie, an Army medical orderly, had his legs firmly pinned in the wreckage and CPL Stephens remained behind to free him. Unfortunately, the task was beyond human strength and after frantic efforts he was forced out of the chopper by the flames. As he scrambled clear the choppers fuel and ammunition exploded. On finding the other shocked survivors amidst the boulders, CPL Stephens found that FLGOFF Tony Ford had been burned on the face and hands. He applied dressings to the co-pilots face and hands while a vicious fire fight between the ARVN and the Viet Cong continued.

Some of the tracer ricocheted off the rocks they were sheltering behind, narrowly missing them. After a very unpleasant stay with the ARVN troops the rescue chopper arrived. Stephens: 'When it arrived the wounded were winched on board the chopper, which was flown by the CO, WGCDR Coy, with a crew of FLTLT Clarke (RNZAF), LAC Rowley and LAC Flemming. After an eternity the chopper was fully loaded with dead and wounded, (ironically one of the dead was the legless soldier for whom this had all started), plus the crew of the downed Iroquois. We vacated the area just on dark and flew to the Army hospital at Vung Tau.

They had many losses but despite them, the quality of 9 SQN support for the troops in Phuoc Tuy Province remained very high and the Army and the RAAF worked extremely well together.

WWII RAAF Bomber Found off Greece

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A Royal Australian Air Force Baltimore bomber aircraft, which was lost while on an operational mission during the Second World War, has been discovered off the island of Antikythera in Greece. The discovery of the wreck of Baltimore FW282 brings to an end 82 years of uncertainty regarding the final resting place of three of the crew, from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, who went missing with the aircraft in December 1943.

In 2024, Greek technical diving group AegeanTec, which specialises in exploring deep-water wrecks beyond the reach of recreational divers, located the wreck in 61 metres of water. Believing it to be a RAAF aircraft, AegeanTec contacted History and Heritage – Air Force (HUWC-

AF), which assessed the discovery, and positively confirmed the wreck as RAAF Baltimore FW282.

The crew of Baltimore FW282 were:

Pilot: Flight Lieutenant (FLTLT) William Alroy Hugh Horsley (RAAF), captured
Navigator: FLTLT Leslie Norman Row (Royal Air Force [RAFVR]), missing
Wireless Operator/Air Gunner: Pilot Officer Colin William Walker (RAAF), missing
Wireless Operator/Air Gunner: Warrant Officer John Gartside (Royal New Zealand Air Force [RNZAF]), missing

The wreck of RAAF No 454 Squadron Baltimore FW282, which was shot down during a maritime reconnaissance mission on 3 December 1943. The wreck was located by AegeanTec in July 2024, with confirmation of the identity of the aircraft made in December 2024.
Photo supplied by AegeanTec

Chief of Air Force Air Marshal Stephen Chappell said the aircraft discovery was significant and offered the chance to provide closure to families. 'The efforts of groups such as AegeanTec are critical for us in accounting for 3143 Australian aviators with no known grave from the Second World War and the Korean conflict,' Air Marshal Chappell said. 'I am pleased, alongside my colleagues from the RAF and RNZAF, to this week be able to announce the find and for us to acknowledge, collectively, the bravery of this combined crew of aviators from our three nations.'

RAF Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, said the discovery of RAAF Baltimore FW282 highlighted the longstanding relationship between the RAF and the Royal Australian and Royal New Zealand Air Forces. 'It's an honour to acknowledge the bravery of this multinational crew,' Air Chief Marshal Knighton said. 'This was a generation who embodied the importance of service and comradeship. Their efforts were the base on which the RAF continues to maintain the security of the UK at home and abroad. Their sense of duty inspires future generations of all of our air forces.'

RNZAF Chief of Air Force Air Vice-Marshal Darryn Webb said that New Zealand was very grateful to AegeanTec for the important discovery. 'I hope will bring some sense of closure for the families. The sacrifice of this brave crew has long been remembered, especially by their families,

and we can now honour their final resting-place with the respect they deserve,' Air Vice-Marshal Webb said.

Operated by RAAF's No 454 Squadron, Baltimore FW282 was returning from a mission over the Aegean Sea on 3 December 1943 when it was intercepted by German fighter aircraft and sustained heavy damage. While ditching into the ocean, pilot Flight Lieutenant Horsley was knocked unconscious and awoke as water filled the cockpit. After swimming to the surface and realising he was alone, Flight Lieutenant Horsley swam to shore, where he was handed over to German authorities. The pilot spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner of war in Germany. The other three crewmembers were listed as missing, believed killed.

Following discussions with the RAF and RNZAF, it has been determined that there will be no further recovery at the wreck site – however, the RAAF will coordinate a memorial service for the crew.

The Day We Flew the Fleet – Maximum Effort

From Bill 'Slim' Maconachie,

The Lockheed C-130 Hercules entered RAAF service in December 1958, when No 36 Squadron accepted the first twelve C-130As, replacing its venerable Douglas C-47 Dakotas. Australia was the first operator of the C-130 after the USAF. In 1966, the C-130As were joined by twelve C-130Es to equip No 37 Squadron, all based at RAAF Base Richmond north of Sydney NSW. The C-130 A/E Hercules, universally known to Australian forces as the 'Herc', provided a valiant service to the Australian forces serving in Vietnam as a lifeline and particularly in the role of aeromedical evacuation of the wounded. Since 1958, the RAAF has operated twelve each C-130 A, C-130 E, C-130 H and currently the C-130 J Super Hercules.

On 5 April 1983, these two Richmond-based squadrons joined in a maximum effort to put 24 of their aircraft into the air at one time. This rare spectacle was made possible by the fact that, for once, none of the Herc's was receiving a major overhaul and all would be on base at the same time. On the day, after final briefing, crews proceeded to their aircraft, to take-off in groups of four and formed up for the massed fly-past. The aircraft flew across Sydney's western suburbs and straight down the harbour, across the harbour bridge for a good photo shoot, before turning north over the sea, tracking to the mouth of the Hawkesbury River, where they turned west on finals to return to base. Unfortunately for the spectacle, at the last minute, one C130E from No 37 Squadron, captained by Flight Lieutenant Andy Maitland, broke off the formation to undertake an emergency search and rescue (SAR) mission for a yacht missing east of the Victoria-NSW

border, which they duly located. The Hercules squadrons at Richmond did a lot of SAR work off the NSW/Vic east coast.

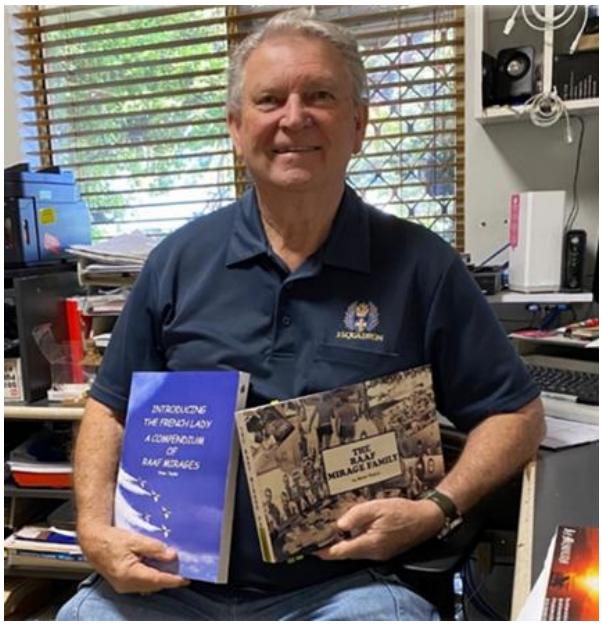
At that time, I was WOFF i/c Electrical Section and Acting WOD of No 486 Maintenance Squadron and was privileged to ride on the flight deck with the C.O. of No 37 Squadron, who was flying the lead aircraft. Another 'Ronnie' RAAF event well remembered.

Following this successful operation, No 486 (M) Squadron held a Saturday 'Open Day' for families of all base personnel. The Hercules squadrons provided crews to fly the RAAF families over the same Sydney Harbour route, but over the bridge with the rear ramp open. What a morale booster that was and I am sure more than a few 'baggers' had extended leave passes for a while for an extra hour in the messes on the way home after work.

P.S. That's me on the end of the front row, left side of the picture.

The Making of *The Mirage Compendium* and *The RAAF Mirage Family*

From Peter Taylor



In 2022 I produced a book titled "*INTRODUCING THE FRENCH LADY – A COMPENDIUM OF RAAF MIRAGES*". This book is a 316-page essay in pictures of the Mirage in RAAF service. Then in 2023 I produced a book titled "*THE RAAF MIRAGE FAMILY*", a book of 508 pages in A4 Landscape format; a pictorial essay of the people of the Mirage era.

Why did I do these books? To better understand what led to my passion for the Mirage I need to take you on a journey from my most humble beginnings. As a child of around nine or 10, I was fascinated by helicopters, I had two or three but the one I remember most was a tin model with a rotor that turned as I pushed the model along on its rubber wheels. How on earth could this thing fly? In 1964 my parents told me that this year was my last at school and that I needed to get a job the following year. Jobs were in abundance in that era; I had a choice of apprentice diesel mechanic training with the railways at Werris Creek, or becoming an apprentice motor mechanic as two dealers in town were offering apprenticeships.

So, why the RAAF? I had always been fascinated by how things worked and very early on could strip things down and put them back together again, well almost, mum's alarm clock was left in bits following a journey of intrigue. We had a 1925 "Uted" Chevrolet as our transport for over three miles of black soil plain to catch the new school bus. The station mechanic, (we lived five miles away at the other end of Windy Station), was an ex-RAF WWII engine fitter and I learnt so much from him that when the opportunity to join the RAAF came up, I was well versed in the mechanical knowledge of engines and cars in general. I pestered the bejesus out of him in my search for knowledge. So, why did I elect to join the RAAF? Helicopters! I saw an advertisement for apprenticeship training in the RAAF and there was a picture of people with a helicopter in the background.

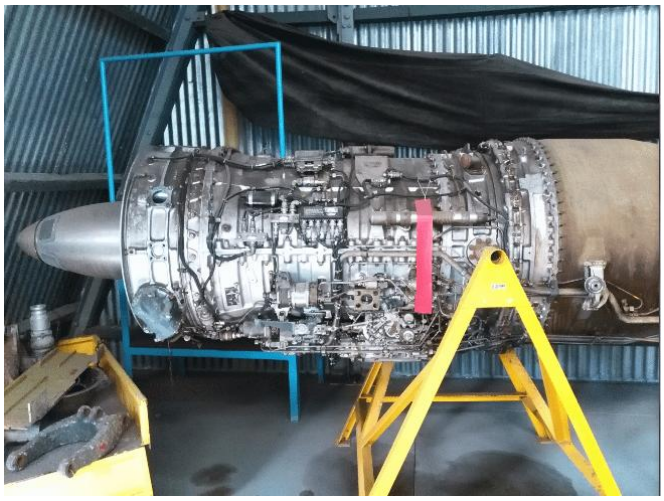
I successfully completed all the requirements, except maths. The interview board were impressed with everything else but thought that I couldn't handle the rigours of apprenticeship training without that higher maths background. However, during the interview process I was handed a piston and asked to describe all the parts thereof; well, the skirt, the ring lands, the gudgeon pin hole and (being a smartarse), I went on to describe the fitting of the con rod and big end on the crankshaft etc, at which time they pulled me up and asked what was the top of the piston called? 'The head' I said. 'Well actually, it's called the crown' they replied, to which I said, 'well my mechanic mentor was a WWII RAF engine fitter and he called it a head, and besides where does a crown go? On a head.' They put me through with my promise to really knuckle down at Wagga and get my maths up to speed.

Wagga in January 1965 was a real eye opener for this naïve 16 (almost17) year old. I'd never heard of this aerial ping pong game and had no idea of the interstate rivalry and boy, what an education I had from the back of the toilet doors. But here I was in the Air Force and look at all the planes! (I soon learned they were aircraft!) And the engines in the Engine Hangar; wow, I

was in heaven! I couldn't wait to get my hands on them. I received many distinctions for my practical tests but barley passed most of the theory with an occasional credit. Fail in maths; oops, School Interview Board with the distinct possibly of being kicked off course. Luckily, they decided to keep me on and to undergo maths training during the first week of the midyear holidays. Friday, all the other blokes went on mid-year leave; myself and two or three others were kept back under the watchful eye of the SQNLDR Education Officer who proceeded to teach us enough to pass the exam and on Monday we too, were on our way.

I loved the role of being an engine apprentice and after finally understanding Prelim Jet Theory, it all fell into place and I graduated with a credit pass; 7th out of 20. I was posted to Williamtown, 3 SQN. They had Mirages. Wow, my love affair with this bird began in July 1967 and unbeknown to me at the time, it would last a lifetime. It was loooong way from my 1925 Chevy, that's for sure. My wife and I now own a 1963 imported factory RHD Impala, so that love affair has also lasted all this time. During my 20 years of service, I spent nine on Mirages and engines. It all started at 481 Maintenance Squadron in early July 67, where I was attached to the Engine Repair Shop (ERS) while waiting for the Mirage Familiarisation and ATAR courses. It was here that I finally got hands on experience with these mighty engines. After the courses in late July 67, I walked across the road and was introduced to FSGTS Darky Clark, Airframes, and Homer Parker, Engines. Both would soon be promoted to WOE. One would have a great influence on my life over the coming years.

My fingers tingled when I first laid hands on A3-52. This was the ultimate piece of engineering that I had ever experienced. Is it possible to fall in love with an inanimate object such as this, made up of various metals, perspex, rubber, plastic and goodness knows what else? Yes, I believe it is.



Snecma Atar 9K50 Jet Engine used in a Mirage III from the late 1960s

My career saw me in 3 SQN from July 67 to February 68. I had developed an eye condition at Wagga that rendered me with a downgrade in medical status and therefore I could not go to Butterworth with the squadron; total disappointment. Back to ERS where I really enjoyed learning all about the ATAR. This was far better than those blokes who chose to fly; flying just never interested me. In May 1969, I was posted into the newly formed 77 SQN, this time before we had any aircraft. 3 SQN had departed and we took over the bottom hangar, directly opposite ERS. 77 never lived up to its name of 'Malfunction Junction' while I was there: as far as I was concerned, we all did what had to be done and nearly everyone got along. It was here in 77 that I learned to do ground runs. The power of that engine was the most exciting feeling I have ever had.

In 2023, I was talking to a few knucks about that subject. I had had two Machbuster rides and the best feeling of power was the low-level slam acceleration from 300 to 600 knots. BUT!!! The power of an installed engine ground run was immense. Going to max dry, the roar behind you tells you this is good, but lift the handle into AB; the nose drops on the cradle, the main wheels start to climb up the high metal chocs and you can't help yourself but smile. Going into full burner, the roar is deafening, even with a headset on, the nose dips even lower and the main

wheels ride up even higher, the power is immense and I'm in charge of that! Oh Mirage, what a feeling!

November 1970 saw a posting to Butterworth, back to good old 3 SQN and WOE Darky Clark - was good to see him again. We lived on Penang Island beside Tanjong Bungah Road, just opposite Seahome. We had 10-month-old twin girls and an Amah. It certainly was a change in culture that took some getting used to. 3 SQN life was good; I had learned the fuel system pretty well at ERS and often diagnosed the problems of a U/S before a decision was made on how to fix it. Being an LAC, no one took any notice of my opinion and they often miscued the fault and didn't fix the problem on first go. However, I enjoyed the flight line; no PPE in those days, just a pair of shorts and TEE boots, oh and your earmuffs as well. I did a three-month stint in MCS which was quite an eye opener, as well as a six-month stint in 478 ERS.

A pair of ARDU Mirages

Promoted to CPL in January 1973, all of a sudden, I had a voice, not a big booming one but enough to be heard and taken notice of. Then, the downfall! 2AD Propeller Flight at Richmond in May 73. I'm posted away from my beloved Mirage. However, all is not lost. After three and a half years at 2AD I found myself at Edinburgh in January 1977 at the recently relocated ARDU. What a unit to be posted to and they had three Mirages; A3-2, 76 and 111. I'm home again! Again, I am in the presence of that terrific WOE, Darky Clark. My three years there were some of the best years in my 20 years and the end of my nine years with the Mirage. ARDU had Macchis as well and my last five years at Pearce saw me with eight years on the Macchi, but it holds no special place in my heart.

Fast forward to around 2008 or 9 and I'm in Fighter World Williamtown where I again met up with not one, but two Mirages; A3-3 and Daphne A3-102. Walking around these aircraft I still had that tingling feeling in the fingers as I ran my hands over various parts of 'The Lady' and when I went under the starboard wing and looked up into the wheel well at the hatch, which I had removed many hundreds of times, this wave of emotion ran over me and I got the biggest lump in my throat I'd ever had. I knew then that I had to do something to recall those Mirage days. I started gathering photos, I bought Marty Susans book "*The RAAF Mirage Story*", Mason and Mottram's *IIIO Colours and Markings* and looked for anything else I could find. Life got in the way and a grandson came along in 2010, I was appointed as a volunteer Trustee as Secretary/Treasurer of the Motor Museum of WA and the Mirage research came to a halt. I had, over the years built a few model aircraft from plastic kits but my favourite was a 1:32 model of A3-85. My son also had built many kits of all types plus a couple of 1:48 Mirages. As the grandson got older, he too started taking an interest in kit building. He is also now a very knowledgeable lad on all things WWII fighting ships. My father was on HMAS Australia during the war and the young fella must have inherited some of his genes.

The two books I produced over the last two years are as a direct result of the grandson asking me when he was 11; 'Granddad, you worked on Mirages didn't you, can you tell me about them?' 'Better than that,' I said, 'I'll do up a little book for you with pictures and the story of how we got the Mirage and the squadrons it flew in'. 'Great!' was the reply. GREAT!! Little did I know just where this was going to take me. By now I had accumulated a few hundred pics of the aircraft

and people and other associated events, so I created a sub folder for each tail number and started putting them into some sort of sequence in Microsoft Publisher. I like Publisher, I'd used it many times when I was Editor of my car club magazine and also for a couple of family history books. As this book was just going to be one, maybe two copies, I wasn't concerned about the copyright that may be on some photos and didn't even think to credit the pics to anyone. Afterall, this was for our private family use.

The pages steadily grew in number but it wasn't complete, just pics on a page with the tail number at the start. Then I re membered ADF Serials; those guys do a great job in retrieving the information from the aircraft history cards, so I then headed each tail number with the description of the aircraft history. That was much better. Now he would have the full history of each aircraft and pics of the different squadrons and colour markings it served in. So, what about how the Mirage was made? I scoured the internet for anything on GAF and CAC and found quite a lot of photos that had been posted. Also, National Archives (NAA) had some pics that led me further afield. I found a copy of the RAAF News in December 1991 where it described how the Mirage came about during the selection process to replace the Sabre. Bewdy, that covered that. Then through Wikipedia and other sources I got the details of the various squadrons, their history etc and when we got the Mirage.

When I got to the 3 SQN page there was something missing, so I contacted Neil Smith. I had known Neil as a boggy pilot in 3 SQN back in the 70s and also as a supporter of Australia's Land Speed Challenge, of which I was a crew member. I knew he was at "Wings" magazine, so I sent the copy of what I had and asked if he could expand on it. He came back very quickly asking what this was all about so I sent him copies of some pages I had done so far. 'You can't keep this to yourself' he said, 'this is fantastic Mirage history so you should publish it'. Hmm, I didn't expect that. Now the copyright problem dawned on me. Speaking with Ron Haack, also at "Wings", we resolved that it couldn't be published as it was. It was totally unsafe from a copyright perspective. Bugger, what to do? I contacted an online copyright lawyer and we went back and forth for quite some time. I just wasn't prepared to chase up all those permissions and credit all the photos, there were just under 1000. Then I asked the lawyer, 'What if I sold the book for cost, made no profit from it at all?' 'Yes, you can' he said. And that, folks, is how the book: "INTRODUCING THE FRENCH LADY – A COMPENDIUM OF RAAF MIRAGES" came about.

I only made it available to anyone who spent time on the Mirage; it wasn't widely published and some 500 copies are out there among you all. One of the recipients was Andrew Wilson, he had shown his dad who said he'd like one. 'Ok, if your dad had anything to do with Mirages, I'm sure he would like one.' Andrew replied 'Yes Pete, he was the last CO of 77SQN when the Mirage retired.' Ex Group Captain Roger Wilson, along with his son Andrew and another knuck, Brian "Tart" Johnson, met with me at the RAAFAWA club at Bullcreek on Wednesday 17 Aug 2022. During our conversation on the book's contents, I went to the Ephemera chapter and told Roger that I had quite a few pictures of the people in squadron photos etc and maybe I could knock up a little book about the people of the Mirage era. He looked at me and said 'Go for it; we'll soak up anything you can give us.' And so, on the 17 Aug 2022, "*THE RAAF MIRAGE FAMILY*" was born. Roger has become a strong supporter and friend to me in this venture and I thank him and everyone who has got on board, from the highest ranks of ex-RAAF pilots to the hundreds of troops who have answered my questions, provided the photos and generally supported what I was doing. In all some 624 books are out there among you. I hoped you would appreciate the work that went into producing the book and you have told me in no uncertain terms that you all are simply enjoying reliving the memories. My job is done!! That is why I produced these two books!

As I was compiling the "In Memoriam" on the rear cover of the "*Family*" book, I became quite emotional. I now understand why: I originally had a grey rear cover with a front on shot of Mirages in formation surrounded by the thumbnail pics of the deceased pilots. I wasn't too happy with how it was coming together, so I sent a copy to WGCDR (Ret'd) Marty Susans and asked his advice on how to better portray his fellow pilots. He quickly came back with 'Pete, in the ode it says "At the going down of the sun", how about a bright sunset and update the info on where the crash happened (mainland locations) and whether on land or sea. He also asked if I could find a pic with a Mirage taking off at sunset? The pic in the middle at the bottom of the page is in fact an online pic of an Argentinean Mirage taking off, but how well it emphasises the impact that these blokes so richly deserve.

To the entire Mirage fraternity, we are growing older and seeing our mates depart this earth in growing numbers knowing full well our time is running out. What a privilege it has been to remember the Mirage years, an era of unbelievable camaraderie across all ranks that continues this to this day after some 62 years.

I thank you all for your support and friendship in bringing these books to you.

What was the best thing BEFORE sliced bread?

Do twins ever realise one of them was unplanned??

RAAF Officers' Training School Salutes 75 years

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Participants in the Officers' Training School 75th anniversary parade stand to attention.
Story by Flying Officer Shanea Zeegers. Photos by Leading Aircraftwoman Laura Flower.

Officers' Training School celebrated its 75th anniversary in April with a special event at Royal Australian Air Force Base East Sale. The event honoured the school's rich history and the

graduation of Initial Officers' Course 01/25. This year's milestone was marked with a combined graduation and commemorative parade, recognising the legacy of those who came before and the potential of those just beginning their journey.

Formed on 12 April 1950 at RAAF Station Rathmines, Officers' Training School has spent 75 years shaping the future leaders of the Air Force. Commanding Officer OTS, Wing Commander Samantha Couper, said that the school's mission had remained constant but its methods had adapted to meet the needs of a modern and diverse Defence Force, focused on ethical leadership, innovation, resilience and cultural competency. 'Officers' Training School has grown alongside the Air Force itself, adapting through decades of change while staying true to its mission of developing leaders of character,' Wing Commander Couper said. 'For 75 years, Officers' Training School has remained steadfast in its purpose, to deliver initial officer training that inspires and prepares leaders of character, committed to Air Force service and the defence of Australia.'

The event on April 10 brought together graduates, instructors, alumni, and senior leaders across the Australian Defence Force and government. It reflected decades of excellence and symbolised continued evolution and commitment to leadership development.

OTS Instructor Flight Lieutenant Joshua Matthew spoke about the unique significance of the day. 'The 75th anniversary is meaningful as the staff joined their trainees on the parade square for the first time,' Flight Lieutenant Matthew said. 'There's a real sense of pride and honour in acknowledging the history that's come before us. It's a moment of gravitas, and one I'm personally proud to be part of.'

The anniversary offered a powerful reminder of the school's enduring role in delivering capable, confident and adaptive leaders ready to face the challenges of today's defence environment. 'It's about celebrating our history, reinforcing our mission and inspiring the next generation of leaders,' Wing Commander Couper said.

Wing Commander Samantha Couper, right, and newly graduated Flying Officer Leah Vroomans, cut the OTS 75th anniversary cake.

Metal Machining at RAAFSTT

From Henry Whittaker

Machining could be a dangerous occupation if not done with expertise. When I was learning how to use cylindrical grinders, I accidentally pranged the machine and scared the living bejesus out of my instructor. The grinder I was being instructed on had a 'rapid-traverse' function on the grinding head. That meant the grinding wheel would lurch violently inwards or outwards depending on what button you pressed. When stopping to take measurements the practice was:

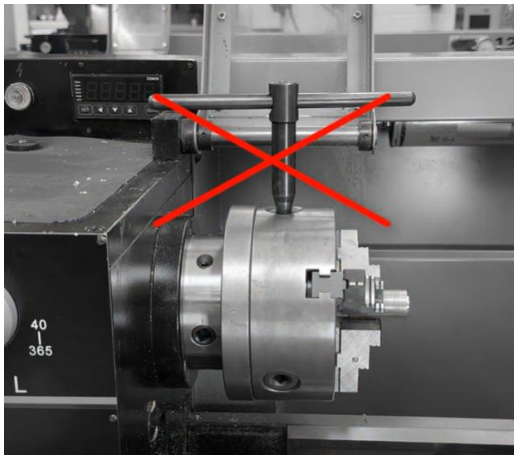
Manually back the wheel OUT from the job one turn, THEN rapid-traverse the wheel head away...BUT,

I accidentally rapid-traversed out, THEN manually wheeled the grinding head IN one turn. That meant when I hit the Rapid Traverse button to return the head into the job - it crashed with a horrible bang and a 'graunching' scream.

At the moment of impact both instructors ran from the room screaming for their lives and left me standing there to deal with it. After the initial surprise, fortunately the grinding wheel had not exploded in my face, I calmly traversed the wheel back out. In the aftermath many jokes were made at mine but mostly at the instructors' expense because I didn't run, but the instructors buggered off like a bunch of 'screaming school girls. The chief instructor jokingly said he should have charged both of them with desertion and he said of me, 'No guts Corpy'. I never made that mistake again.

Chuck Key in the Chuck

One of the most dangerous things that anyone can do in a machine shop is to leave a chuck key in chuck of a machine lathe. It carried a heavy penalty to one's reputation and career if done once and especially if done a second time.



One day the top student on our course committed the crime so paid the price. Because we were under instruction, the price was mild public humiliation but great entertainment for the rest of us. The course was lined up in front of the hangar. We watched the offender state his offence and the possible consequences of such to life and limb. He then turned around and ran toward the grass at the edge of the tarmac. There he stopped, hurled the chuck key into the grass, turned, took a bow then went looking for the key. Once found he came running back with both hands holding the said key shouting over and over, 'I will not leave my chuck key in the chuck!'

Other punishments for this crime were doing push-ups on your bench whilst saying, 'I love my chuck key.'

Why do we put round pizzas in square boxes and cut it into triangles to eat?

SEATO Fighter Operations RAAF Ubon Thailand

From AVM (Ret'd) Bob Richardson

Our several years of Sabre operational deployments to the Royal Thai Air Force airbase at Ubon Ratchathani, the third largest city in Thailand in the early 1960s, was a formative experience for all of us. Ubon is on the Mun River tributary of the massive Mekong River border with Laos, and also close to the Cambodian border, both neighbouring countries being very politically unstable in those days. This of course was why we were there - to provide armed air defence of the Thai borders as a signatory to the South East Asia Treaty Organisation SEATO (America, Australia, UK, Philippines and Thailand).

Three 79 SQN Sabres on the dispersal at Ubon, Thailand, soon after their arrival.
RAAF Photo

It was tough for our families back in Malaysia because no communication with them was possible other than via our fortnightly Hercules supply courier. This normally came up from RAAF Richmond via Darwin, Singapore and Butterworth and then a one-day round trip to Ubon. This would bring our mail, so we would meet the Herc, get the mail and while the crew lunched, we had to write replies to go back on the return flight - or there'd be hell to pay if our wives had to wait another two weeks!

My first deployment to 79 Squadron was in September 1963 for eight weeks, the standard attachment period from Butterworth, and I did this four times. Base squadron support personnel were deployed from Australia on six months unaccompanied postings. Our eight Sabres were vitally supported by Butterworth's 78 Fighter Wing and its 478 Maintenance Squadron.

Turning to our 79 Squadron flying operations at Ubon, our assigned operational role was the air defence of Thailand's border areas against Communist incursions - responding to the 'domino threat 'of communist incursions from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, with Chinese support. This was a logical concern at the time, especially in the light of Chinese communist terrorist groups who'd been fighting a ferocious war in Malaya in the 1950s, and then events in communist-led Laos, volatile Sihanouk-led Cambodia and the recent French war in North Vietnam.

Living was quite comfortable when I first got to Ubon, unlike the first 12 months when everyone lived in tents. We were accommodated in newly constructed huts. All of the internal fittings were built in the local jail, including the beds and furnishings. I was told on my arrival that I could have a bed made to order, so I ordered a longer bed. The large wooden bed duly arrived, but the standard Dunlopillo mattress was just six feet, so my feet stuck out over the end as usual. The windows were unglazed, so air conditioning was entirely natural. Six feet outside my room was the single Base air raid shelter, a dugout several feet deep surrounded by sand bags that also covered the roof. I occasionally peered into its gloomy interior to see it full of water, and as snakes were also seen around it there would need to have been a dire emergency indeed to encourage us to use it!

Relaxing in the Officer's Mess. The author, third from left looks like he's winning!

A convenient 30 yards away from our quarters was the Officers Mess. This timber building was connected to the Sergeants 'and Airmens 'messes so that all three shared a common central catering facility; a cost-effective arrangement later adopted widely across the three Services in Australia. The comfortable bar area, bamboo furnished and decorated from the local jail was, of course, where we all spent a lot of our off-duty time. All sorts of games were played in the bar, many of which involved alcohol in various forms.

Under our SEATO Agreement we were all allocated American BX ration cards that entitled you EACH MONTH to six cases of beer plus six 40 ounce bottles of high-quality spirits like Johnny Walker Black Label, Smirnoff vodka, and other popular spirits. And TEN cartons of 200 American cigarettes each month. I never ever drew anything like that ration, of course, but some treated it as a bit of a challenge! And every BX ration item cost just one US dollar: a dollar each for a bottle of Black Label, a carton of cigarettes, or a case of beer meant that boozing and smoking was basically free!

In the Mess we normally preferred Australian beer, always full-strength 5% alcohol in those carefree days. And our USAF colleagues certainly liked Australian beer. I remember a USAF liaison visit by four of our Sabres to the F102 Squadron based RTAF Base Tahkli, north of Bangkok. The arrangement was to meet first in the air over their base for a 4v4 air combat exercise, then to all return to socialise and stay overnight in their quarters. All went well for the rather exciting air combat battle, then the two formations separated for the recovery to Tahkli. With no air traffic control the two returning formations failed to communicate their runway intentions - and we both ended up running in at high speed for our standard 'pitch and break' to

downwind for landing at opposite ends of the single runway, so our four had to break away and rejoin again.

USAF F-102

When we all finally shut down on the F102 tarmac, we climbed out and opened up our ammunition bins. Fortuitously our 30mm cannon shell rounds were the same length as Fosters cans, and for such international social gatherings we usually loaded each bin with about two dozen Fosters cans. Provided we all remembered to leave ammo bay heating off this exposed the bins and their contents to 40°C temps at high altitude, and after landing in the tropical humidity when the cans were exposed, they were perfectly chilled and glistening with condensation. As we handed out these gifts to our hosts, the response was 'Goddam, you Aussies know how to live…you do this every day?' Naturally we replied with a laconic 'yeah, of course, last flight each day!'

The local air defence radar, callsign Lion, was manned by Thai operators who were being trained by Americans, and we did a lot of work with them. They were generally okay, but the local controllers were very variable; some really had no idea and it wasn't uncommon to find yourself, when stooging out for a practice intercept, being separated and then vectored back together again to find you were heading into nearby Cambodia. There were no weapon ranges available to us, so our air-to-ground exercises were limited to tactical simulated strikes against bridges and other targets, often involving long-range, high level flights across Thailand, with low level dashes into, and out from, the selected target. We also spent a lot of time on air combat training, directed by air defence Lion radar.

On my first tour there I had a couple of pretty hairy incidents. I returned to land one day as a single aircraft. Just after touchdown I realised that there was a samlor pedalling across the runway ahead of me. This was one of the two-passenger tricycle taxis that were very common modes of local transport. A main highway out of town came right across the centre of the airfield - which would only happen in Thailand! A guard was placed on one side during all flying operations, who on seeing a red light from the control tower, would hold up a sign saying "YUT" (STOP!). But this driver had ignored the guard, who was on the other side of the runway.

A Thai samlor

I saw this samlor just after touching down. He was alone, pedalling steadily across the runway, halfway down its 7000 ft length. At touchdown I've pulled the throttle back to idle, and I had about 15 seconds to impact with him near the centre of the runway. I slammed the throttle to full power, still travelling at just over 100 knots. There was nothing else I could do but call 'going around' - and wait while the power wound up.

As I got within about 1500 feet of him, he must have heard the accelerating engine whine, and he desperately tried to pedal away, but of course didn't achieve anything. As the power slammed in, I reefed the lightly loaded Sabre off the runway just over the driver's head. The tower operator estimated the clearance was 15 feet. This was all over in much less time than it takes to describe it, but it was certainly an adrenaline moment for a few seconds. I was pretty sure I'd make it - but

engine acceleration time increased at higher temperatures, and my pulse was racing in the last few seconds because it was agonisingly close. After that an extra guard was placed to police the highway on BOTH sides of the runway!

A Sidewinder-armed 79SQN Sabre Mk.32 on patrol, about 1963. The unit decorated its Sabres with a cobra marking on the tail.
RAAF Photo

I had an even more hair-raising runway incident, also in my first few weeks at Ubon, and it's the closest I've ever come to dying. This was a function of my inexperience. I was returning to land as number two in a four-ship close echelon formation, via the standard four second 'pitch and break 'to separate each aircraft onto downwind for landing. The leader was our deployed CO, SQNLDR Trebilco, and I realised as I was coming around base on the approach turn that I was closing on him. I wasn't particularly concerned because I believed I was a safe distance behind him. As I flared for landing, his invisible wingtip vortex picked up my right wing and my Sabre flicked to 90 degrees of roll in about half a second. I instinctively applied a full boot of right rudder and right stick, and the wing flicked back up very quickly. But although not apparent to me at the time my wingtip had actually touched the concrete - and we later found a 10-metre scrape along the runway! Only 10mm lower and I would have ended my life in a ball of fire, tumbling end over end.

I just went ahead and landed normally and exited the runway behind Trebilco. On the rollout the tower called shakily something like: 'Are you okay, number 2?'. Equally shakily I replied that I was. They'd seen a sheet of sparks streaming behind my wingtip, and initially thought I was a 'goner', as did Number 3 behind me! After shutdown we all inspected my left wing. The Sabre's alloy wingtip fairing has steel fastening screws around it. The runway impact had partly abraded and flattened the tip fairing about 10mm, and the steel screws must have originated the sparks seen by the tower operator. An airframe fitter simply removed the fairing, and I watched as it was quickly repaired by hammering out the dent. It was a bit thinner, but the aircraft flew again on the next sortie. No report on the incident was ever submitted!

The Australian Squadron Board at Ubon
R Farquar via M Goodman

Fred Freeman, a senior pilot, spoke to me quietly afterward, saying 'You need to be aware that Trebilco likes to approach at slower than the recommended speed'. Apparently because of the 1000ft shorter Ubon runway, he was deliberately approaching to land about 10 knots slower than the recommended speed, requiring some aileron to correct the pre-stall wing roll. That was why I had closed up to his aircraft. And his slower speed in the landing flare generated a more powerful wingtip vortex that the slight crosswind then impacted under my right wing.

I learned a hard lesson from that and it's certainly the nearest I ever came to killing myself, but luck was with me, aided by my pretty fast instinctive response. I've since learned that human response rates peak at puberty and slowly decline from then. Fortunately, this decline is mostly masked by a growing maturity of judgement - perhaps well-expressed in the aphorism: 'there are old fighter pilots and there are bold fighter pilots- but there are NO old, bold fighter pilots!'

Breakfast of Champions

From Gerald Mapstone

When at SAR Flight in Williamtown, we performed a rescue and delivered the patient to a Sydney hospital. We went to Mascot to refuel and while we were there a catering van arrived and asked if we were RAAF. He then proceeded to give us some really fine meals along with cutlery etc, so we had a lovely breakfast.

As I was holding the rotor blade, a well-dressed flight steward came and asked if we had seen the meals for the Deputy Prime Minister. We started up and left rather hurriedly!

Lessons of Gallipoli, and Freedom's Greatest Strength

From Bryn Evans

On Anzac day this year I happened to be on a cruise (*Regent SS Navigator*) with my wife Jean (ex-WRAF) in the Mediterranean, although not stopping at a Turkish port. I was struck by the worldwide reach across the generations of Anzac's significance. At a Remembrance function held on the ship, attended by service veterans, other passengers and crew members from Australia, New Zealand, UK, Canada and the USA, the ship's Cruise Director, Ray Solaire, gave a brief but very moving speech, its transcript as follows:

> *The impact of the Gallipoli Campaign extended far beyond the battlefields. For Australia and New Zealand, the campaign has become a defining moment in their national identities, with the anniversary of the landings at Anzac Cove, April 25, commemorated each year as Anzac Day.*
>
> *In Turkey the campaign is remembered as a great victory against the Allied forces and defining moment in Turkey's history. For the United Kingdom and other Allied Nations, Gallipoli represents a tragic loss of life and a sobering reminder of the human cost of war. The campaign also had significant political consequences, with the failure at Gallipoli contributing to Churchill's resignation and the fall of the British Government.*
>
> *Today the Helles Memorial and others at Gallipoli stand as powerful symbols of remembrance and reconciliation. Each year thousands of visitors from around the world come to pay their respects to the fallen, and to reflect on the lessons of the campaign.*
>
> *This year is the 110th Anniversary of the landings at Gallipoli, so it is more important than ever to keep the memory of the campaign alive, and to honour the sacrifices of those who fought and died there. The Helles Memorial, with its towering obelisk and*

walls of names, serves as a constant reminder of the human cost of war, and the importance of working towards a future of peace and understanding.
If you stand at the Helles Memorial, and gaze out across the tranquil waters of the Dardanelles, then remember the courage and sacrifice of those who fought and died on those shores over a century ago. Let their memory inspire us to build a future of peace, understanding, and hope, so that their sacrifices may noy have been in vain.

Ray Solaire has had a career of over fifty years on blue ribbon cruise liners such as Cunard, Silversea and Regent, in which he has met many famous celebrities, and prominent world leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Vladimir Putin. Ray's one regret of some twenty years ago is not pushing the latter overboard!

Leaving aside the opinions on the strategy and failure of the Gallipoli campaign, I believe it did show the populations of Allied nations the importance of individuals' spirit and will to fight for their way of life, and their country's freedom. This example of service and self-sacrifice is still recognised and remembered to this day.

During the Second World War countless millions of men and women, both in the armed forces and civilian life, found themselves in life or death situations with the odds stacked against them. In my new book, Escape, Survive – or Die (Pen & Sword Books UK), a collection of stories shows us the resilience and stoicism that we all need to face life's ultimate challenge. To stand against the increasing aggression and expansionism of authoritarian regimes and their dictators, we need that spirit of our past generations. When put to the test, the most powerful strength of democratic countries, is the determination and self-sacrifice of ordinary individuals to endure and fight for their families, their country and freedom.