SITREP

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION NSW - NEWS AND VIEWS

Excerpt from 'My Life in the WAAAF: 1942-1945'

From Chris Harnath; By Beryl Mainon, aka 106683 ACW Walker B

Chapter 6
131 Radar Station

Fortunately, Jan and Lorna were Sydney girls so knew their way about the city - I just tagged along. I remember it was a beautiful sunny day as we walked along the streets of Point Piper. I also vividly remember seeing seaplanes moored on Rose Bay - which at that time was the terminal for the airline BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) a forerunner of today's British Airways. At that time their planes were all flying boats, these were possibly Sunderlands, which came in via the Gulf of Carpentaria where they refuelled at Karumba. My pulse raced a little at the sight of these aircraft as it still does today. To a country girl of that era these things were such a new experience and always full of wonder.

Finally, we were at the Point Piper Headquarters and we eagerly questioned the WAAAF clerks to reveal to us where our respective stations were. However, they all insisted they did not know and presently we were ushered into a room and into the presence of an officer. Here I learned for the first time that 131 Radar was at Ash Island. Immediately my imagination ran wild. ASH ISLAND! I lost interest in where the others were going - I was off to "Ash Island": lovely tropical isle, beautiful beaches, clear blue surf, waving palm trees, our aircraft filling the skies as they flew overhead, going to and from their missions. We operators on duty in our darkened rooms carefully guiding them and trying our best to protect them - all the while aware that we could be under attack ourselves. Here I could really play my part in winning the war and perhaps even change the course of history.

Suddenly I was brought back to earth with a jolt when some documents were thrust into my hand - my travel documents. I read "Take the train to Newcastle. "NEWCASTLE - just 50 miles north of Gosford, there must be some mistake! "No, that is right - you will be met at Newcastle station and taken the rest of your journey by motor vehicle." Cruel fate!!

We operators were then dismissed from the presence of the Security Officer and shown to another room. There I met for the first time, Clerk General Jean Sefton - who was on her first posting after Rookies and she too was being sent to 131 Radar. Thus began a lasting friendship, for we are still good friends who enjoy to get together to talk about old times. I do not recall where the other girls were sent but Jean and I made our way to Central Station where, after a visit to the RTO (Rail Transport Officer) we boarded a train for Newcastle. We stopped for a couple of minutes at the Gosford station en-route, but I had no way of contacting my family to tell them I was going north.

When we arrived at Newcastle it was already dark. We alighted with all our gear, to stand on the platform like two lost sheep. The date was 7th June 1943.

Suddenly we were greeted by a happy, broadly smiling WAAAF, dressed in jeans and wearing a peaked cap. "Are you going to Ash Island loves - then come along with me". So, we met DMT (Driver Motor Transport) Edith Barker, starting another friendship that has endured through the

years. Picking up our things we followed her into the street where we found a khaki painted utility, with a canvas cover over the back. We loaded our bags and clambered aboard, sitting on the narrow wooden benches which ran along each side. This, it transpired, was the entire transport fleet for the whole unit. Off we drove into the night, not quite knowing where we were headed or what to expect on arrival, but hopeful that at the end there would be a meal and a bed, for it had been rather a tiring day. Out through the city we drove, following the tram tracks till they terminated at Mayfield - still further on into what appeared, in the darkness of the night, more open country. Suddenly the vehicle turned right, crossed a wooden bridge on to a dirt road. A further half mile and we drove through an open wooden gate before coming to a halt. We seemed to be in the midst of a farm settlement of scattered tin sheds or huts and we could even sense horses wandering around. This is an RAAF Station?

However, as we clambered to the ground, we were met by ASO (Assistant Section Officer) Mary Cowan and after checking in were shown to our quarters and advised we could obtain a meal at the mess. As these units were so small there was no spare accommodation. It seemed we had arrived earlier than expected and some of the operators here who had been posted had not yet departed. For two or three days I was co-owner of a bed with Mercia "Bing" Crosby. She was on midnight shift so when she went to work, I went to bed and when she returned at 6 am, I had to move out. The only good point about this arrangement was that we always got into a warm bed, but I think we were both pleased when she finally left.

WAAF Quarters

Mary Cowan was the only female officer on the unit and we also had one male officer who was the Commanding Officer. It must have been a very lonely life for them. Mary was at Ash Island for the entire 13 months of my posting though the position of CO did change many times. I remember COs Drummond, Ling and Mann. Funny how things change with the passing of the years. In those days Mary was always "Madam" and we held her and other officers in awe, thinking that as an officer they knew everything. I know I for one did all within my power to obey the rules and keep out of trouble. Now, all those years down the track, "Madam" is Mary and is included in all our get togethers as one of the girls. She now lives in retirement in Gosford and I like to call in for a chat when I am up that way. Interesting now to talk to some of these women who were thrust abruptly into officer uniform - to learn of their fears, uncertainties and doubts at the time.

Ash Island is situated in the Hunter River near Hexham. The island was completely fringed by mangrove swamps, inhabited by mud crabs. When 131 Radar Station was established there in early 1943, all personnel lived in tents with wooden floors, out in one of the fields. Things were very primitive and very muddy. By the time I arrived in June 1943 more permanent buildings had been erected. One long corrugated iron but provided living quarters for the 26 WAAAF with a similar one opposite for the 20 RAAF. A shower room ran across one end of each hut. Toilet blocks were some distance away. Another iron but served as a communal recreation but and yet another as a mess and kitchen. Our one WAAAF officer and the one RAAF officer each had their own self-contained quarters in close proximity to our huts. Orderly room was another small unit, run by the WAAAF officer as Adjutant and one WAAAF clerk - the position filled by Jean Sefton, who had arrived with me. Another small room served as a store and Medical Section. The unit transport was one small utility. There were no compounds and the farm animals were allowed,

indeed encouraged to wander around our area, as part of our camouflage. We had a Medical Orderly to attend to minor complaints while anything of a more serious nature meant a trip by tender to Rathmines Base. Whenever new clothing was needed or booster injections due one notified orderly room. When sufficient requests were recorded, a trip was organised to Rathmines. If there was any spare room on the tender one might hitch a ride, in the hope of gaining a "Joy Flight" at Rathmines. It was under these circumstances that I had my first flight ever. I managed to talk myself aboard a Catalina Flying Boat and once airborne found I was on a training flight with a pilot doing a "Conversion Course". We spent the next hour doing circuits and bumps. Was quite an exciting experience for each time we hit water it sprayed right up over the mid-ships blister in which I was sitting. The other times we were allowed the use of the tender was it sufficient of us desired to attend a Church service in town on a Sunday. As I remember the Army trucks brought all our food supplies.

L-R: Joan Bale, Beryl Walker, Mary Bale, Gordon Lee (Mary and Gordon later married)

Being such a small unit there was complete integration and it worked very well. We worked together, ate together, spent our off-duty time together and what a harmonious unit we had. All credit to those who vetted the personnel for these units. Only once during my time there did a couple of square pegs come on strength. Miraculously, they were posted out again in a very short time. The Radar unit itself was situated about a mile from the living quarters and only the Radar personnel and the guards were allowed to make that trip. On day shifts we walked the distance through the cow paddocks but for the 6 am and the midnight change overs, one of the DMTs was dragged from their bed to provide transport.

While water was laid on to our but for washing, hot water certainly was not. To fill this need we were provided with an old-fashioned wood copper- at the rear of the hut. This was always kept filled and fuelled by the off-duty crews, so that hot water was always available. To take a shower was quite an experience. One filled a bucket from the copper - cooled the water to the required temperature -placed the bucket on a shelf in the shower cubicle - quickly undressed and with one hand operated the pump handle to and fro while lathering with the other hand; quite a trick of co-ordination. One had to judge when to stop lathering to allow enough water to be left in the bucket for the final rinse. The only thing we did not have to do was to chop our own wood. A local farmer had that contract and he always kept us well supplied. Our toilet block was a handsome structure of galvanised iron, standing some distance from the living quarters. It comprised 6 cubicles and was of the pan variety, with flaps at the rear for removal. The pans were changed frequently by a couple of cheerful chaps who were always thoughtful enough to give fair warning before removing a pan.

As the total number of personnel on this unit was only about 47 and because of the shift requirements, one crew being on duty, one crew sleeping and one crew being on leave, there were never sufficient people available at any one time for parades etc. As a result, it had become customary on pay day for people to just wander over to orderly room at random to collect their pay. One day our CO decided this had become all too sloppy and that we would dress correctly in work attire and present ourselves for a pay parade. We lined up, suitably dressed, all 15 of us, outside Orderly Room. The CO called us to order and started to tell us about our many misdemeanours. At this stage, a wiley old draught horse came wandering along looking for a drink. He sniffed the fresh water in the copper at the rear of the nearby RAAF ablution block.

Without hesitation he took the handle of the lid in his mouth, dropped the lid to the ground with a clatter, thrust his head into the copper and began to drink as noisily as only a thirsty draught horse can do. The parade dissolved into hysterics and the poor CO lost all control. He ordered the SGT Mechanic, the senior NCO at hand, to take us on a five mile route march as punishment. We fell into step and marched correctly out of sight, over the bridge and along the highway towards the Hexham pub. Here the SGT called a halt and we spent the next hour or so sitting in the shade chatting, while a few of the troops downed a cool ale or two. After an appropriate time, we fell back into line and marched back to camp - very chastened!

Returning to Ash Island after leave, one took a train to Newcastle Station then a tram to the Mayfield terminus. Then followed a five mile walk to Hexham, a walk over the wooden road bridge and a further half mile to the camp. With only one vehicle for the use of the unit, transport for personnel did not have a high priority. Personnel on posting to and from had transport to the Newcastle Station, but at other times you made your own way. A lonely walk along a dark road, passing along the boundary fence of the Sandgate Cemetery for added effect, with little or no traffic. I know, I walked it many times alone late at night, returning from leave at my home in Gosford. Petrol rationing etc. kept vehicular traffic to a minimum and black-out or brown-out conditions meant people went out only when absolutely necessary. We accepted lifts from anyone who came by and was good enough to offer. These included Night Cart (Sanitary) collector, a hearse, a cattle truck and one night I even accepted a ride on the handlebars of the push bike of a middle-aged shift worker from the steel mills. Anything but face those five miles alone.

Our Mess was similar to most RAAF stations. Wooden trestle tables with long wooden bench seats along each side. Here airmen and airwomen used the same Mess and there was a small room at one end where the two officers dined. We had two cooks at the island and they shared the duties. Bertie was a very jovial little English gent and he did his best with the rations provided, to give us a variety of meals which we mostly enjoyed - plain but filling. Ernie on the other hand had only two recipes - cottage pie, which comprised tinned meat as a base with mashed potatoes on top, which he made in very large flat trays and which could only be eaten when covered with tomato sauce. For dessert he served boiled rice with stewed dried apricots. Nobody ever approached the mess with enthusiasm when he was on duty.

One night, while we girls were off enjoying ourselves in the recreation hut the off-duty boys raided our hut. They poured copious amounts of uncooked rice between our blankets - we did not have sheets - and set the legs of our folding beds in such a manner that when we sat on them on our return, they all collapsed. Once we had righted the legs and crawled into bed, we then found the rice. We always threatened to get back at them but we never did come up with a plan. When I told my mother of the incident on my next leave home, she was close to tears - all that wasted rice when the civilian population was unable to buy any. We would happily have given them our rations as well as Ernie to cook it.

Somehow it was discovered there was an old sand quarry situated well back in the bush, off the road to Raymond Terrace. This huge hole had filled with beautiful clear water, thus providing a wonderful swimming pool, surrounded by white sandy "beach". During summer it became a favourite spot for off duty personnel from our island. Some of us who lived fairly close had our pushbikes transported to the camp, while others were "scrounged" or old parts assembled, thus providing a basic pool of transport. Some personnel hitch hiked while occasionally we could coerce one of our drivers to do an "illegal" detour to drop us off or pick us up later. It was indeed a lovely secluded oasis, but perhaps we were a little foolhardy for the water was obviously hundreds of feet deep and its very seclusion was in itself a hazard in the case of emergency. However, we spent many hours there swimming and sunbaking.

There were thousands of troops stationed around the Newcastle area and each summer a combined swimming carnival was held at the Newcastle baths - each arm of the services competing against the others. One of the events was a bathing beauty contest and it was felt we should enter some contestants for this title. Four girls were chosen, Elva Noble and Noreen Stubbs who were both radar operators, Edith Barker who was a DMT and myself. One of the radar mechanics, Ray Ellicot, took us in hand with deportment lessons. I can remember parading around the mess hall with books balanced on our heads.

The winner - Beryl Walker, WAAAF

Clothing was in short supply because of rationing - bathing costumes being considered a luxury item were not being manufactured. So, it was a case of do it yourself. Mum made mine for me during a couple of my short leave periods and Noreen, who lived in Newcastle, brought in for me a pair of her sister's white high heeled shoes. The great day arrived and four nervous WAAAF joined all the other girls in parading before the judges, cheered on by those of our friends who were free to attend. The winner of the previous year - a member of the AWAS (Australian Women's Army Service) was again competing, so most bets were on her. Finally, the winner was announced - Number 10 - that was me! Great celebrations when we returned to camp and within days there appeared on our notice board a sketch of a reclining bathing beauty, with congratulations from the boys of Tomaree Radar Station.

Another diversion started by one CO was our vegetable garden. An area was dug over and divided into five long plots, each about a meter wide. Each crew was given a plot - marked by a painted wooden peg. We were provided with seeds and seedlings and were expected to spend some of our spare time tending and watering our plots. Unfortunately, "A" crew did not have any keen gardeners so we were usually well behind with results. We usually knew when there was to be an inspection so it was simply a matter of someone slipping out to the garden to exchange our marker peg with that of the crew which was on duty. I doubt that we really fooled the CO.

A-crew gardeners. L-R: Mary Bale, Joan Bale, Beryl Walker

There were two other radar units in the Newcastle area - each with different equipment and therefore varying roles. The one at Tomaree, because of its position atop steep cliffs, was manned only by RAAF, but the one at Swansea was manned by RAAF and WAAAF Our tasks were to watch for all aircraft approaching Newcastle, and Tomaree, again because of its position right on the coast, probably also plotted shipping. All radar units could plot direction and range but we had the extra advantage of being able to gauge height. This extra information was essential to the fighter aircraft stationed at nearby Williamtown base, if they were to intercept any approaching enemy aircraft.

Our equipment was GCI (Ground Controlled Interception) which had two cathode ray tubes - one giving the range (distance) and the other the bearing of the aircraft. The cathode ray tube was the forerunner of our present TV screen. We worked in a darkened room, one operator sitting in front of each tube. The range tube showed a green line across the centre which looked like a row of lawn viewed at eye level. An aircraft appeared as a thickening and slight lengthening of the "grass" and its distance away was ascertained by reading it against a measurement graph which

ran beneath the green line. One had to learn to judge the number of aircraft by the density of the thickening. The bearing tube, on the other hand, had a green line which traversed the tube in the same manner as the second hand of a clock. Round the edge of this tube were marked out the 360 degrees. As this line of light - which was relayed from the turning aerial outside - passed round it recorded the returning 'echo' of radio waves from any object they had encountered in their path. Thus mountains, tall buildings etc presented 'permanent echoes' on the screen and we had to learn to distinguish between these and moving objects such as planes. By the flicking of a switch, the operator on the range tube caused the echo to split and by a quick judgement of the ratio between the two images the height of the aircraft could be determined. One had to keep a constant vigil, for these images lasted only a few seconds as the aerial continued its turn. If the operator wished to concentrate on a particular sighting she could, through a series of bell signals, have the aerial reversed to and fro for a limited period.

When a plane was being tracked the two operators called out the range, bearing and height to the plotter. She was seated on a high stool in front of a large grid map, about four feet square. With a large clear plastic ruler affixed at the centre of the board she would swing to the bearing, measure the distance along the ruler and call off the grid reference. First, she identified the station by its code number, gave the time from the large wall clock above her head, then gave the grid reference to the person manning the phone at Fighter Sector at New Lambton. All this information was recorded in a logbook by yet another operator who was seated at a small desk with a shaded reading lamp aimed at her book. The fifth operator was taking her turn at sitting in the aerial box out in the paddock, turning the whole structure at a steady pace, changing direction or speed only at the direction of the bell signals from the operator inside the main building.

Once a new "plot" had been picked up and the information passed on it was given a plot number by Fighter Sector and if they knew the type of plane it was and where it was headed, we were advised. However, we had to continue to plot its course while it remained on our screen and if it passed within sight of our position we were expected to go outdoors and give a visual report - type of aircraft, direction of travel and estimated height. We took great pride in passing in perfect plots and picking up any slight change of direction of the flight.

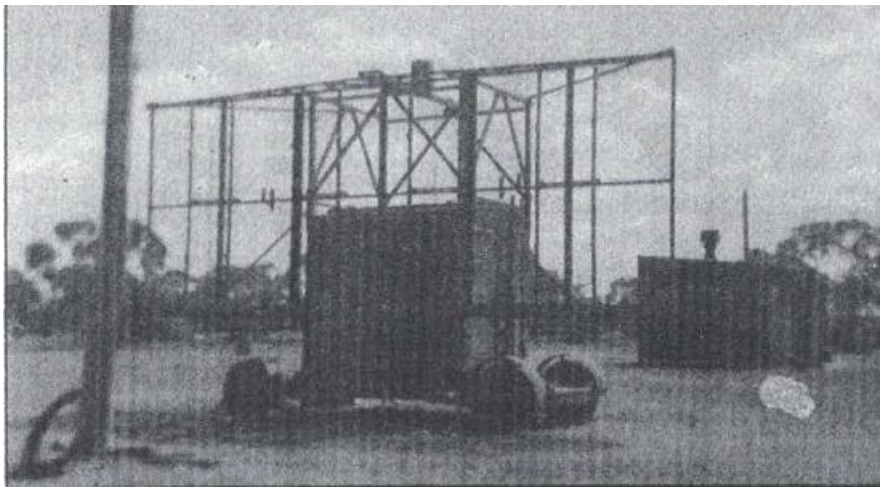
As the eye strain for those working on the tubes was very great, we changed positions every half hour, so that during a shift each operator took turns with each phase. If things were busy the mechanic made copious cups of cocoa or tea for all hands, otherwise the recorder could slip away from her desk to do the honours while the plotter covered for her. On long dog-watch nights we practised singing in harmony and serenaded those at Fighter Sector, who were also fighting sleep in the wee small hours. We made many friends at Fighter Sector by phone, though we never met.

Shifts were of six hours duration, round the clock. Each crew rotated six hours on then 18 hours off for three days, then a 24-hour break, then another three days on another shift, giving a 15 day work cycle. We were then granted three days leave off the station. We were also allowed to leave the station for local leave between shifts. Mary and Joan Bale often went home during these short breaks and several times took me along, which I greatly appreciated. They, along with Noreen Stubbs lived in Newcastle.

As the Radar unit was 'ON AIR' 24 hours a day, it meant the majority of the camp personnel were on shift work. Each crew comprised one RAAF Radar Mechanic and five Radar Operators (mostly WAAAF, but sometimes RAAF, who were awaiting or had just returned from northern postings). The person in charge of the operators was usually a Corporal, though 'A-crew', on which I served was the exception, as our head was an ACW. The mechanic of the crew had the overall authority, though in these situations it was a team effort and authority counted little. He was the one

completely responsible for the efficient working of the equipment and signed the log books etc. We were so keen on our crew that as we changed positions eyes remained fixed on the trace, as one person slid into the operators chair the other moved out.

There was much local flying activity at Williamtown Fighter Base and nearby Rathmines Flying Base. We kept a motherly eye on these planes doing their training flights and could always report there were 10 plus aircraft in the vicinity of either station. We learned quickly to identify the friendly steady beat of the 'Blip' given by Catalinas as we watched them do their "circuits and bumps" and their navigational exercises. I was paramount in bringing one lad safely back one night when he had strayed well off course and was trying to find his way into a blacked-out Sydney - taking it to be Newcastle. Despite repeated assurances from Rathmines that all their planes had returned, I insisted they had a lost one much further south, circling and obviously confused. Finally, action was taken and the wayward one headed north and landed safety at base. I received a message of thanks some weeks later from the crew. We got to know the regular civilian flights - few though they were by comparison with todays air traffic - and were able to give perfect tracks of them and also to give visuals as they passed overhead.



Aerial box in foreground, receiver hut with transmitter hut close by, generator shed at the rear.

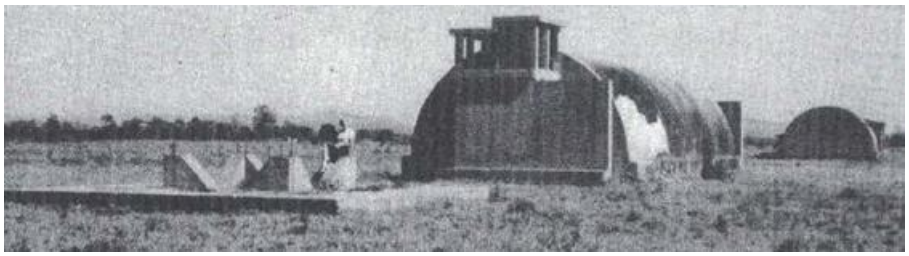
One night I plotted five plus aircraft well out to sea, moving at a steady speed and at zero height. Fighter Sector assured me I was plotting a storm. What a perfect track it was making, travelling at the speed of aircraft, a steady beat at about 1000 ft. I was sure we were to be bombed off the map but Fighter Sector still maintained it to be a storm. I have never known such frustration. I knew it was a flight of aircraft and nobody would listen to me. I passed plots every two minutes but still nobody took action. Finally, the "storm" disappeared over Sydney. Next morning the headlines in the press announced "Squadron of RAAF Sunderland Flying Boats arrived from U.K. last night and landed at Rose Bay - after a wave hopping flight". I smiled and felt good. I trust Fighter Sector had known and for security reasons had let me go on plotting a 'storm'.

On another occasion we picked up an unidentified aircraft heading towards Newcastle. Fighter Sector claimed to have no knowledge of the flight and requested we ignore all other traffic and give rapid plots. I was on the tube at the time and reported that the plane was indeed a Catalina - for they gave quite a distinctive 'blip'. However, as the plot continued unerringly in the direction of Newcastle an "Air Raid Yellow" alert was issued. In the event of such a warning we had to alert the CO at the main camp. This was duly done and within minutes he rushed through the door - gas mask hung around his neck and immediately threw the whole place into a panic. We learned later, that he had commandeered the vehicle from the camp and driven at breakneck speed the distance to our position. He even failed to heed the order from the guard to "Halt" as he turned into our area. The guard actually fired off a round over the roof of the utility.

This particular CO was a technical man - in other words he had completed some or all of the mechanics course and so was permitted inside the "doover". Once inside he started issuing orders for me to give rapid plots - something I had already been doing for sometime. I was still

reporting that the plane was a Catalina but still nobody at the other end of the line believed me - all Catalinas had returned to Rathmines I was told. The CO watching the tube over my shoulder berated the mechanic about the quality of the reception and was making suggestions for improvement. Meantime we continued to pass plots and the tension was mounting. Suddenly the CO decided to take matters into his own hands and, pulling a rack from the back of the equipment, called for some new radio valves. Of course, we immediately went off air and our plotting ceased. Fighter Sector calling for more plots, us reporting we were off air, the CO installing new valves, and we would be back on air again for a few minutes. He would then decide on some other course of action and our trace would again disappear. Such a debacle. Finally, our enemy aircraft landed at Rathmines - it was indeed a Catalina returning late from navigational exercises - and the CO returned to his quarters. We then and there resolved if we ever again had a Yellow or Red alert, we would either fail to notify the CO or we would lock the doors so that he could not enter.

Original equipment at the Island was a mobile GCI housed in small prefabricated huts, one containing the receiver in which we operators worked and the other, a short distance away, contained the transmitter. Yet another shed further along contained a diesel generator for emergency power. The aerial, atop a mobile trailer and hand turned by an operator seated inside, was a short distance from the receiver room.



Remains of concrete igloos, 1980
Aerial base in foreground

In late 1943 or early 1944, two large concrete igloo buildings were finally completed, having been constructed by CCC (Civil Construction Corps) and new equipment was installed. This equipment, as I remember, was identical to that which we had been using. The mobile unit was then packed up and removed from the site. We had a great deal more room in our new quarters and I guess they would have given a little more protection in the event of an air attack. The time taken in construction was rather farcical. These two structures still stand in the fields of Ash Island today, the only reminder that it was once the site of a busy though small RAAF station.

During my time at the island many personnel came and went, including a group of WAAAF operators who were sent to Townsville - they were amongst the first girls to be sent so far north. Unfortunately, only those girls who were over 21 were chosen for that posting, so I did not qualify. Eventually my turn came for posting. I was summoned to Orderly Room one day and informed I was being sent to 2 OTU (Operational Training Unit) Mildura - with attachment (temporary position) for one month to CFS (Central Flying School) Parkes, enroute. What a strange posting; what was I do to in Parkes for one month?

I was indeed sad to be moving on but perhaps new exciting experiences lay ahead and certainly I would be seeing new places. I had not, at this stage been outside New South Wales. I packed my bags, obtained my clearance and was driven to Newcastle railway station to begin the next phase of my Service life. Life on a small Radar station was a wonderful experience. I spent part of my Service life on very large stations such as Bradfield Park, Parkes and Mildura, but my 13 months spent on Ash Island stand out in my mind as the happiest days of my Service and many friendships forged there are still strong today.

RAAF C-130s Notch up 65 Years of Service

From Col Coyne, President 37SQN (RAAF) Assn, C-130E Loadmaster 1981-1990

On 8 September 2023, the 37SQN (RAAF) Association hosted an event at the Clarendon Tavern, opposite RAAF Richmond, to celebrate the Air Force's 65th continuous year of C-130 Hercules operations. We had approximately 160 current and former members attend the function including AIRMSHL (Ret'd) Warren McDonald, former CDRALG and DCAF; CDRAMG AIRCDRE Brad Clarke; OC 84WG and former CO 37SQN, GPCAPT Matt Cooper; and current CO 37 SQN, WGCDR Charlie Freebairn.

Former 36 and 37SQN COs who attended

From Lockheed Martin: "To say, without fear of contradiction, the venerable C-130 Hercules is one of the most versatile, impressive, functional and important medium lift cargo aircraft in aviation history still does not do justice to this phenomenal aircraft."

Introduced in the USAF in 1956, Australia became the first international customer to operate the C-130 Hercules, with the first C-130A, A97-205 arriving at RAAF Richmond NSW on 8 December 1958 to be operated by No 36 Squadron. Initially the 12 x C-130As arrived without the external fuel tanks.

Another unique feature of the C-130A was the Forward Cargo Door. These Forward Cargo Doors were subsequently sealed after several incidents on USAF C-130As where the door came open in flight, resulting in the loss of life of the passengers seated in the door area.

The 36SQN C-130As commenced war-like operations in 1962, airlifting troops and equipment from Singapore to Borneo at the onset of Konfrontasi between Malaya and Indonesia, with support flights continuing through until 1967. In the meantime, the Vietnam war commitment required scheduled troop and equipment flights to Vietnam and medical evacuation of injured and KIA personnel from Vietnam back to Australia. Due to Konfrontasi, Indonesia would not allow Australian military aircraft to transit through their airspace, necessitating the A model Hercules to transit to and from Malaya via Pearce and Cocos Island each way.

In 1966 No 37 Squadron was re-established at RAAF Base Richmond to receive and fly the C-130E model Hercules with 12 aircraft arriving in 1966/67.

This model Hercules was more efficient and quieter than the A model, taking over the medical evacuation role from Vietnam to Australia in February 1967. The C-130E flew direct from Butterworth to Richmond.

The twelve 36SQN C-130A model Hercules were decommissioned in 1978, having

accumulated 148,063.6 flight hours over that 20 year period. They were replaced by 12 new C-130H model aircraft. In December 1978, C-130H A97-005 became the first RAAF C-130 to land at McMurdo base in Antarctica. Over the next 34 years, the C-130H was the tactical airlift platform for the ADF, undertaking cargo/troop movement, paratroop and airdrop capabilies.

The 37SQN C-130Es were replaced by 12 C-130J-30 'Super' Hercules with the aircraft being received between 1999 and 2001. The E model Hercules were decommissioned in 2000, having accumulated 307,007.9 flight hours over 34 years. Seven C-130Es were returned to Lockheed Martin, re-winged, fitted with -15 engines, Kestrall APU and glass cockpits, then sold to the Pakistani Air Force. Five are still flying to date, one was destroyed by fire after a crash landing during a training mission.

C-130H END OF ERA

November 2006 saw the 12 C-130H aircraft transferred to 37SQN when 36SQN relocated to RAAF Base Amberley in preparation to receive and fly the Boeing C-17A Globemaster III. 37SQN became a 'super unit', operating 12 C-130H and 12 C-130J-30 stretched Hercules, with over 600 aircrew, maintainers and support staff. The C-130Hs were decommissioned in November 2012 with a parade, flypast and 'End of Era' hangar bash, having accumulated 244,618.4 flight hours over 34 years. 37SQN was back to 12 C-130J-30 aircraft. In January 2022 the RAAF C-130 fleet of Hercules surpassed 850,000 flight hours, an outstanding achievement not only by the aircrew who have flown the venerable Hercules since 1958 through until today, but also the maintenance personnel who have serviced and repaired those aircraft and the support staff who have contributed to the safe operations over all these years.

The J model Hercules, up until 15 August 2023, has accumulated 158,375.2 flight hours. By September this year, the 48 various models of C-130 operated by the Royal Australian Air Force have amassed in excess of 858,600 flight hours without loss of an airframe, an outstanding achievement of which everyone involved can be extremely proud. In July this year, the Federal Government announced the current fleet of 12 C-130J-30 aircraft will be replaced with 20 new C-130J-30 with deliveries commencing in 2027. If they have the same service life of 30 years, it will see the mighty Hercules reach its centennial year in 2054 and RAAF centennial of Herc operations in 2058.

Veterans' Health Week

This year, Veterans' Health Week (VHW) is being held from 8 to 15 October 2023 and is themed Mental Wellness Matters. The theme aims to promote good health and wellbeing in the everyday life of veterans and families, and shines a spotlight on the importance of mental health.

Ex-service and community organisations are encouraged to host an event for their local community in support of VHW. Events can be held two weeks before and two weeks after the official dates 8-15 October 2023.

Everything you need is available from the website, including the guidelines, application form, resource kitbag and more. We are also offering two general information sessions on all things Veterans' Health Week to support you to create an engaging event for your local veteran community. There will also be a drop-in session with DVA staff available to assist with questions and answers for interested organisations.

The Community Support Team
Lived Experience and Community Strategy
Mental and Social Health Programs Branch | Program Delivery Division
Department of Veterans' Affairs
W: www.dva.gov.au | W: www.openarms.gov.au
DVA General Enquiries: 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

Memories

From John Clarkson

Memories can do funny things, particularly after some considerable time! Around late in 1981, I was serving as a Sergeant Armourer at Amberley, and our Squadron Senior Engineering Officer had a chat to me and suggested I apply for a commission, as I had already exceeded my twenty years and was enjoying squadron life. We talked some more on the topic and after some more discussion, I began my application.

After assembling all the necessary support material, I began to seek the necessary interviews. So far, all seemed to go well. Then when I sought an interview with the OC Base, I found that the Group Captain who was the CO Base Squadron was the acting OC Base. A date and time were agreed and I turned up at his office hoping I was prepared.

It turned out he was an excellent interviewer. By chatting to me in a comfortable manner, he was trying to determine if we had served on the same squadron or base at similar times. During this time, we would agree on the merits of a certain squadron or the merits of a certain aircraft. A good example was when he mentioned the Sabre aircraft. Yes, he fondly remembered his time flying Sabres in Butterworth and Ubon, but I don't think at the same time as I was there. It became very apparent that he was quite senior to me in his service time, as although we both had fond memories of some of the classic RAAF aircraft, he was flying them probably when I was still in training. This type of discussion continued for well over forty minutes or more, yet he was able to ensure I felt comfortable in his presence. Yet, during this talk, he had the ability to discern my attitudes to a number of topics, be they current or from older memories.

Finally, he said he would start to round off this interview, or rather, as he described it, this interesting discussion. He told me that he was going to write some favourable comments on my application, but he said to me – with a slight tone of warning – *"I wish you well in your endeavours, but I do have some reservations. From our very enjoyable chat today, I do think that if you do succeed, you are not going to enjoy being a Commissioned Officer. In fact, I think you and I have the same problem, the Air Force we both love does not exist anymore".* With that, he wrote some favourable comments on my application, and bid me farewell.

So, what was the result? No, I was not successful, as I bombed the interview with the selection panel in Brisbane a few months later. Also, I noted that the Group Captain with whom I had a very enjoyable talk, retired from the Air Force about a year later.

27 August 1920 – AFC veteran won Australia's First Official Air Race

This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and www.ozatwar.com. The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch-Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to airforce.history@defence.gov.au

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P00449.004

On this day, William Harold Treloar - a former Lieutenant in the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) - won Australia's first official air race. One of four AFC veterans competing, the race was conducted in Victoria with the aircraft taking off from Serpentine, flying to St Kilda, circling above the spire of Christ Church before proceeding to the General Post Office in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.

A large crowed assembled at the 'winning post', the Melbourne Town Hall, to witness Treloar win in 1 hour, 15 minutes and 17 seconds with the second and third place getters arriving two minutes later, only eight seconds apart.

A motor mechanic who had previously served as a 2/Lt in the militia, Treloar joined the Mesopotamia Half Flight on 26 May 1915 and was forced down and captured by the Turks on 16 September 1915, spending the remainder of the war in captivity in Constantinople. Released on 21 November 1918, Treloar returned to Australia on 5 February 1919 and his appointment terminated on 30 March that year.

One Time Exit from a Good Aircraft

From Phillip Frawley

Throughout my career, I have been asked on many occasions if I had ever ejected from an aircraft or in lighter terms, do I have the same number of take-offs and landings? The answer is yes I do, for aircraft that I was flying. The same cannot be said for other aircraft that I was not flying.

This story began when I was undergoing my second attempt at the lead in fighter course on the Macchi aircraft at No 2 Operational Conversion Unit based at RAAF Base Williamtown, New South Wales. During the course, the Squadron Leader in charge of the course decided that we should all complete a parachute course involving just one jump from a Caribou aircraft. I was not happy and vehemently opposed the idea. The Squadron Leader, a certain Ian Thompson (nicknamed Whale) proceeded to apply pressure at every opportunity and in the end used the younger and more junior members of my course, who agreed to do the jump, to embarrass me into agreeing to do it. At this time the Army's parachute training school was also based at Williamtown which made the organisation of the exercise quite easy.

On the day of the course, we were given training in all aspects of how to go about departing the aircraft, checking for a good parachute, coping with emergencies such as entanglement, and finally how to land in the water. The program was then outlined to us where three of us would exit the aircraft on each run and be picked up by work boats waiting in the water below us. Incidentally, the place where we were to jump was Nelson Bay, a resort town not far from the base. The aftermath of the jump would be a barbecue and beer on the shoreline for the survivors.

The training lasted all morning and following that, we climbed into the Caribou to set off for the dreaded jump. We were organised into four lots of three with Whale Thompson to go first followed by me then another member of the course. As we were boarding the aircraft I remarked to Whale Thompson that I might end up refusing to jump because it wasn't compulsory and the Defence Force law of the day reflected that. Whale Thompson turned to me and said "Frawley, I know the crew of the Caribou and they will make sure you jump ya bastard!". Unbeknownst to Mr Thompson, I actually did know the Caribou crew from my days as a C-130 Hercules pilot because they shared the same base and we often had drinks together there. So I set up a prank on Mr. Whale.

As the moment of truth approached the Caribou loadmaster opened the back door and ramp of the aircraft and made the first three stand and attach our static lines to the wire that ran the length of the aircraft. This would automatically open the parachute once the static line reached the end of its travel. So standing there I said to Mr Whale "Once your parachute opens turn around and give me a wave". He replied "righto". The green light for jump now flashed on and Mr. Whale proceeded to make his jump and as his parachute opened, he turned around only to see me waving from inside the Caribou and the back door and ramp closing while the aircraft flew away. Apparently, he thought that the whole course had decided not to jump and his descent into the water was marred by his realisation that he had been fooled.

The problem was that while that prank was very funny for all, we were now committed to making the jump as well. Unfortunately for me, that meant that I would be the next out of the aircraft and I would be picked up by the same boat that Mr. Whale was in, whereby I would be at his mercy. And for the jump, as I stood up and looked down, I noticed that the angle of the aircraft ramp was very steep and I hadn't anticipated that fact. That and the sight of the water, way below, caused me to freeze at the exit. So instead of the training exit of arms across the chest, feet together and small deliberate steps to exit the aircraft, a firm push in the middle of my

back from the loadmaster resulted in an exit that resembled that of a chicken being thrust into the same predicament with arms and legs flailing all over the place until the parachute opened.

I also distinctly remember the water seemingly rushing up at me until the parachute opened. That was a rush I never want to experience ever again.

De-Havilland Caribou

So now floating down from 2,000 feet all was quiet and actually pleasant. Then I became aware of someone screaming abuse, looking down I saw the pick-up boat approaching to pull me from the water and Mr. Whale pointing at me and yelling obscenities at me. Fortunately, the Army boys in control of the boat ignored Mr. Whales' insistence that I should be made to swim ashore. In the end, Squadron Leader Thompson saw the funny side of the whole thing and the remainder of the day was very pleasant. However, I never want to jump from a perfectly good aircraft again.

The Kabul Evacuation, 1928-29

From the Handley Page Assn Newsletter via Geoff Raebel

Most of you will have read of the chaotic scenes at Kabul's airport in 2021 as the Taliban seized control in Afghanistan. Although on a smaller scale than that recent airlift, the operation by the Royal Air Force in the 1920s to evacuate British and other nations' embassy staff and their families was, in its day, a major and hazardous operation. A Handley Page Hinaidi played a significant part.

In 1919 a Handley Page V/1500 carried out a long-range bombing raid on Kabul - but that's another story. In the winter of 1928/29 a Hinaidi was among a small fleet of aircraft sent into Afghanistan when an emergency evacuation had to be undertaken. In 1927 the Afghan king Amanullah Khan was trying to introduce western culture and values into a very conservative religious society. Perhaps not surprisingly various groups united in rebellion against the king.

By December 1928 things had become very dangerous around Kabul for the embassy staff of Britain and other countries. The senior British diplomat in Kabul was Sir Francis Humphrys and he alerted the RAF to the possibility of a need for evacuation of all embassy staff and business people, including those of other countries. There was no possibility of going overland to safety or of a military intervention, and so an airlift was the only option. A fleet of RAF aircraft was assembled, including the Hinaidi which was at the time located in Baghdad. Other aircraft came from various squadrons and comprised Vickers Victoria transports (eventually eight in total), 24 DH9As and two Westland Wapitis. The evacuation

The Hinaidi which participated in the airlift was J7745, the original prototype Hinaidi 1, which had been converted from a Hyderabad. For service in tropical conditions, it had been given an overall aluminium dope finish.

began on 23 December when a Victoria flew out 21 women and children and three DH9As were loaded with baggage.

The flight distance from Kabul to Peshawar in India (now Pakistan) was 160 miles, passing over and in-between the Hindu Kush mountains with peaks up to 10,000 feet. Kabul is 5,900 feet above sea level. There were severe winter conditions prevailing, with a likelihood of snow, and there was little in the way of navigation aids, just maps and a compass, and for much of the way an engine failure would be unthinkable. The Hinaidi began to take part on 29 December and made a total of eight sorties, the first of which had 11 passengers on board. Following its final sortie on 25 February 1929 it had evacuated 38 passengers and much baggage. (The Editor must confess that in his book Handley Page - A History, published in 2003, he attributed the 38 passengers to a single flight. Don't believe everything you read in secondary source material!).

The total number of people evacuated was 586, which included 23 British, in 86 sorties. Much of it included flight in freezing conditions and on occasions there was gunfire directed at them from the ground. One Victoria was written off following a crash landing due to fuel filter icing while inbound to Kabul. Five pilots were awarded the Air Force Cross, one of whom was Flt Lt Anderson, the pilot of the Hinaidi. The RAF received much deserved praise for carrying out a very successful operation, the first air evacuation on such a large scale. Hinaidi J7745 continued to serve with the Royal Air Force as part of the Heavy Transport Flight at Lahore until 1934. An added difficulty it had with the evacuation flights was that it was not equipped for night flying and a hurricane lamp had to be employed to illuminate the pilot's instruments for landing in the dark!

Search and Rescue (SAR) for Caribou VM-JML, August 1972

From Graham Christian, captain of rescue Iroquois A2-490, Rotary Wing Branch (and 9SQN Association)

PREAMBLE: This account was written following a request from a relative of survivor Patrick Tau Gau, for the 50th Anniversary Memorial of the accident. It was written in consultation with Tony Lea, Ron Bishop, Chris Young, Michael O'Loghlen, Stan Flack, Raymond "Mongo" Morrison, Neville Pratt and Ken Tanswell. Ken Tanswell passed away in February 2023.

On 3rd August 1972 a detachment from No 5 Squadron RAAF Base Fairbairn ACT was sent to Goroka in the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Highlands to support a mapping survey by the Army. At the beginning of this detachment two Iroquois were deployed to Lake Kopiago (just east of Telefomin in the Central Ranges west PNG) to recover two damaged 9 Squadron Iroquois to Wewak. After completing that task, they rejoined the survey support detachment based at the tent camp on the western side of Goroka airstrip.

Lifting the stripped fuselage of a 9SQN Iroquois at Lake Kopiago

On the afternoon of 28th August 1972 Caribou VM-JML (A4-233) carrying 25 PNG Army Cadets was reported missing enroute from Lae to Port Moresby. Late that day Search and Rescue response was activated by the Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC) at the PNG Defence Force Headquarters in Port Moresby. Under the command of

FLGOFF Tony Lea a detachment of two Bell Iroquois UH-1H helicopters (A2-487 and A2-490) from the 5SQN Detachment at Goroka, along with aircrew and ground crew was assigned SAR duties. Departing Goroka at first light on 29th August this Iroquois detachment commenced search operations in their assigned search areas between Lae and Wau.

Wau was the last known position of the Caribou before it was listed missing and due to the very changeable weather and low cloud base it was not known whether the aircraft had continued past Wau (toward Port Moresby) or turned back toward Lae. There was a small airstrip at Wau however it did not have sufficient jet fuel to support two Iroquois operating from dawn till dusk, so RCC directed the detachment to base out of Lae airport, about twenty minutes flight from Wau.

Search Headquarters advised that the Australian Army would base a Sioux (small observation helicopter) and small fixed wing aircraft at Wau to join the search, as they could use the available Avgas fuel supply (for piston engine aircraft). As time progressed some Avtur supplies in 44 gallon (200ltr) drums were flown into Wau by Caribou to allow the Iroquois to refuel and extend their area of operation. Several other aircraft were involved in the search, including Caribou (from a permanent detachment based in Port Moresby), a C-130 Hercules transport and a long range P-3 Orion maritime surveillance aircraft. The Orion searched throughout the first night hoping to pick up radio signals from the Caribou, or from survivors. It was a huge team effort with a large geographic area to be searched. RCC produced grid maps and distributed them to the various search aircraft to ensure all areas were searched in an efficient and methodical manner. (As an aside, there have been some misrepresentations by individuals about how various elements were deployed, largely due to those personnel being unaware how large-scale search resources are efficiently managed and coordinated, to safely ensure the earliest result – and not end up with a secondary SAR!).

During the search phase the two Iroquois would depart Lae at dawn, completing an allocated search area prior to arriving at Wau to refuel and would return to Lae at last light. Most of the Iroquois aircrew had extensive helicopter flying experience, including recent intensive

operational flying in the Vietnam War. The flying conducted during the rescue in particular, was largely successful due to the experience of those crew and their ability to work as a team in what were very demanding conditions.

A2-487 at village near Garaina– seeking witness reports - had a Caribou flown over?

As the search progressed both Iroquois conducted methodical searches between Lae and Wau along the possible tracks the Caribou may have flown. We had local Kiaps (Australian patrol officers / district administrators) onboard to assist, asking villagers in remote settlements in the highlands if they had seen or heard a Caribou fly over. In general, most villagers were shy, but curious enough to come for a closer look after the helicopter had landed. Some of the more remote villages had very little contact with the outside world and outsiders were not always welcome. On one occasion as we approached to land near an isolated village, we were met with a salvo of arrows fired at us, all fortunately falling just short of the aircraft – so we gave that one a miss! Gathering reports of where the Caribou had flown (and where it had not) it was determined the Caribou had most probably continued beyond Wau, passing through the Kudjeru Gap in the high ranges toward Port Moresby. It was later confirmed this was in fact where the Caribou had flown and upon encountering increasingly low cloud and poor visibility the pilot tried to turn back toward Lae; unfortunately, unable to turn tightly enough nor outclimb the rising terrain the Caribou clipped a ridgeline and crashed into thick jungle.

On the afternoon of 31st August 1972, an Army Sioux helicopter piloted by Terry Hayes reported sighting some cadets walking along a ravine (the Kopera River). Low on fuel Hayes was then replaced by Ian Sinnott, piloting an Army Pilatus Porter. Tony Lea (captain of A2-487) refuelled at Wau and proceeded to the area with guidance to the exact location of the survivors being provided by Ian Sinnott, who then departed for Wau. I was captain of A2-490 and after refuelling at Wau and having a maintenance problem rectified, proceeded to the rescue area about a half hour after Tony.

The trees in the rescue area were up to 300ft (90m) high and with a winch cable length of around 270ft (82m) maximum, required the rescue helicopters to descend between the tree tops and below the overhanging canopy to enable the winch cable to reach the ground. Tony lowered one of his crewmen (Ken Tanswell) and a local Kiap by winch to assist in the recovery of the survivors in the ravine. Ken was equipped with a PRC-90 (transmitter/receiver) to permit two-way communication with the rescue Iroquois. This was late in the afternoon with failing light, increasing rain and unfavourable wind making the rescue a very demanding operation. This, combined with a high-density altitude (around 8,000ft) saw the Iroquois operating at its maximum performance limits which, without a very experienced crew working as a team, could have had dire consequences. Tony winched out three survivors from the ravine initially then, following guidance provided by one of the survivors (Patrick Tau Gau) retraced their path to the site of the crashed Caribou, some distance away.

Quote from Tony: *"Patrick was very aware and capable…he informed me the Caribou had crashed back upstream and insisted we should try to find it as he'd left one cadet behind due to injuries…his situational awareness was brilliant as he guided us back up the very narrow valley and a few tributaries. We would never have found the Caribou without Patrick's guidance – the Caribou had cart-wheeled into the trees and the heavy canopy had returned to cover the crash site, with very little damage or evidence to show the tragedy underneath the foliage".*

At the crash site Tony lowered his observer (Stan Flack) by winch who, equipped with a PRC-90, searched the site for survivors. As Tony moved from the ravine to the crash site, I moved 490 in and winched up Ken and the fourth and final survivor from the ravine. Having lowered Stan to the crash site and low on fuel, Tony departed in 487 to take the three survivors to Bulolo and to refuel. Replacing Tony over the crash site in Iroquois 490, my crewman Ray "Mongo" Morrison winched crewman Ken Tanswell with a Stokes Litter (stretcher) down to recover the last survivor.

Quote from Mongo: *"I advised Graham the winch cable was not long enough and we had to get lower…all crew called clearances as we gradually descended below the canopy…settling into a new hover with the nose of the aircraft virtually sitting in the branches and only minimal (5-10ft?) clearance in places around the main and tail rotors…with only a few turns of cable left on the winch drum we finally managed to get Ken onto the ground"*.

Ken and Stan located the last survivor and checked the wreckage and surrounding areas confirming there were no other survivors. Weather conditions and the light continued to deteriorate, with the jungle cover so thick that, at no time during the rescue, was I able to see the crashed Caribou. Relying heavily on my expert crew for clearance we had to hold in the hover for more than half an hour. We winched out the last survivor in the Stokes Litter and departed, leaving Stan Flack and Ken Tanswell on the ground to be recovered by Tony, who had just arrived back on-site in 487.

Quote from Stan Flack regarding his experience being winched down to the crash site: *"Dropping into a hole in the jungle when it was raining, dark, and windy, not having a clue of what lay ahead…on the ground under the aircraft was dangerous as the down wash was breaking limbs off the trees. This combined with the lack of light, a steep slope and very wet layer on the ground made it 'interesting'. For my first time winch it was a very fast wake-up call".*

Departing the crash site in 490 with the last two survivors on board, it was almost dark and we needed the searchlight to help define the treetops as we flew toward Wau, some fifteen minutes flight away - with the twenty-minute fuel warning light already illuminated. Considering the severity of injuries to the last survivor we requested approval to refuel at Wau and fly on to Lae "special night VFR" where there were better medical facilities than in Bulolo. This request was quite correctly denied by HQ as being too risky, considering the hazardous terrain and prevailing bad weather between Wau and Lae.

A2-490 at Bulolo Golf Course on the morning after rescue

We landed at Wau airstrip after dark and carried out a running refuel from 44 gallon drums of Avtur (engine and rotors turning while refueling). We then flew to Bulolo (about 20km north of Wau) having arranged for a group of cars to shine their headlights onto the golf course near the hospital, so we could land and get the survivors there as quickly as possible. Tony Lea and his crew on 487 returned to Wau after dark where they stayed for the night, with Tony, Stan and Ken providing Search HQ an extensive debrief of the rescue and what they had witnessed at the crash site.

Our crew stayed overnight in the Bulolo hospital and next morning returned to Wau for fuel. Unfortunately, the last cadet rescued in the Stokes litter died the day following his rescue. On the day following the rescue (1st September) both Iroquois ferried Army engineers from Wau to the crash site and winched them down so they could prepare a helipad nearby and begin the recovery of those deceased - and later, to fly in RAAF crash investigators to determine the factors leading to the crash. Over the next few days both Iroquois and crews continued to provide support to those working at the crash site and eventually recover the deceased to Wau.

On 3rd September 487 (crewed by myself, Chris Young and Ken Tanswell) was tasked to recover the engine and transmission of an Army Sioux (A1-734) that had crashed on 24th August at Ioma (200km SE of Lae). This was accomplished as a slung load to Popondetta, after which 487 and crew returned to Lae. On 4th September both Iroquois and crews relocated to Port Moresby where, on 5th September, they flew the deceased to their various villages for interment.

A2-490 on 2nd Sept 1972 at the newly cleared helipad, near the Caribou crash site

There were many people and aircraft involved in the Search for Caribou VM-JML. All who participated worked diligently to determine the Caribou's flight path after its last reported position before communication was lost, and to then coordinate a search in a large area of uncertainty. Considering the steep terrain and heavy jungle cover at the crash-site it was incredible that survivors were located and then rescued.

Crew of Caribou VM-JML (A4-233)
Captain: FLTLT Graham Thomas, Co-Pilot: PLTOFF Gregory Ebsary, Loadmaster: CPL Gary Power, Army Liaison Officer: Captain Robert Loftus. The crew, along with 20 cadets, perished in the crash.

<u>Crews who flew Rescue Operation 31st August 1972</u>
Iroquois One: A2-487 (three survivors rescued)
Captain: FLGOFF Tony Lea, Co-Pilot: PLTOFF Michael O'Loghlen, Crewmen: LAC Neville Pratt, Ken Tanswell, Observer: FSGT Stan Flack

Iroquois Two: A2-490 (two survivors rescued)
Captain: FLGOFF Graham Christian, Co-Pilot: FLGOFF Ron Bishop, Crewman: LAC Raymond Morrison; Observer: FLGOFF Chris Young

(Support Ground Engineers: FSGT Stan Flack, CPL Rob Gee, LAC Gordon Watt, plus one or two others whose names I cannot recall).

Recent photo of Tony Lea

Stan Flack and Graham Christian, Aug 2023

The five survivors who were rescued: Patrick Tau Gau, Joseph Fragi, Nicholas Fabila, Anthony Kolou and Chris Maraga. Having survived the crash, Nicholas Fabila died the day following his rescue.

Fifty years after the accident The Reverend (retired) Patrick Tau Gau and Joseph Fragi, a retired lawyer, are living in PNG. Chris Maraga became a Major in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and died in 2010 and Anthony Kolu died in 2018.

FOOTNOTE: On return to their base at RAAF Fairbairn in September 1972 all crew were recommended for formal recognition of their combined contributions during the rescue. I understand FSGT Flack and LAC Tanswell were highly recommended for valour awards. However a new Government, intent on replacing the Imperial Awards System in Australia, drastically reduced or suspended military awards until 1975, when Tony Lea and I were awarded AFC's. Regrettably, FSGT Flack and LAC Tanswell received no formal recognition for their critical and heroic efforts during the rescue of the survivors.

Book Review: 'The Flying Grocer' by Rupert Guinness

From John Clarkson

The true story of Keith Bennett D.F.C, his crew and a Dutch girl's letter that would change their war

This is what I can add from my memory of the book. First of all, this book nearly did not happen at all. It is mentioned above that Keith Bennett passed away at home in a Sydney suburb in 2003. However, when his son-in-law and family were going through his collections and other memorabilia, they found records and other stories that the family never even knew about. They knew that Keith had been a Lancaster pilot during the war, and had flown many hazardous missions, but this story nearly went unreported. So, to give a little background, which the book does early in the story, in 1944, the Germans were systematically starving the people of Holland, particularly those toward the western coastline. They were completely blocking all supply lines to these people.

So, with the help of the resistance movement, an idea was born. Why doesn't the RAF (and the RAAF) take some groceries and supplies in the bomb bay of a Lancaster and drop them near a village? With the help of the resistance, they formulated a plan. A Lancaster was modified to take several panniers of food in the bomb bay, instead of bomb racks and a flight plan was drawn. The flight would still be hazardous, even though the resistance was helping. After all, Holland was still an occupied country. Imagine flying a Lancaster low and slow toward a Dutch village with the bomb bay open! The book will reveal that Keith Bennett flew three of these missions, so I am not sure if other pilots flew any of these as well.

I shall add another review: <Review: <I>The Flying Grocer</I> by Rupert Guinness - Matilda (middlemiss.org)>

Some of this second review includes the following text:
Rupert Guinness had access to war diaries, service records and personal letters. He did a lot of research into the training of Bennett as a pilot in Australia and England, and he goes into great detail about all the aircraft specifications, which annoyingly he quotes in metric instead of Imperial which would have been in use then. He gathers a lot of opinions about Bennett from flying mates and family, but somehow his subject remains a shadowy figure. Amongst the letters is one from Jannie van Splunder, a Dutch girl who thanks Keith and his mate Murray for the carton of cigarettes to which he had attached their addresses in Australia and included it in the food drop near Ridderkerk, where

Jannie and her friend picked it up. She expresses her gratitude for her family and all the neighbourhood for the food which saved them from starvation. As a six year old I can remember standing on the corner of the Uddelstraat and Soestdyksekade in Den Haag with a group of silently crying neighbours, watching the Lancaster bombers dropping food parcels on the other side of Zuiderpark. My father was involved in the fair distribution of this life-saving food.

Jannie asks Bennett if she can send him anything as a Thank You, but he replies that her gratitude makes him feel the food drop makes some sort of amends for having been part of the bombing raids that destroyed Dresden. Their correspondence dwindles as both get on with their lives on opposite sides of the world.

In 1983 Bennett and his wife visit Jannie and her husband briefly. After Bennett's death Guinness visits Jannie and she shows him where the cigarette parcel was dropped, now a busy 4-lane highway. He had not been aware that the West of Holland had lost so many people in the Hunger winter of 1944-45 due to the appalling conditions and lack of food.

The book is also available through Amazon. <The Flying Grocer eBook : Guinness, Rupert: Amazon.com.au: Books> or at this link: <The Flying Grocer by Rupert Guinness - Penguin Books Australia>

Fighter Controllers Breaking New Ground

From https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events, By Flying Officer Matthew Edwards

In a first for the command and control community, two air surveillance operators have graduated as enlisted fighter controllers (EFC). Corporals Emily Smeaton and Baden Oakley completed the Air Battle Manager Basic Course at Surveillance and Control Training Unit (SACTU), RAAF Base Williamtown NSW, alongside officers.

First graduates of the Air Battle Manager, Fighter Controller, Enlisted Course, Corporal Baden Oakley and Corporal Emily Smeaton with their graduation certificates at RAAF Base Williamtown in NSW.
Photo: Sergeant Craig Barrett

In an effort to address growing workforce demands, Surveillance and Response Group is conducting a trial to understand how an enlisted air battle manager (ABM) category could complement the existing officer ABM workforce.

Over 14 weeks, the two EFCs were put to the test along with their fellow ABM course mates, applying their newly acquired skills through a series of simulated training events. Corporal Smeaton said she felt honoured to be a part of the trial was looking forward to continuing in her role at 2 Squadron. “We’ve only scratched the surface of this journey. I am excited to jump into the next challenge and begin my conversion onto a new platform, and gain an understanding of a different capability,” Corporal Smeaton said. Corporal Oakley hoped the pair's success in the trial would open more opportunities for the enlisted workforce. “It’s been great to be a part of this. By completing the ABM course, I hope it will make enlisted fighter controllers the norm," Corporal Oakley said.

The introduction of new and emerging capabilities, such as the AIR6500 series entailing integrated air and missile defence capabilities, and the creation of Defence Space Command continue to place demands on the skilled workforce, especially in the officer ABM community. Executive Officer Headquarters 42 Wing, and one of the architects of the EFC trial, Wing Commander Samuel Thorpe, said the initiative would enable flexibility by retaining experience while still meeting demand for the integrated force. “EFCs will have longer initial tours than the officers, with second tours a standard part of their progression. This increase in resourcefulness will reduce training overhead and increase crew throughput” Wing Commander Thorpe said. “EFCs will provide the stabilisation of experience that is eroding from the junior officer ABM workforce. They will reduce the churn and increase resilience in the experience base at the units they serve.” SACTU is set to train another two EFCs for 41 Wing over the coming 18 months as part of the EFC trial.

WWII Air Gunner Celebrates 100th Birthday

Reprinted with permission from CONTACT magazine

Squadron Leader Edward “Ted” McConchie (Ret’d) celebrated his 100th birthday with fellow service members from 100 Squadron at RAAF Base Point Cook in Victoria on July 6. Mr McConchie is a former wireless operator/air gunner in a Beaufort bomber aircraft in WW2 and served with 100 Squadron in Papua New Guinea during the war.

Squadron Leader Ted McConchie (Ret’d) smiles in front of a CAC CA-18 Mustang at RAAF Base Point Cook, Victoria.
Story by Flying Officer Rosetta Gigliotti. Photo by Leading Aircraftwoman Paris Rigney.

He was honoured with a private tour of air-worthy heritage aircraft in the 100 Squadron hangar, which included a Tiger Moth that he flew in during transits and training. On sighting the old bird, his eyes widened. “Charters Towers had a Tiger Moth,” he said. “We used it to taxi and commute to Townsville. The original Tiger Moth wings were fabric.” Commanding Officer 100 Squadron, Wing Commander Jason Easthope, enjoyed chatting about the squadron’s Tiger Moth in the hangar with Mr McConchie,

especially with reference to the wing material. "They still are fabric" WGCDR Easthope said. "This is an original and we only fly her on nice days with light winds." That was something Mr McConchie was delighted to hear.

He was cheered and applauded by Air Force personnel and members of the public at the interactive flying display of the 100 Squadron CAC CA-18 Mustang. "Although 100 Squadron showcases the rare flying machines of the past, this pales in significance compared to celebrating a WW2 veteran turning 100," Wing Commander Easthope said. "These dwindling opportunities are truly special moments." Mr McConchie cut his birthday cake, standing with members of 100 Squadron and was presented with a unit patch, coin and cap. An old photograph of Ted with his crew, pilot Tony Warden, wireless officer/air gunner Ken Davies and navigator John Snewin, taken in Bundaberg was proudly placed next to his cake.
Mr McConchie said it was "magnificent" celebrating his 100th birthday at the 100 Squadron hangar. He attributes his survival of the war to luck, given how many mates he lost during operations in Papua New Guinea in 1943-44. To them, he said, "Thanks for your friendship."
During a strike against the enemy at Rabaul, on December 14, 1943, Mr McConchie witnessed the bombing of a Beaufort A9-472, which killed its pilot and severely wounded its air gunner. Standing just a few metres away during the Japanese bomb attack, he said they were very lucky to still be here to tell the tale. Avoiding bombs aside, he shared his advice for a long and healthy life: "Keep moving and do what you can and hope luck stays with you."
Wing Commander Easthope said: "On modern operations, when we sit with our young aircrew, who may be anxious about going into combat, we talk about people like Ted who were courageous and tenacious." Mr McConchie operated the radio and had a daunting role sitting in the dorsal gun torrent, as air gunners were often the highest casualties in aircraft with a tail gun.

28 August 1916 - NSW Aviation School opened

This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and www.ozatwar.com. The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch-Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to airforce.history@defence.gov.au

The New South Wales government - apparently in a mixture of concern for the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) being centralised in Victoria and foreseeing a need for civil aviation after the War - set up the NSW School of Aviation on Ham Common at Richmond, outside of Sydney (the site of the present RAAF Base Richmond).

AN WAR MEMORIAL

The government purchased four Curtiss Jenny trainers from the USA and two Caudrons from Europe as well as funding and building a large hangar which survived until the 1980s. The School was officially opened by the NSW Governor, Sir Gerald Strickland, on this day; the first course commenced shortly thereafter and lasted 12 weeks.

1st Course, Richmond State Aviation School - Opening Day celebrations, 28 August 1916
Picture from the Nigel LOVE Photo Collection

Back Row [L to Centre] Students:
Nigel LOVE - flew 190 hours over the front with 3rd SQN AFC (3AFC);
Garnsey POTTS - briefly in 3AFC, invalided out due to sickness, thence instructing in England;
William L. KING - joined 3AFC but crashed on a ferry flight with serious injuries, invalided to Australia;
Irving SUTHERLAND – RNAS 10SQN, wounded in action;
Alan WEAVER - joined 4AFC but soon seriously injured in a training accident;
Centre - Chief Instructor Billy STUTT - Seen in profile, without cap. Formerly a famous British test pilot - lost without trace in Bass Strait during the first North-to-South crossing by air in 1920;

Thence Students [Centre to R, Back Row]:
Augustus WOODWARD-GREGORY- flew with 52SQN RAF, wounded in action, French Croix de Guerre;
Jack WEINGARTH - flew 151 missions over the lines 4AFC Sopwith Camels, thence instructing duties in England - later died instructing in a post-war training flight, 4 Feb 1919;
Jack FAVIELL - training and administration duties in England;
Edgar COLEMAN - joined RNAS, but dogged by illness and did not fly in combat;
Robert L. CLARK - two months' combat with 2AFC, injured in an SE5A landing accident, thence instructing in England; died in WW2 as a civilian internee of the Japanese, when the Japanese POW ship Montevideo Maru was torpedoed by submarine USS Sturgeon on 1 July 1942;
Leslie SAMPSON - 4AFC but suffered several accidents flying Camels and was grounded;
Roy SMALLWOOD - combat with 4AFC for four months, shot down by German anti-aircraft fire, but survived;
Leonard WEBBER - left Richmond course but later saw action in Belgium;
Charles DAGG - RNAS seaplane pilot, awarded Air Force Cross after he survived a wreck in the Mediterranean, died in WW2 serving in the RAF;

Front Row Students [L to R]:
Norman CLARK - served with 3AFC for 9 months, pilot and Signals Officer, thence instructor in England, promoted to Captain and Flight Commander;
Cecil R. BURTON - 4AFC for two months, but invalided to England with illness;
Vernon BURGESS - 9SQN RFC and Flight Commander with 7SQN RFC on RE8s, shot down and wounded after six months in action, thence instruction duties;
Michael CLEARY - served with 62SQN RFC, killed in action flying a Bristol Fighter, 28 March 1918 near Villers-Bretonneux, France;
Hector K. TIDDY - killed on a practice flight in France, 1917, 7SQN RFC;
D. Reginald WILLIAMS - retained as an instructor at Richmond, then joined the AFC in England, but only employed ferrying new aircraft to France, due to medical restrictions.

The 24 student-pilots in the first course were selected from amongst 413 applicants. The roof of the lone Richmond hangar, bedecked with flags, can be seen behind the Curtis 'Jenny' two-seat training aircraft. The most notable graduates from the course were Lieutenant Jack Henry

Weingarth and Lieutenant Roy George Smallwood, both to distinguish themselves with the 4th Squadron AFC in France. The School remained in operation until 1919.

From the Ground Up - Story of the RAAF Apprentices

From John Clarkson

Some time ago, I borrowed a very good book from our local library. In fact, they had to obtain it from the State Library in order for me to read it. It is called, "From the Ground Up" and it was written by Christopher Coulthard-Clark way back in 1997. It was a very informative book about the RAAF Technical Training programme, and gave a very detailed description of the RAAF Apprenticeship scheme, which went from 1948 until 1993.

When the scheme closed, there was great anger from many of the ex-apprentices, but the author of this book gave a good explanation of why it was closed. Also, in the rear of the book, there is a complete list of EVERY apprentice who graduated from the scheme, listed by intake number, be they engineering apprentices, Radio Apprentices, JEAT apprentices, etc.

I am led to believe that many of you may have already purchased your own copy, whereas I waited a long time before making my decision to buy one *(yes, it is called procrastination)*. Anyway, I spent a long time after returning the book trying to remember many of the details, so I have now bought my own copy. The book is actually out of print, but I managed to find one and I have purchased it through EBay.

A reference to the book appears here:
From the Ground Up – The Training of RAAF technical ground staff – Welcome to Regimental Books (regimental-books.com.au)

New powers for Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

From the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Thursday, 14 September 2023

The Parliament has today passed new laws that will support the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide to complete its important work ahead of its reporting date of 17 June 2024. The new laws will do this by making it possible for more people to participate in face-to-face private sessions. Private sessions enable individuals to share their personal experience with a royal commission in a trauma informed and less formal setting than a hearing.

Currently, only a Commissioner can hold a private session. The Royal Commissions Amendment (Private Sessions) Act 2023 will change this by enabling a suitably qualified, experienced and appropriately senior staff member of the Defence and Veteran Suicide Royal Commission to be authorised as an 'Assistant Commissioner' to conduct private sessions.

Since it commenced in July 2021, the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has carried out 535 private sessions with another 400 remaining to be done before the Commission reports. The Albanese Government is committed to supporting the important work of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and this new power will make it possible for the Royal Commission to conduct all of the registered sessions face-to-face. These changes will also apply to all future royal commissions.

The Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP
Attorney-General
Cabinet Secretary

The Hon Matt Keogh MP
Minister For Veterans' Affairs
Minister For Defence Personnel

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling provides 24/7 free confidential crisis support for current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families on 1800 011 046 or openarms.gov.au.

Safe Zone Support provides anonymous counselling on 1800 142 072.

Defence All-Hours Support Line provides support for ADF personnel on 1800 628 036 or defence.gov.au/health/healthportal.

Defence Member and Family Helpline provides support for Defence families on 1800 624 608.

The Meat Box

By and from Tomas 'Paddy' Hamilton, 31 Aug 23

When South Korea was attacked, by its neighbour from the north
a desperate cry from the weak, bought 77 squadron forth
equipped with trusty Mustangs, a great fighter in its day
but no match for a jet, to keep the Migs at bay

Cresswell wanted Sabres, the master of the air
but the pommies gave them Meteors, it was all that they could spare
the Aussies fought on bravely, against the tyrants might
the enemy learned the hard way, they were ready for the fight

No master in a dogfight, it was built just like a brick
so they switched its role to ground attack and that seemed to do the trick
when the enemy heard the blue note, they knew Meteors were around
the scourge of North Korea was that unique sound

When the fighting settled down, they returned to safer shores
thrilling crowds at air shows, free of foreign wars
a loyal and trusty servant, flying with the reserve
though a part time air force, always prepared to serve

Now those jets may still be found, in museums throughout this land
silent ghosts from Korea, who were forced to make a stand
they might not have been the "Spittie" or "Stang" of its day
but still could give a bloody nose, when it joined the fray

Aviator Reconnects with his Roots

From Defence (https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events) By Flight Lieutenant Rachael Blake

Flight Lieutenant Burentogtokh Altantsetseg spent half of his early childhood growing up in the busy city of Ulaanbaatar and the other half with his extended nomadic family. "I came to Australia when I was 10 years old and got into university with a motivation to become an aerospace engineer," Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg said. "I later joined the Air Force to pay a debt to the nation and I stayed to protect the Australian way of life. "I have found it very meaningful to be able to give back by assisting this team to integrate more easily with each other and navigate any unique cultural sensitivities."

From left, RAAF engineer Warrant Officer Andrew Warmington, Mongolian Armed Forces Lieutenant Tsendendamba and RAAF engineer and interpreter Flight Lieutenant Burentogtokh Altantsetseg at the Tsenser community hospital in Arkhangai State, Central Mongolia

Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg kept up his Mongolian language skills by speaking it at home with his mother and sister while he went to high school and university in Brisbane. Mongolian Australians are affectionately known as 'Mozzies' and Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg quickly applied his native language and people skills to his role of interpreter.

His work began from the first moment of landing, as English is not a commonly spoken language in Mongolia. But his easy-to-understand daily translations enabled the teams to communicate effectively with transport drivers and Mongolian Armed Forces personnel, and even helped the troops order their food. Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg was identified early on by US personnel as an integral part to early-construction planning by aiding the transfer of initial repair concepts to see if they fitted into the vision for the community. Any small adjustments the locals suggested to the planning were efficiently re-explained to the teams.

RAAF detachment commander on the ground, Warrant Officer Andrew Warmington, praised Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg's agility on the job. "Buren's ability to talk with the hospital administration and build rapport with the hospital staff made the locals far more comfortable and accepting of our work and promoted far better trust between all parties," Warrant Officer Warmington said. "There were a lot of hand signals and broken English, with interesting mimes being acted out at times on the construction site, and Buren was always able to intervene when those techniques didn't work."

The RAAF contingent's connections with the Mongolian people paved the way for an outstanding outcome and Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg's presence was critical to mission success. Equally important was the task of building sincere friendships, sharing trade secrets and working

techniques. By learning about the differences in each other's safety standards, the teams overcame any difficulties.

Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg said this humanitarian assistance experience was the highlight of his Air Force career. Even before deploying, he knew this mission would be personal for everyone involved. "In Australia, we sometimes lose appreciation for the simple things, like clean, running water and high quality healthcare systems, which we have access to every day," Flight Lieutenant Altantsetseg said. "In Mongolia, living in these austere environments means the people learn to be completely self-reliant with very little. "This opportunity made us all appreciate the importance of the human element underpinning strategic partnerships even more. "By empowering communities through teamwork and support, we are making a difference."

Lockheed Martin Wins Multi-Billion $ Project AIR6500

Reprinted with permission from CONTACT Magazine

Lockheed Martin Australia has been selected as the 'strategic partner' to deliver the Joint Air Battle Management System for the ADF. The first tranche of Project AIR6500 Phase 1 (AIR6500-1) will cost around $765 million to deliver with follow-on phases to cost multiple billions of dollars.

The ADF said the Joint Air Battle Management System would support an enhanced, integrated and coordinated air and missile defence capability across the Australian Defence Force and national infrastructure. "It will provide greater situational awareness of advanced air and missile threats and increased interoperability with international partners."

The project is likely to generate up to 230 jobs, including for subcontractors, in high-tech areas including software development, systems engineering, project management and logistics. Around 150 jobs will be in South Australia, 60 in the NSW Hunter region, with others in Brisbane and Canberra.

Lockheed Martin graphic supplied

The government also announced today that it was accelerating the ADF's medium-range ground-based air-defence capability, which would form part of a layered, integrated missile defence capability. Minister for Defence [who prefers his other title, Deputy Prime Minister, even when making Defence announcements] Richard Marles, said the government was working at pace to ensure the ADF was equipped with modernised capabilities that would allow it to transition into a genuine integrated force, optimised for national defence. "The new Joint Air Battle Management System, and the Medium-Range Ground-Based Air Defence System will contribute effective capabilities as part of an integrated ADF," Defence Minister Marles said. "These capabilities are essential in our pursuit of preserving and protecting our sovereignty and security, while also promoting stability in our region."

Quote from Ronald Reagan

From John Clarkson

During a fund-raising dinner, President Ronald Reagan told this humorous little tale:

An evangelistic minister and a politician arrived at the Pearly Gates together one day and met Saint Peter. After doing all the necessary formalities, Saint Peter took them in hand to show them their new quarters.

He took them to a small single room with a bed, a chair and a small table and said that this would be the quarters for the minister.

The politician was a little worried about what might be in store for him. He couldn't believe it when Saint Peter stopped in front of a beautiful mansion with lovely gardens, many servants, and told him that this would be his quarters. The politician couldn't help but ask, "Wait, there is something wrong here; how do I get this lovely mansion when that good and holy man only gets a single room?"

Saint Peter replied, "You have to understand how things work up here. We have thousands of clergy and evangelists up here, but you are the first politician we have had up here for many decades".

RAAF Tech Honoured for In-Flight Wi-Fi and Phone Fix for Albo-1

Reprinted from CONTACT Magazine. Story and photo by Corporal Luke Bellman

Australia's jet-setting echelon of political leaders, diplomats and senior public servants might finally have long-range, wide-bodied and purpose-built VIP aircraft at their disposal, but there's a lot to be said for locally fine-tuning the large converted Airbus luxury state jets that double as tankers.

The King's Birthday Honours list reveals one enterprising Royal Australian Air Force sergeant has made a name for herself digging around in the KC-30s wiring loom to sort out a few nagging issues with the planes in-flight phone and e-conferencing facilities, that by definition have to be secured to the highest level. After all, what's the point in having a prime ministerial jet on call if you can't do an encrypted Teams or Webex call halfway over the Pacific Ocean because the connection keeps dropping out delivering a pre-NBN user experience to the flying conference suite? And when those users are deciding Defence budgets, posture and spending priorities, it does help when the in-flight Wi-Fi is working.

According to the Air Force, "When Sergeant Georgia Hannah was confronted with complex bandwidth and network architecture complications for the VIP communications system aboard Air Forces new KC-30, she took matters into her own hands." In lay terms, that seems to have equated to rebuilding some of the systems that shipped a little light on robustness from the factory; a not uncommon scenario when civilian commercial products and systems get subjected to military rigours. "There was an issue with the antenna to satellite connection. It turned out to be the design." Hannah said in a Defence rundown of her exploits. Defence said these extended to organising for "stakeholders to go through the network with a fine-tooth comb to identify improvements."

RAAF Sergeant Georgia Hannah CSC
(Luke Bellman/Defence)

This resulted in the documentation of technical improvements so they were incorporated into service documents and established a training system to ensure others could benefit from Hannah's innovation, Defence said. Put more simply, the newly arrived Air Force network tech pulled down the whole VIP comms rig and then rebuilt it so that it actually worked in the air, which the Air Force characterised as Hannah having "identified solutions to vastly improve the passenger communication system aboard the KC-30A." Sufficiently vast that RAAF's top brass no longer have to explain to the prime minister of the day why their phone and email doesn't work on a +$200 million plane, which might be problematic.

Such good deeds and problem-solving skills are meritorious, and the reason the glitchy comms system ever broke cover is that Sergeant Hannah received the Conspicuous Service Cross (CSC) in this year's King's Birthday awards. The CSC wasn't just for finding the solution, it was for passing down the working knowledge to those who

come next to lift Air Force's proficiency and performance. "It's really good to get recognition, but it's better to see it all work after having all those issues rectified. It's good that people are noticing gaps in the system," Hannah said. "I am proud that I was able to train the new operators. I have trust in them that they have the knowledge when the issues arise." "IT has always got room for improvement."

Ford UK Refused to Build Rolls Royce Merlin Engines

The Story of when Ford UK Refused to Build Rolls Royce Merlin Engines because the Tolerances Rolls Royce allowed were Looser than Ford was Willing to Work With.

By Dario Leone an aviation, defense and military writer. He is the Founder and Editor of "The Aviation Geek Club" one of the world's most read military aviation blogs. His writing has appeared in The National Interest and other news media. He has reported from Europe and flown Super Puma and Cougar helicopters with the Swiss Air Force.

The Rolls Royce Merlin is a direct descendant of the Kestrel engine, the power unit from the Hawker Hart and its many variants; an enlarged version of which powered the Supermarine S6 which won the Schneider Trophy for Britain in 1929. This led directly to the Spitfire aircraft powered by the new engine now called the Merlin.

According to ShortFinals.org, in 1941, in Trafford Park, Manchester, Ford UK had two assembly plants where they were told to build Rolls-Royce Merlins – lots of them! At the time, this engine was in the vast majority of British fighters and bombers, including the two which had just won the Battle of Britain, the Supermarine Spitfire and the Hawker Hurricane.

Ford re-drew the blue-prints for the Merlin, making it more suitable for mass production, and by 1944, over 400 engines a week were flowing out of the plants.

In his book 'Not Much Of An Engineer', Rolls Royce supercharger designer Stanley Hooker states that Ford UK looked at the Merlin engine drawings and said "we can't build an engine to those tolerances." Hooker said loftily (his words) "I suppose the tolerances are too tight for you?" "No,

they are much too loose – we use much tighter tolerances for car engines so all the parts are truly interchangeable without any hand adjustment needed."

Ford re-drew the blue-prints for the Merlin, making it more suitable for mass production, and by 1944, over 400 engines a week were flowing out of the plants. "And they were very good engines too" said Hooker.

The final total came to 30,428. This was only 2,000 less than the main Rolls-Royce plant at Nightingale Road, Derby (although there were several other plants producing Merlins in the UK).

The first Merlin engine developed 880hp but by the time the last mark of Merlin was produced the power output was 2030hp. The Merlin engine was then enlarged still further and named the Griffon. Aircraft which were powered by the Merlin engine include the Lancaster, Spitfire, Halifax, Hurricane, Battle, Defiant, Whitley, Mosquito, Hornet, York, Lincoln and North American Mustang.

Hooker's book is an excellent read about the development of the Merlin engine and then the early jet engines. Hooker eventually saved Rolls Royce after it went broke developing the RB211 three-shaft jet engine, which became today's very powerful and very fuel-efficient Trent engine.

Eric William Penfold

15 July 1923-5 May 2023 Service No 127342

From AFA Victoria, RADAR Branch September Newsletter

This Faded Echo Tribute for Eric Penfold is based on Eric's recall of his life experiences recorded in his written memoirs, which provide a particularly graphic account of his WWII RAAF Radar service with 323 RS (Radar Station), in Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya) from August 1943 to September 1944.

Eric was the sixth of ten children born to Alick Penfold and May (Hyder), near St Arnaud, North West Victoria. He attended Cope Cope Primary and Donald Higher Elementary schools before commencing Primary School student teacher training in March 1942. Eric's teaching career was put on hold when he volunteered for RAAF service, commencing on 25 February 1943. After completing his rookie training on 4 April 1943, Eric then graduated as a Radar Operator at Richmond RAAF Base in May 1943. On 16 May 1943, Eric was posted to Mascot Aerodrome where 323 Radar Station (323 RS) was forming up.

His unit left Townsville on 16 July 1943 with their radar equipment on several Douglas C47s, finally landing at Merauke, Dutch New Guinea (DNG), the following day. After camping there, the 323 RS Unit travelled by army barge for three days to the chosen site for the radar station, close to the native village of Boepel on the Merauke River, some 200 river miles from Merauke. 323 RS first became operational (date unknown) at ground level but soon after the radar equipment was moved to a 15-foot stand built nearby with the plotting room beneath that stand. Eric was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman on 30 November 1943.

After some nine months or so of operations and with the Japanese forces retreating back along the coast, 323 RS was no longer required to cover Hollandia (Jayapura), which was taken by the Allies on 22 February 1944. During March 1944 Eric was part of an advance party to relocate 323 RS to Mappi Post, on the Deogel River, which included the first Catalina landing on that river. The Mappi Post location was less hospitable and more isolated; low, swampy, mosquito-ridden terrain, devoid of animal/bird life, (except crocs), with active head hunter tribes that 'objected' to all 'newcomers'.

With the rest of the unit arriving by mid-June, the 323 RS LW-AW (Long Wave Air Warning) radar set became operational on 2 July 1944, established on a log stand 25-feet high. Eric's overseas service ended with his posting back to Australia on 30 August 1944, being "…some of the best news that I had heard for over 12 months". Leaving Mappi Post on 31 August 1944 via a three-day boat trip, through the Marianna Straits and the Arafura Sea and then flying via a Douglas DC3 transport on 2 September 1944, Eric landed at Jacky Jacky (Higginsfield) Airfield Cape York, kissing the "Aussie soil…what a feeling to be home again!" Finally, Eric reported to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (No.1 Personnel Depot) on 11 September 1944.

Although DNG was classified as a six-months service area, due to the poor conditions of service experienced, Eric had actually served 13.5 months in DNG, all before turning 21. From that time until his discharge on 28 July 1945, Eric was posted to several Victorian RAAF depots, including No.1 Flying Boat Repair at Lake Boga where he worked on Catalina Radar equipment. In Mid 1945 he applied for a re-mustering as a Radar Mechanic, as well as a discharge 'to resume civil occupation' as a teacher. When offered both, Eric chose discharge, returning to both teaching and university study after two years and five months RAAF service. He taught at various Melbourne high schools until retiring as Scoresby High School Principal in 1983, but he continued in emergency/casual teaching roles until he was 72.

Eric married Florence Beer on 13 May 1950. They had two children, Lynette and Ross. In his memoirs, he observes he was "…lucky to have had 44 years of a very happy marriage", until Florence's passing in May 1994. Throughout his life Eric was an active member of his communities, never forgetting his early life in Cope Cope. He was a keen fox/duck hunter and enjoyed Australia-wide travel. In his memoirs Eric also reflects on his WWII RAAF Radar service: "The comradeship and bonding that existed between servicemen is something that never wanes. It is great just to meet up with old mates and relive some of the past, in conversation".

Eric Penfold had been a longstanding Veteran Member of the Victorian RAAF Radar Association and more recently the AFAV RAAF Radar Branch. Over the years Eric regularly attended Melbourne Anzac Day Marches together with his long-time mate Terry McMahon, who he first met in RAAF rookie training in 1943 and then trained with on course MO72 for Radar Operators at Richmond RAAF Base NSW. Whenever the occasion arose, such as gathering for refreshments following ANZAC Day marches, Eric and Terry would sing their rendition of 'The Song Of The R.D.F. Boys', to the tune 'Bless Them All' circa 1943, composed during their MO72 Radar Operators course. Eric was also a regular attendee at Reunion Lunch Meetings over the years. As a tribute to Eric, and with the support of Eric's family, a copy of his memoirs will be placed in the WGCDR Pete Smith RAAF Radar Collection at the RAAF Museum, Point Cook. Such memoirs together with other memorabilia including photos, are so crucial in recording, preserving and telling the story of what was the secret WWII history of RAAF Radar and those who served.

WWII veterans Eric Penfold, left, and Terry McMahon singing their rendition of "The Song of The RDF Boys", circa 1943, following the Melbourne ANZAC Day March 2021.

Taking a Test of Toughness

Reprinted with permission from CONTACT Magazine

For one challenging week in August, a select group of ADF members came together as candidates in Combat Control Suitability Screening (CCSS).

ADF candidates participating in the 4 Squadron Combat Control Suitability Screening do a 3.2km run in the rain as part of the Special Forces entry test.

Story by Flight Lieutenant Rob Hodgson. Photos by Aircraftwoman Laura Flower

The week-long event had candidates undertaking a series of physically and mentally demanding activities to allow 4 Squadron to determine an individual's base suitability for further training in the combat control role. Activities included high-level testing in strength and fitness, runs, swims and pack marches.

Combat controllers are specially selected, trained and equipped air-land integration specialists supporting deliberate and contingency special operations and Air Force missions, domestically and internationally. The role of the combat control team is to integrate, synchronise and control the elements of air and space power at the tactical level to support the execution of precision strike and military advance force operations. To do this, combat controllers must be capable of working for prolonged periods in austere conditions and non-permissive environments.

Combat control applications are open to any service or career field. The training trajectory is attainable for capable and motivated individuals regardless of previous mustering, specialisation or service. Candidates must be able to assimilate information quickly in order to meet the constant but graduated demands of preparation and reinforcement training courses. Regardless of previous field or combat skills, candidates graduate as competent and credible controllers capable of working with Special Forces units as air power specialists.

Leading Aircraftman C (name withheld), a participant during CCSS, commented on the intensive nature of the selection-week activities. "The most rewarding part about this week is being able to test yourself in ways that I don't think a lot of other courses in the ADF would require," he said. "You will find out a lot about yourself, and how your personality comes to the forefront. "But when push comes to shove and the fatigue sets in, your character comes through and you have to rely on your level of training."

On completion of the screening week, successful candidates are panelled on the combat control indoctrination course in preparation for the Special Forces selection course. Flight Lieutenant I (name withheld) said she looked forward to pursuing a career in this specialised role. "I want to be a combat control officer as I am looking for a career that is physically and mentally challenging," she said. "I am looking for a job that is adventurous and demanding and not the sort of job I could find anywhere else."

Candidates rest after the 400m swim component.