HERITAGE SERIES

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Frank Korbl

WINNER OF THE 2001 HERITAGE AWARD

2001 RAAF HERITAGE AWARDS

EX-LUFTWAFFE MBE

FRANK KORBL

DISCLAIMER

The views are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defence, the Royal Australian Air Force or the Government of Australia.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Korbl, Frank
Ex Luftwaffe MBE

Bibliography.

ISBN 0 642 26573 9

1. Korbl, Frank. 2. Germany. Luftwaffe – Biography. 3. Australia. Royal Aurstralian Air Force – Biography. 4. Air pilots, Military – Germany – Biography. I. Australia. Royal Australian Air Force. Aerospace Centre II. Title.
(Series: Heritage series (Canberra, ACT)).

358.4133092

Published and distributed by:

Aerospace Centre
RAAF Base
Fairbairn ACT 2600
Australia

Tel: (02) 62876563
Fax: (02) 62876382
e-mail: AerospaceCentre@defence.gov.au

Other titles in the series:

Secret Action of 305
Smith & Coghlan
Winner of the 1988 Heritage Award

The RAAF Mirage Story
Compiled by Wing Commander M.R. Susans
Winner of the 1989 Heritage Award

Alfresco Flight – The RAAF Antarctic Experience
David Wilson
Winner of the 1990 Heritage Award

Edge of Centre – The eventful life of Group Captain Gerald Packer
Chris Coulthard-Clark
Winner of the 1991 Heritage Award

Beaufighters Over New Guinea – No. 30 Squadron RAAF 1942-1943
George Turnball Dick
Winner of the 1992 Heritage Award

Defeat to Victory – No. 453 Squadron RAAF
John Bennett
Winner of the 1993 Heritage Award

Not to be Shot at or Exported – An Airman's Letters Home 1942-1945
Leslie Howard Sullivan
Winner of the 1994 Heritage Award

Odd Jobs – RAAF Operations in Japan, The Berlin Airlift, Korea, Malaya and Malta 1946-1960
Steve Eather
Winner of the 1995 Heritage Award

McNamara VC – A Hero's Dilemma
Chris Coulthard-Clark
Winner of the 1996 Heritage Award

Skylarks – The Lighter Side of Life in the RAAF in World War II
Eric Brown
Winner of the 1997 Heritage Award

Up and Away – Memoirs of a Pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force 1950-1981
John Jacobs
Winner of the 1998 Heritage Award

How Not to Run an Air Force – The Higher Command of the Royal Australian Air Force During the Second World War
Norman Ashworth
Winner of the 1999 Heritage Award

Dicing with Death – An Airman's Account of his Training and Operations over Japan
Arthur Sandell
Winner of the 2000 Heritage Award

Acceptance Speech

by Frank Korbl

This will certainly go down in my diary as a red letter day! I feel deeply honoured to receive the award, but I am also humbled for many reasons which may become obvious to the reader.

I would like to thank the RAAF for providing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I would like to thank the Chief of Air Force, and the judges for selecting my entry.

My thanks also go to my good friends Ken Llewelyn who first drew my attention to the Heritage Award and Noel Tanswell who took time to read the original manuscript. Noel gave me valuable advice as how to reduce the lengthy text to meet the prescribed words limitation.

My profound gratitude goes to my dear wife Stella who spent long hours with proofreading and to my son Harry who set up the computer system.

Last but not least I wish to thank all the dedicated Education Officers and the tutors at University as well as all the good people who helped me to improve my English.

I can honestly say that the years I was privileged to serve in the Royal Australian Air Force, both in uniform and later working as a civilian in the Facilities Branch at Air Force Office, were the happiest of my whole life.

It was an exciting and rewarding experience. I made many true and lasting friends and it is to them that I wish to express my appreciation for having suggested in the first place that I should sit down and write my memoirs before my cerebral computer becomes unserviceable.

Sadly, some of them are no longer with us to share in the celebration. I am thinking of John Lessels, Ted Hewby, Jack Leonard, 'Chris' Christofis, Robert O'Neill, Alec Rundle and many others. But, who knows, they are probably watching anyway.

What else can I say? I am definitely floating on Cloud Nine! Thank you all!

Contents

Foreword

Squadron Leader Frank Korbl (Ret.), MBE, BA, was born in Vienna, Austria. Following the annexion of his country in 1938, he became a German subject and was drafted for military service as soon as he reached the conscription age. Whilst undergoing basic recruit training in a Signal Regiment of the *Luftwaffe*, he was selected for aircrew operations.

Great expectations of adventure and heroic exploits came to a sudden end when the *Heinkel* bomber that he was training in crashed on a training flight and both pilot and navigator were killed in the accident.

After several ground appointments in various theatres and at a time when it should have been obvious that the German war effort was lost, he found himself transferred to the *Abwehr*, the intelligence organisation of the *Wehrmacht*. In May 1945, having survived several bizarre experiences, his unit was encircled by the advancing Russian armies. Crossing the Elbe River, some 100,000 men were able to surrender to the American 9th Army.

The spell as a Prisoner of War (POW) exposed him to further unusual adventures in the now occupied provinces of Western Germany. When he was finally discharged, he did not return to his native homeland of Austria which, like Germany, was also jointly controlled by British, American, French and Russian Forces.

Taking refuge with the family of a former crew mate, he went to Kiel in Northern Germany, where he found employment with the British element of the Allied Control Commission. It was to be the start of a remarkable career that eventually took him back to Vienna, where he continued to work for the British until the end of the occupation in 1955.

Fate had it that he eventually migrated to Australia.

After over two years in a clerical position at the Immigration Centre at Bonegilla, he went to Melbourne to work with the stockbroking firm of J.B. Were & Son as an investment analyst.

Early in 1965 a newspaper advertisement which invited suitable persons to join the RAAF for an 'exciting' career, caught his attention. Prompted by his friends, he accepted a dare and applied. Much to his surprise, the application was accepted and he was commissioned into the Equipment Branch.

During his fifteen years service with the Royal Australian Air Force, Frank served at RAAF East Sale, RAAF Townsville, with No 9 Squadron in Vietnam, Headquarters Operational Command and RAAF Richmond. At Richmond he held the appointment of Senior Barracks Officer with the rank of Squadron Leader.

He was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday and Jubilee Honours List of 1977.

The London *Saturday Telegraph* reported:

> **Ex-Luftwaffe MBE** Squadron Leader Frank Korbl, RAAF, 54, formerly a Luftwaffe pilot, yesterday received the MBE for outstanding dedication and loyalty. He emigrated to Australia in 1956 and joined the RAAF in 1966.'

After leaving the Air Force in 1979, Frank joined the Air Force Facilities Branch, Department of Defence in Canberra. During the last two years of his employment he held the position of Director Works Policy before finally retiring in 1987.

When reminiscing about his colourful past, he modestly observes that he had just been lucky.

Reflections

On many occasions friends and colleagues who had heard about my experiences during World War II and my time in Vietnam suggested that I should write my life story. Whilst I never had any plans to write my memoirs, it seems that the idea germinated in my subconscious mind, covertly considering form, concept, and extent of a possible future project. The crucial impetus to start with the project emerged by coincidence. One day whilst visiting friends in the United Kingdom, I was introduced to a lady I had never met before and who knew nothing of me. Out of the blue she asked me whether I had already started with 'that book of yours'. 'What book?' I asked. 'The story of your life!' she replied. 'Don't leave it too late!' That was in 1991. Another three years passed before I sat down at the computer and began to write.

Realising that writing one's memoirs is a major undertaking involving dedicated research and many hours of concentrated work I thought that it would take me between three and five years to cover the seventy-plus years of my life. In fact, with proofreading and editing it took much longer and the first draft which covered over 800 pages was not completed until 1999. I did not know then that one day I would write another book using all those chapters concerning my experiences in two air forces and two wars. That was a much later project, requiring more research and revisions.

The first problem that I faced was of course to determine the purpose of the exercise. Was I going to write a book for publication or was it just intended to record an interesting part of the family history for internal consumption? What would be the extent of my writings? Would they only cover the chronological sequence of events and experiences or should my memoirs include reflections on the historical and cultural aspects of the periods I lived through, dwell on thoughts and opinions, delving into the philosophical sphere as it were? Should I embellish the writing with the occasional literary quotation or perhaps even include a bit of poetry here and there?

I eventually decided that I would write down everything that I considered important from both the perspective of a family history as well as from a historical point of view. If at any time I or somebody else after me may decide to go to print, the material could always be suitably edited for publication. Based on existing literature I was familiar with, I had a general idea about the concept of an autobiography. I had read *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, the memoirs of several illustrious personalities as well as a few autobiographical novels. I have not read Proust but I am of course familiar with the famous autobiographical writings of Goethe.

Yet curiously, there was one important book that I had found by accident when I was in my twenties. The title of it was, I think, *Großvater erinnert sich,* that is 'Grandfather Remembers'. In it an elderly man talked about his recollections of life as he had experienced it at the beginning of the 18th century in an obscure small town somewhere in the German countryside, dwelling on the events of his childhood, his apprenticeship to a cabinet maker, his early loves, marriage and all the things that were going on as time went by. I must have been strongly impressed because I never forgot some of the episodes charmingly presented by *Großvater,* perhaps even thinking that I would love to be able to tell my own story in a similar vein.

Whilst studying at university, I read that Sir Francis Bacon, who lived from 1561 to 1626, had stated in his famous work *The Advancement of Learning* that there were three aspects of history; namely the historical facts, the historical person and the 'historicity', that is to say the historical authenticity of the person and the assumed situation at the time. He continued to say that history is very much related to memory. Accordingly, whilst the historical facts are generally well recorded — who lived at what time and when a certain event had occurred — the problem lies with the other two aspects where the blank spaces must be filled in by the historian, relying heavily on his wit and intuition.

I suppose that if Bacon had lived in the twentieth century, he would have had to add 'Political Correctness' as one of the problems facing the historian. I have strong feelings about the latter aspect, because contemporary literature dwells heavily on political correctness, preferring authors who follow the popular line. As a consequence, most contemporary accounts of history often place the emphasis on the unpopularity of regimes and the excesses of authority, but neglect to picture the daily aspects of life which inevitably must go on whatever the situation may be. The result is that there is little known about how the average person managed to pursue a reasonably normal life in turbulent times, when survival is the only determining objective.

Somewhere else I had come across a statement that historians deplored the dearth of accounts that recorded the experiences of ordinary people concerning the various eras of history. I vaguely felt that I could make some contribution in that respect. The more I thought about it, I came to the conclusion that, if I wanted to present a true picture of the times, I should include all that I remembered about community aspirations, attitudes and beliefs I have witnessed.

What at first seemed to be a not too difficult task suddenly became a major project, requiring a good deal of research in order to get the historical facts right. Memory can play astonishing tricks regarding places, dates and even persons. Fortunately, living in Canberra I had ready access to the National Library where I found practically all the books I needed to verify the events I was going to include in my story.

I also had a lot of valuable assistance from the RAAF concerning the history of the locations where I had been stationed during my service life. Newspaper offices kindly provided cuttings from past editions that I required and the German Archives even sent me a copy of the accident report from the Luftwaffe authorities concerning the accident in 1944 when I was involved in a crash that killed the pilot and the navigator of our *Heinkel* bomber.

Generally, in relation to the distant past, suitable sources of information were often difficult to find. However, by referring to letters, postcards, photos, documents and death notices that I had in my possession or which I obtained from family members, I was able to slowly piece together a comprehensive story. Diaries would have been useful but, regrettably, not everybody is encouraged in his youth to write a personal journal.

I don't know what motivated me to start keeping a diary after my posting to Richmond in 1974, but these notes, together with the scrap books I began to collect when I joined the RAAF in 1965, were a welcome source of information. My wife Stella had the foresight to preserve all the letters I sent from Vietnam which helped me to support my recollections of that period.

When deciding on the contents of an autobiography one has to consider the question of intimate relationships and the obvious need not to cause offence to persons still living. The questions of how much should be disclosed, whether it is necessary to dwell perhaps inappropriately on bad experiences and how one should treat the recollections of difficult periods, require careful consideration. There is an old maxim that one should not speak ill of the dead. Neither should one be unkind to someone when there is the possibility of misunderstanding actions and intentions. After much thought, I concluded that I would refer to unpleasant experiences only in relation to the question as to how much they influenced my life. Obviously, one cannot ignore certain facts just because the memory of them is unpleasant.

Format and structure are important. As I discovered fairly early in the process, the initial concept has to be continuously varied whenever new ideas or additional information come to hand. This entails frequent and sometimes irritating revision, reorganisation of chapters as well as changes to the planned overall layout.

Fortunately, my experiences in writing papers and reports during my time as an investment analyst with J.B. Were & Son in Melbourne, the intensive training I received in the Air Force through the Staff College Tutorial Course, the writing of manuals for the Department of Defence, plus the rigorous presentation requirements for the assignments during the BA Course at the University of Queensland had given me a solid grounding in that respect.

Much to the advantage of the modern author, the amazing facility of word processing enables the writer to re-arrange the text at will and without much bother, its beauty being that one can put on file thoughts and information that come to hand well ahead of the chronological position and the intended composition of the text. I really think that I could not have achieved the progress I made without that facility. I was lucky that my son Harry is a computer wizard. He assisted me greatly with the setting up of the required system and giving me advice when needed.

I am glad that right from the start I commenced with the compilation of a bibliography and also developed summaries of contents as the story unfolded. I also thought about incorporating photocopies of relevant documents, certificates and letters which could add to the reality of the story and conscientiously collected anything I thought to be of value.

As far as the tools are concerned, a good dictionary of the English language is indispensable and so is *Roget's Thesaurus*. Books of quotations and colloquialism are also helpful. If one includes words from other languages, foreign dictionaries are a must. To verify references to historical events a collection of Yearbooks comes in handy.

On reflection, the earlier draft was perhaps not as lucid as it should have been. But as the author gains experience whilst writing, he improves his style, syntax and grammar. Struggling along I soon realised that in order to write good prose, it is necessary to have a wide-ranging knowledge of quotations, memorable passages of literary works, descriptive phraseology and even the odd poem. To that end I resorted to the time-honoured device of opening an old-fashioned *Commonplace Book* in which I jotted down anything useful that caught my attention whilst reading. It proved an invaluable tool in the long run.

Periodical proofreading and editing would have been advantageous, but I thought that because of the volume of the material to be sifted, it was more important to get the relevant data and my accompanying thoughts keyed in first and worry about the revision later. Stella subsequently spent many hours in going through the draft, pointing out any errors, inconsistencies and passages in want of improvement. I am greatly indebted for her assistance.

At this point, I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Ms Summer-Rochelle Blackman and Ms Roz Bourke of the Aerospace Centre, RAAF Base Fairbairn, who played a significant role in the preparation of the manuscript for publication. Without their skill and dedication it would not have been possible to complete the task within the timeframes available.

The foregoing reflections have continuously occupied my mind ever since and the work involved in writing my memoirs has been absorbing to say the least. In retrospect, reliving the past was a most interesting and pleasant experience in many ways, but there were some traumatic moments too. I suppose that going over one's life by way of writing an autobiography could in many ways be likened to subjecting oneself to psychoanalysis. In both cases, the objective is to talk about the past and by doing so disclose associations that often had a disastrous effect on the individual at the time, but were subsequently buried in the subconscious, yet continue to influence relationships, personality traits, attitudes and fears.

Bringing the hidden associations out of the closet has the effect of seeing things in an entirely new light, the individual suddenly beginning to understand the circumstances surrounding disturbed relationships and the causes of events that remained unclear until then. I am not ashamed to state that I shed many tears and more than once broke down as I tried to put certain memories into words. Inevitably, catharsis must follow when repressed experiences and ideas are brought forth into consciousness. Has the exercise been beneficial? I believe so. I may not be a perfectly adjusted person in the sense of the textbook, but I no longer agonize about the sometimes difficult relationships encountered during my childhood, a failed marriage and the brushes with death during the wars. And all that without professional counselling, hours on the couch and hefty bills to pay!

To Stella

So, if these scattered lines
Should be approved in aftertimes,
If it both pleases and endures,
The merit and the praise are yours!

Jonathan Swift, 1720

Chapter One

A Time to Kill and a Time to Die

Ernst von Salomon in his famous novel *Die Kadetten* (The Cadets) describes the scene at a prestigious German grammar school in the days before World War I as the Commanding Officer welcomes the new intake of fourteen-year-old boys. With a stern look on his face the Colonel tells the assembled crowd:

'Gentlemen you have come here to learn how to die!'

In 1964, when I joined a Signal Regiment of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), the platoon leader told us that we had enlisted in order to learn 'how to kill the enemy'.

I forget what they told us when we were called up for service in World War II, but it was most likely something along the same lines, because killing and dying are the two central themes of the military culture.

On that fateful morning in November 1941, when we were about to take the first step into an uncertain future in which we were to put our lives on the line, I doubt that anyone of the large group of conscripts that had gathered on the main square in the Austrian city of Linz was aware of the implications of going to war. Nor would anyone have engaged in philosophical contemplations about the prospect of killing people legitimately.

Moods were generally subdued and I don't remember any great excitement, certainly not the public enthusiasm of the days of 1939. Too many people had already been killed in two years of fighting. Still, Germany's fortunes looked good and it was tacitly accepted that one had to do one's ultimate duty expected from a citizen of the Reich.

Immediately after the roll call a group of unfriendly and ill-humoured *Luftwaffe* NCOs took charge of the assembled recruits. Their ferocious shouting succeeded in transforming the lively and spirited crowd into a flock of frightened sheep, giving us a foretaste of things to come.

A special train took us across the border of Austria to the city of Pilsen in the neighbouring Republic of Czechoslovakia (CSR), now occupied by Germany and designated as the *Reichsprotektorat* (the German official title given to the occupied CSR).

Having arrived after a long night's journey, we disembarked and formed into a long column. As we marched along the still deserted streets in the misty light of the cold winter morning, we encountered only a few people on their way to work, their attitudes giving us a foretaste of what we may expect.

Observing yet another mob of a thousand Germans being taken to the training mills that churned out fighting men for the war must have stirred the feelings of the local population. Whilst some waved and smiled, most people we saw looked hateful, some sad, a few even spat on the ground.

When we finally reached the barracks at the outskirts of town, we were moved on to the tarmac area. A colonel, who wore a conspicuous decoration that indicated he had served in the Spanish civil war, eyed the assembled crowd approvingly.

'Welcome, men!' he shouted and immediately proceeded to sort us out in an obviously well-practised routine.

'Who has got a driver's licence? Three steps forward. Sergeant, your new transport drivers. Move them off!'

'All those who can touch-type — three steps forward. Teleprinter training!'

'Anyone with experience in telecommunication work? Three steps forward. Off with them to the linesmen training company!'

Then came the climax. With a big smile on his face, the Colonel said:

'Now then! Who of you men was a member of the *Flieger Hitler Jugend* (a branch of the Hitler Youth interested in glider training) or the NSFK (the Civil Flying Corps)? Good! Three steps forward. You will be trained as air crew wireless operators. Congratulations!'

Thus I found myself without any effort of my own selected for a career I had never thought of. The prospect of flying offered new vistas, but the hectic routine to which we were immediately subjected left us little time to think.

Arriving at the precincts of our company, we were sorted into individual squads, allocated sleeping quarters and taken to the clothing store for kitting. Shouting Prussian corporals acquainted us with regulations, procedures, discipline and an endless string of prescriptions of do's and don'ts. Everything said was short and to the point.

It soon became evident that they considered us *Ostmärker*, that unfortunate and to most Austrians offensive term introduced by the German regime after the annexion, as some kind of ignorant colonials who had to be taught the basics of life before being turned into useful soldiers.

'We will transform you into real men. We shall grind your balls until they will start to glow like electric light bulbs. You are too stupid to know how to shit!' we were told.

The fierce attitude and the disdainful expressions on the faces of our instructors left us in no doubt that they meant business. Everything had to be performed on the double, even going to the dining hall or the ablutions.

On the next day we learned that our platoon leader, *Oberfeldwebel* (Flight Sergeant) Weisser was on leave and that until then junior NCOs would supervise our training. They vowed to prepare us for a real surprise — the flight sergeant was TOUGH! What they could do with us was nothing compared with what he would do!

One wintry morning, a tall and morose looking sergeant stood at the edge of the drill square, watching the corporals incessantly chasing us up and down, making us take cover on the red gravel, jump up, advance and take cover again. The man had red hair, and bore a stony expression on his face. *Oberfeldwebel* Weisser had arrived.

As we lined up for a break, huffing and puffing, covered with mud and sweat, the fearsome man moved slowly forward.

'Thank you, Corporal. At ease men!' he bellowed.

'Now then' he continued, 'I have observed this disgraceful performance of you young dogs for an hour. Never in my life have I seen such a lacklustre effort. Well, from now on this is going to change. You don't know yet what you are in for. But I guarantee you that at the end of these three months we will have turned you into useful German soldiers. From this moment on I am taking over and may God help you!'

The corporals had not been wrong. He was tough! And unrelenting! The slightest mistake or omission, like failing an inspection, being caught walking instead of running, resulted in punishment ingeniously designed to cause maximum physical discomfort.

His menacing appearance and plain nastiness soon earned him the nickname *Oberfeldwebel Bluthund* (Flight Sergeant Bloodhound).

Our training was thorough, hard, brutal and sadistic. As I found out much later, many of the drill practices employed in our regiment were illegal, some of them explicitly forbidden under the German Military Code. These included ordering the occupants of a room to remove the furniture and arrange it on the barracks square, then move it back and have the room ready for inspection in record time.

However, who would have dared to complain? It would certainly have resulted in 'The Treatment' which was worse than death. In fact, one of the boys whom I knew from my high school days could not take it and committed suicide. He was the son of a colonel.

The general attitude of our superiors was obviously influenced by an often quoted pronouncement by the *Führer* to the effect that the German youth was:

Fast as greyhounds, tough like leather and hard as Krupp steel.

Just as well that at the age of nineteen years one can take a surprising amount of physical punishment. It is a different matter when you are in your thirties and have not been active in sport. One unfortunate man in our company was in that category. Because of his 'essential' occupation he had missed earlier call-ups and now found himself amongst that wild mob of young greyhounds.

One late afternoon, exhausted from the *Schleifen* (the grinding on the barracks square), he fell asleep during a lecture by the company commander. When the captain noticed the dozing figure he became hysterical.

'How dare you fall asleep in the presence of an officer!' he screamed.

I think the good captain took it as a personal affront. After all, NCOs were demigods but officers were positively divine beings, entitled to worship and most of all, unquestioned obedience.

Our platoon was particularly unfortunate because of the perfectionist attitude and sadistic disposition of the flight sergeant. No other detail of the company was constantly on the double nor drilled in such an exhausting manner. The chaps from other platoons often grinned and made sarcastic remarks when they watched us being chased about.

'Poor bastards! The Weisser's mob again!' they would say.

To what extent Weisser would go in his sadism may be illustrated by the fact that, when other squads would march from the accommodation blocks to the lecture hall for Morse code training, they carried the stools from the sleeping quarters over their shoulders. Not us! We had to hold them out in front of our chests and hop along like kangaroos, all the way to the lecture hall and back. It was designed to toughen our legs for the *Parademarsch* (goose-stepping) we were told.

If the flight sergeant was particularly annoyed about some unfortunate creature, he would order the offender into his room where the man, dressed in great coat and wearing the heavy steel helmet on his head, had to perform a hundred or more knee jerks, holding the rifle with outstretched arms. And all that in front of the blazing stove. No wonder, we were constantly alert and careful not to fall into disgrace.

A particularly ridiculous incident may illustrate what kind of punishment was meted out in certain circumstances. One day, at morning parade, the tall and skinny sergeant major was in a very bad mood.

'Who of you monkeys has been on dental parade yesterday morning?' he queried. 'Three steps forward.'

Two recruits marched to the front.

'Well then, which one of you two pigs pissed into the sandbox in the doctor's waiting room?' the sergeant major asked.

'Come on. I haven't got all day. Both of you? I can't believe it. I'll see you in my office after drill. And will you be sorry!'

As we heard later, the two boys who hailed from a remote mountain village in the Austrian Alps, had been sitting for a long time in the dentist's waiting room. When they eventually felt the need to relieve themselves, they were too embarrassed to ask the pretty nurse at the reception desk for the toilet.

Being in distress, they decided to misuse the sandbox in the waiting room which, of course, was intended for emergency fire fighting during an air raid. As soon as the dentist discovered the misdeed he phoned the regiment.

For their misdemeanour, the two hillbillies received special treatment that I am sure they would never have forgotten for the rest of their lives. For two weeks they were undergoing extreme punishment drill during the lunch break as soon as they had eaten their meal. They then had only a few moments to clean up, change and fall in for the afternoon activities.

When we were considered to have learned enough of ceremonial drill without fouling up, we had to assemble on the tarmac to take the oath. Six selected recruits placed their left hand on the lowered regimental standard, symbolically representing the new intake, and we all repeated the sombre words of the oath, swearing total allegiance to the Commander-in-Chief, Adolf Hitler, the self-appointed *Führer* of the nation.

Much has been written in post-war literature about that unusual and compelling oath. It weighed heavily on every soldier's conscience, and it certainly fostered unquestioned obedience. Significantly, it was that oath which would often be cited in war crime trials as the excuse for unjustifiable actions.

For the first few weeks of our training we were confined to barracks. With all the hectic activity going on, the constant attention to our kit which was inspected daily, cleaning rifles and other duties we wouldn't have had time to spare anyway.

In preparation for our first outing we were subjected to lectures about behaviour in public, good manners and etiquette. When the much anticipated critical Sunday arrived, we were led into town under the supervision of our corporals who, like doting mothers, were supposed to make sure that we behaved properly. The final insult, I guess.

That first chaperoned outing traditionally led to the '*Deutsche Haus*', that grand café of Pilsen which was then still a glamorous establishment of a more cultured era. There, under the watchful eye of proud corporals, we were allowed to enjoy the famous Pilsner beer and engage in civilised conversation governed by accepted protocol.

Those were different days to be sure.

From then on we could apply for shore leave, provided we were not rostered for extra duties, like fire pickets awarded for defaults. Alas, with the exhaustive drill, study for exams and other chores, plus the five kilometre walk to the city, let alone the fact that the sex drive was temporarily in neutral because of physical fatigue, not many of us ventured out during the whole three months.

Nevertheless, our coming-out involved yet another of those traditional German military practices of yore.

One morning about 5 o'clock, the door to our room was noisily torn open. In rushed the Orderly Sergeant, followed by Orderly Officer, CO and Medical Officer. A barked order made us jump out of bed, our night shirts came off and we had to stand to attention in front of our bunks.

It dawned on us that we were in for the embarrassing ritual of a *Schwanzparade* — the dreaded VD inspection.

Whilst a corporal positioned himself outside the toilet block to make sure that nobody from the now wide awake company tried to relieve himself before being checked out, the MO ordered *Pull back*! and *Squeeze*!

Considering our monastic existence, everyone just had to be clean. Only one unfortunate baby-faced virginal youngster who could not comply with the MO's direction was later counselled to submit himself to what the sergeant described as a 'Jewish cut', that is to say a belated circumcision. Not a pleasant experience for a boy of nineteen!

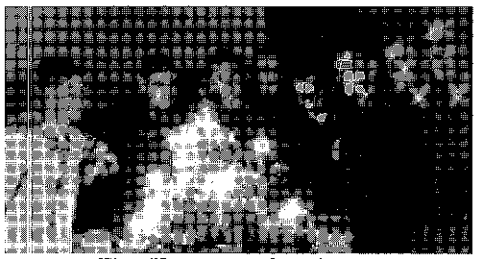
One break from the daily routine occurred when we had to travel to Prague to undergo the decompression chamber test which was required to assess medical fitness for aircrew training. That test had also an educational purpose, namely to acquaint the candidates with the perils of oxygen starvation.

The standard test involved the writing down of a series of descending numbers from a thousand down, whilst the air mixture flowing into the chamber became less and less oxygen-rich, representing higher altitude levels. Each minute, on a signal from the observer outside the chamber, we had to interrupt the number sequence and write down a long word given to us before the test. Mine was *'Luftwaffendienstvorschriftenhandbuch'* (Air Force Procedural Manual), a brain-teaser under any circumstances.

The progressively increasing occurrence of errors in the numerical sequence written down, plus the distorted appearance of the operative word, strikingly illustrated how awareness and concentration decreases as the oxygen level gets lower. In fact it was quite frightening to see what errors one can produce without being aware of the condition suffered. As it is well known, death through oxygen starvation is swift and painless.

Sundays were usually occupied with letter writing. Reminiscent of my days at boarding school, during the first few weeks all incoming, as well as outgoing mail was censored.

Contrary to expectations, we received no lectures of a political nature. The only occasion was when we assembled to listen to a broadcast that informed the nation of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor that brought the US into the war.



First Xmas away from home.
Author third from left.

Christmas provided welcome relaxation from our absorbing routine. There was an official function, which we somehow resented because of its formal nature, but on Christmas Eve we were allowed to celebrate in our own quarters. It was a far more intimate and congenial affair. A little fir tree procured from the nearby woods was decorated with candles and we laid the tables with some goodies from the parcels that we had received from our families.

The first Christmas away from home is always a sad occasion, everybody's thoughts being with the loved ones back home. Surprisingly, *Oberfeldwebel* Weisser, who had been invited, displayed a hint of human feelings, but he probably felt exactly as we did.

We completed our arduous training in February 1942 and, after a faultless passing-out parade, were transferred to Brünn (Brno), the capital of the province of Moravia.

There, attached to the local Base Squadron, we would have to wait until a new course at the *Flugnachrichtenschule* (aircrew signals school) was due to commence. We were also joined by another group of recruits who had been trained in Vienna. Much to our astonishment, they presented themselves as a spirited mob, not totally crushed like us poor blokes from Pilsen.

During that interlude we were under the sole charge of a flight sergeant who bore the ominous name of Dämmerer. He was a hefty former heavyweight and considered himself 'tough'. He certainly did not take any nonsense, but in stark contrast to *Oberfeldwebel* Weisser, was quite an amicable character. Nevertheless, when upset, he could roar like a lion, making seasoned NCOs pale with fear.

With a play on his name, that in a wider sense could be interpreted as 'The Destroyer', his favourite expression was '*Ich zerdämmere Sie!*' (I'm going to demolish you!), perhaps an exclamation uttered with subconscious associations of former bloody exploits in the ring.

His favourite phrase quickly earned him the nickname '*Der Dämmereffekt*' — the German term for the 'Heavyside Layer Effect', that well-known phenomenon that occurs in the ionised gaseous layer of the upper atmosphere, playing havoc with radio transmission during dusk.

Our training now concentrated on radio science, practical exercises on communication equipment, and efforts to improve our Morse code speed. Inevitably, there were also field exercises and toughening-up drill, but far less sadistic than at Pilsen.

As I said before, Dämmerer, in spite of his ferocious acting, was fair and deep down a friendly person. Being visibly proud of his physical prowess, he often seemed to expect that his charges also had to be athletic. Once, outraged when he spotted four men struggling with a cupboard, he declared that, if anyone was game enough to dare him to a wager, he would carry it up to the fourth floor on his back. Nobody did.

There was an unexpected bonus. Because of the proximity of Brno to Vienna, a special weekend train had been provided. All local units had a quota of seats and a number of those fortunate enough not to have been in trouble during the week could get a leave pass. True to his style, the Flight Sergeant had a sporting way of selecting the lucky ones. On the Friday morning parade he would suddenly shout:

'All of you who want to go on weekend leave — to the fence — on the double!'

The sprinters who reached the perimeter fence first, received the coveted ticket. I don't think I ever ran the hundred metres as fast as on these occasions.

Funnily enough, being exposed to the freezing winter temperatures in that part of Europe fostered in my mind the germination of a far-reaching idea. One day during a field exercise, when the temperature was -30 degrees Celsius, icicles had formed on our eyebrows and our hands could hardly hold the rifles, the thought flashed through my mind that, should I survive the war, I would migrate to a warmer country with palm trees, blue seas and lovely bare-breasted native girls, clad in flimsy grass skirts, frolicking on sunny beaches.

I could not of course have foreseen that fourteen years later I would actually realise my dream — well, almost.

Brno offered many fascinating historical attractions, like the ancient Spielberg fortress with its gruesome dungeons, as well as cultural activities. I once earned a free ticket to to see *La Bohême*.

I should mention that at that point in time in pursuance of established practice and an attempt to alleviate boredom amongst the many soldiers stationed in the city, the Army had opened a controlled bordello, colloquially known as the *Puff*.

Some of our boys became regular visitors and a young and handsome man acquired instant fame when one of the ladies adopted him as her quasi boyfriend, plying him with cigarettes, drinks and occasionally letting him have it for free.

Even our *Oberfeldwebel* was impressed.

In April 1942 our interlude came to an end and we were posted to the training school at Königgrätz, the ancient royal city of Bohemia, known as Hradec Králové in Czech.

Before our departure, there was a carefree farewell function when drinks flowed freely, happy tunes were sung and the jokers amongst the crowd performed their antics. The Flight Sergeant joined in the fun but he had his own surprise in store. Early on the following morning he took us on a ten kilometre hike.

'To clear your lungs of the smoke', he said.

The course at Königgrätz consisted of four individual stages of two months' duration. Progress examinations were held every week and at the end of each stage, plus a final test at the end of the course. Trainees were allowed to repeat one failed stage. Those who failed a second time, were posted to Stuka and other bomber formations as rear gunners. Such a unit was stationed at the airfield and we heard a lot about the disadvantages of being radio operator/rear gunner on the famous Ju 87 dive bomber.

It seems that the aircraft was not very popular. Enemy fighter planes would attack from the rear and always at that critical moment when the aircraft came out of the dive, temporarily hanging in the sky like a ripe plum. The unfortunate bloke in the back seat got the full blast, resulting in a relatively short life expectancy for that category.

Furthermore, there were frightening stories about the cumulative effect of the split second blackout caused by the tremendous G-Forces experienced during the recovery from the dive. It was rumoured that many dive bomber fliers eventually landed in the psychiatric ward, their brains having been permanently damaged. Such stories greatly influenced our study efforts and determination to pass the course.

We now concentrated on radio science, Morse code practice, navigation, air gunnery, meteorology and recognition of enemy aircraft types. There were drill, target practice and field exercises. The intermediate stage also featured the tasking NCO course which was a necessary requirement for the promotion to the rank of *Unteroffizier* (Sergeant).

Our instructional staff displayed a very high standard of professionalism. Many officers and senior NCOs had extensive combat experience, indicated by their decorations. The Iron Cross 1st Class was then awarded for one hundred missions, the *Deutsche Kreuz in Gold* (German Cross in Gold) for three hundred. Most of their missions had taken place over England.

The extensive syllabus imposed a heavy workload and we were kept busy at all times. The school was run under a tight management, expecting strict discipline, often irritating adherence to daily kit inspection standards, military bearing and academic achievements. A number of men failed and, in the final outcome, our original contingent had shrunk from eighty hopefuls to less than thirty.

Once again, we rarely went ashore being occupied with studying or extra duty for errors and omissions. People who failed the weekend Morse code test were routinely ordered to participate in additional practice after stand down.

On Saturday mornings there was an orgy of scrubbing, plank scouring and tidying up the cupboards. The cleaning exercise, which saw floods of water brushed through the ablutions area and the corridors, was referred to as '*Rein Schiff*', scrubbing the deck, that is.

Uninitiated newcomers might have wondered why a flying corps should use that and other nautical expressions in the daily routine. Anecdotal tradition seems to trace that tendency back to the days when a number of ex-Navy NCOs had been recruited to form the nucleus of the *Luftwaffe*.

The clinical inspections before lunch were thorough. Sometimes a whole room would fail, which meant confinement to barracks over the weekend. Nonetheless, depending on the sense of humour of the inspecting officer, the inspections had their lighter moments too.

For instance, our sergeant major, who was a very short man, once spotted in my cupboard a pair of kid gloves which Steffi had sent to me in anticipation of my promotion. Fingering the gloves he queried:

'What's this? Kid gloves already? You are not *Unteroffizier* yet!'

At that moment, his eyes fell on Steffi's glamorous studio photo which, according to custom, I had mounted on the inside of the cupboard door. Seemingly stunned he raised himself up on his toes, took the picture down, whilst handing back the gloves which had suddenly lost their interest. Staring at the photo he exclaimed:

'Man. Man. What a woman. Absolutely crazy!'

Looking me up and down he muttered admiringly:

'Man, you must be some lover-boy!'

Still entranced and grinning, he left our room without bothering about continuing the inspection. Our hilarity was almost riotous.

On Saturday afternoons there was the weekly punishment drill for defaulters, usually carried out with gas masks. Once, caught out with a minor offence, I was given the option of two hours extra drill or being rostered on three weekends for duty. I opted for the former.

One particularly nasty East-Prussian NCO was known to position himself at the main gate when he was orderly sergeant, and carry out random dress inspections. Once he ordered me to roll up a trouser leg to check whether I was wearing the regulation sock suspenders. Fortunately I was. Having to walk back to the quarters in order to fix up the discrepancy would have made going ashore unattractive.

Another foible of his was his insistence that you had to have a packet of condoms in your pocket.

I think it should be put on record, that during the whole eighteen months I spent on Czechoslovakian territory, we were never harassed by the local population, but treated in a civil manner. As I was to discover later in France and, painfully during the subsequent occupation of German and Austrian territory after 1945 itself, life in an occupied country goes on irrespectively.

It is, of course, not a normal life, but survival being the strongest motivating factor in humankind, people will always find some form of accommodation with the occupying forces. One has to eat to stay alive and trade and commerce must go on to ensure income and support. Furthermore, ordinances issued by the occupying power must be observed for fear of reprisals.

Historical evidence shows that even limited fraternisation may take place. As Leon Uris says, those who have never mingled sweat with the enemy in bed, will never learn to understand each other. Nevertheless, there is always the hard core resistance of patriotic or fanatical forces. It is their activities that make headlines and all too often distort the true picture.

Our first familiarisation flights took place in a FW 58, known as '*Weihe*' (Harrier), one of those earlier military aircraft built with a fuselage of plywood and canvas, no longer suitable for combat, but still useful for training.

Before getting into operating the radio equipment, we practised shooting from the aircraft at floating targets on a nearby lake and later, when we had to qualify with recorded target hits, at the firing range.

In-flight training on the radio was then carried out in Ju 52 and Ju 86 aircraft. Initially, this was practised on the FUG 3 radio set, but later on the state-of-the-art FUG 10.

For the purpose of tactical communications the school had devised an ingenious setting that provided a very realistic scenario of a full flight of bombers on a mission. It consisted of the recovered and refurbished rear sections of twenty bodies of crashed Heinkel 111 bombers which had been positioned in a huge hall, wired to a command centre that simulated the communication procedures during an actual mission flown over England.

During the exercise we had to carry out all the procedures which would have been necessary in the real situation according to the instructions contained in the OPS order and certain unexpected events, advised by the directions issued from the command centre.

The simulated flight involved dead reckoning navigation, plotting the flight progress and recording course changes. Some of these would be made to evade enemy fighter planes and we had to correctly record the position after the evasive action on the navigation chart and calculate the new course.

In order to make it all as realistic as possible, the radio operators were strapped in their seats and dressed in full flying gear with helmet and goggles. It was a very advanced and realistic concept for those days. Nowadays such exercises would be conducted on a simulator.

Naturally, that progressive and most effective training aid was the pride of the school. Whenever a staff inspection or the visit of a VIP was announced, a flight had to be detailed at short notice in order to demonstrate our impressive training facilities.

One of the highlights towards the end of the course was a 40 kilometre march to the battlefield of Königgrätz where in 1866 the Prussians had defeated the Austrians in an unfortunate fratricidal war instigated by the German Chancellor Bismarck. There, whilst we were resting, an officer would give a complete resumé of the happenings at that historical encounter, which is also known as the *Battle of Sadova*.

There was a funny sideline to the ritual of that outing.

The commandant of the station was then an aged officer of the former glorious Austrian K & K Army, reactivated from retirement. Since the German military did not have much time for these gentlemanly officers which they considered as inefficient when measured by Prussian standards, the colonel, like many of his former comrades, had been placed in a non-sensitive position.

Every time a company was due to return from their outing to the battlefields, the good old colonel would position himself at the main gate in order to take the salute. The march-past required forming up into full drill order with rifles held tight, eyes right and the inevitable *Parademarsch* (ceremonial goose-step).

Since goose-stepping is quite a physical effort, particularly after having covered a 40 kilometre hike and with blisters on the feet, we did not look forward to that performance. But, as the gentleman's habits were well known, we had of course been forewarned and thus ample time to straighten up before approaching the main gate.

One of the peculiar foibles of the colonel was that he had selected his own marching tune which had to be played by the band whenever he was on parade, sort of a Wagnerian *Leitmotif* one could say. Since the troops had invented some unprintable lyrics to go with it, everybody had a grin on his face as we marched in perfect order past the diminutive OC. He would then smile benevolently and in true Austrian Imperial Army style salute with a jovial nod of his head.

Towards the end of 1942 the fortunes of war turned against Germany when a whole army was defeated at Stalingrad. Shortly after the disaster had been announced to the nation, Dr Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, delivered his 'Total War' speech at the *Sportspalast* (sporting arena) in Berlin, yet another event when we were required to assemble and listen to the historical radio broadcast.

We could not have fathomed then what disasters lay ahead for Germany and us insignificant participants in the war.

Early in 1943 I had my first home leave since the call up in November 1941. Naturally, I spent the two weeks in Vienna with one of my aunts. Uncle was then serving on the Russian front and, much to our regret, had not been home for over a year.

When I returned to the school, I found that most members of the course had already been posted to Prague for training on Ju 88 dive bombers. The officer addressing the twenty remaining graduates read out a list of names that included mine.

'Congratulations!' he said.

'I am pleased to tell you that you are now promoted to the rank of *Unteroffizier*. You will immediately go to the tailor shop and have your silver braid sewn on to your blouses! When that has been done, report to the orderly room where you will receive your marching orders. You are attached to Blindflugschule II at Semlin (Zemun) in Yugoslavia for further training. I think you'll depart tonight!'

The Czech tailors smiled as we arrived — they were traditionally entitled to a gratuity on account of our now greatly increased remuneration which, in addition to the daily rate of pay, also meant a monthly salary to be paid into a nominated bank account.

As we emerged from the tailor shop, resplendent with the shining new silver braid around our collars, we received salutes, new trainees would jump to attention and literally fall over themselves to open the doors for the new 'demigods'.

The sergeant major welcomed us to the *Unteroffizierskorps* and advised us that it was tradition to donate one week's pay to the Sergeant's Mess. The money would be gladly received at the orderly room.

'Please, gentlemen, settle before you leave the unit!'

Who cares about one week's pay! We made it!

Chapter Two

Kampfgeschwader 53 'Legion Condor'

On the way to Belgrade we had a stopover in Vienna. The next evening, having settled at a window seat on the overcrowded transport train to various Balkan destinations, I engaged in some daydreaming, trying to envisage what lay ahead. My contemplations were suddenly interrupted when a steel-helmeted sergeant beckoned to me:

'Follow me!' he said.

Squeezing through the crowded corridors, I was taken to the compartment where the captain in charge of the train had established his office. Several other NCOs were already present.

The officer explained that we were about to enter Partisan-infested territory. Since derailments through mines on the track and attacks on transport trains did happen, extreme security measures were necessary. Accordingly, we had been selected to take charge of individual carriages. Our task was to roster armed guards to be positioned at each end and supervise their alertness. Whenever the train stopped we were to descend and make sure that no suspicious persons approached the carriages and should check that no magnetic mines were placed underneath.

I felt as if I had been thrown into the deep end. Conscientiously trying to live up to expectations of my new responsibilities, I did not get any sleep that night.

On arrival at Zemun, where in contrast to Vienna the weather was oppressively hot, we were advised to check the notice board. To my surprise, I found that I was rostered to be guard commander.

The next morning, when I had finished my duty and returned to my room, I faced a smiling young *Unteroffizier* leaning against one of the bunks.

'Hello Franz Körbl' he said.

Unable to place him, I queried: 'Where did we meet?'

'A long time ago.' was the answer.

'Do you mean in Pilsen, Brno, Königsgrätz, Berlin — perhaps Ried or Linz?'

'No' he said. 'Earlier than that — think hard.'

'Vienna?'

'Yes my friend. Don't you recognise me? I am Bruno.'

Bruno Haller. I could not believe it. The well-to-do child prodigy from my state school days who had disappeared from my sight when he transferred to a different high school. All I remember is having seen the posters in the city advertising his violin concerts and painting exhibitions staged at the age of twelve.

'Good God Bruno. What a surprise. What are you doing here?' I asked.

'I am a pilot instructor. How did I find you? I noticed you when you paraded the guards last night. I immediately said to myself: Franz Körbl — it has to be him. We'll have to get together and celebrate.'

As things go in a war, I lost contact with Bruno but later learned that he had a distinguished career flying bombers over the Atlantic. I caught up with him and his parents in Vienna after the war where he had broken into the theatrical world. On that occasion it was he who did not recognise me!

At Zemun, the new radio operators were paired with pilots to form the nucleus of future bomber crews. In the days of directing and ranging via Morse code transmission to the ground controller, coordination between pilot and radio operator was of course vital to instrument flying.

First Crew: Fähnrich Schacht second from right. Author on right.

I was assigned to *Fähnrich* (Ensign) Schacht who hailed from the Rhineland. No time was wasted and we immediately embarked on an extensive instrument flying program of five-hour missions during the day and also during the night. In between, there were *Link* Trainer (simulator) sessions, navigation classes, meteorology lectures and other important subjects.

We trained on Ju 52 transport planes and Heinkel 111 bombers, flying mainly in the Danube/Sava River basin, and practising QGH (assisted landing manoeuvre) instrument approaches. For reasons of economy, several aircraft would operate simultaneously at varying allocated altitude levels during night flying. Accordingly, the simulated landing approach procedure was actually executed at high altitude. This meant that the aircraft never touched the ground but that 'finals' occurred at say 9,000 feet.

There were always tense moments when the aircraft slowed down to landing speed, followed by full throttle, the roar of the engines revving up and the aircraft climbing to a new approach position. No wonder, our instructors were often nervous and irritable.

However, there were also pleasant compensations. During daytime, the instructors would sometimes take us away from the assigned air space and venture into more interesting regions. I particularly remember a flight over the Adriatic, cruising at medium altitude over the isles near Dubrovnik — an unforgettably beautiful experience. On another occasion we flew low along the Danube River and actually through the 'Iron Gates', the narrow mountain gap at the border between Yugoslavia and Romania.

In contrast to Czechoslovakia, life in Yugoslavia was dangerous. The Partisans were active and would strike at selected targets at any time. Although we were free to go into town to enjoy food and wine, we always had to be armed and look over our shoulders everywhere.

Armed members of the Croatian *Ustashi*, who were on the German side, would patrol the streets with hand grenades dangling from their belts, ready to strike at a moment's notice. One evening, some men came back to the base ashen-faced, telling us that they had just witnessed militia-men executing someone in the main street.

German Army units stationed in Yugoslavia had a hard time. Local air support was provided by two Ju 88s stationed at the airfield that flew daily sorties into the mountains to attack enemy strongholds, but I doubt that they were very effective. Anyone who has seen the rugged mountains from the air would realise how difficult it was to find the targets, let alone inflict effective damage.

One man from our course was shot dead late at night when he cycled back to the base from a visit to a tavern. Although such incidents would cause patrols to be sent out to comb the area, contact with the evasive Partisans was seldom made.

About Easter time the radio beacon at Pancevo was attacked. By the time an assault group was organised, armed and transported to the location, the enemy had, of course, disappeared. We spent some twenty uncomfortable hours patrolling along the estuary of the Sava River, getting drenched by heavy rain in the process.

I think our course ran over five weeks. When we graduated and obtained our certificates — the *Bordfunkerschein* — we were granted home leave, subject to posting authorities being issued to the gaining squadrons.

The return journey was hazardous. The track had been blown up causing a lengthy delay before we arrived in Vienna. I was lucky to have another two weeks rest before the telegram arrived that directed me to proceed to Orléans in France. There I was to report to IV/KG 53 Legion Condor.

Naturally, I was greatly excited by the prospect. We always had vivid fantasies about the glamorous life in France where the climate was supposed to be pleasantly warm, the landscape beautiful, food and wine exquisite and the women adorable. There was even an old German adage: '*Leben wie der Herrgott in Frankreich*' — to live like the Good Lord in France.

For obvious reasons, Paris was a strictly controlled area and only people stationed there were allowed to move about freely. Transients, like myself, received a piece of paper from the Railway Transport Officer (RTO), which stipulated the route to be adhered to between the Metro and railway stations. Having been looking forward to see the city, I was naturally disappointed.

The train journey from Paris to Les Aubrais took about an hour. From there it was only ten minutes by local train to the city of Orléans.

By then I had caught up with more chaps posted to the squadron. Having ascertained that there was a regular special train at 2130 to the airfield at Bricy we had plenty of time to look around town. There was so much to see an do — the many historical buildings, the fabulous shops in the main street, the soldier's club; and savouring some of the many fabulous local diversions which were available. According to all the enthusiastic accounts we heard, life was quite acceptable there.

Orléans had been bombed by German planes during the assault in 1940. The Stukas had been selective, destroying part of the quarter near the central square, but avoiding the magnificent Cathedral, the *Hôtel de Ville* and other historic features like the statue of Joan of Arc.

At the corner of Rue de Commerce and the city square, a large building had been fitted out as the *Soldatenheim* (Soldier's Club) which was run by the Red Cross. It provided food, drinks and other entertainment. The meals served in the club were particularly good, with venison, wild boar and other game gracing the menu. As is well known, the Loire valley is a hunter's paradise.

With the exception of a few 'out-of-bounds' places there were no restrictions on access to public establishments. One could enjoy the occasional evening in the balmy atmosphere of the summer months, listen to accordion music, the voices of local singers or the records of Piaf and Lucienne Boyer, getting pleasantly intoxicated in the process. Of the many chansons I've heard in those days, the haunting tune of *J'attendrai!* has been indelibly inscribed on my mind.

The population at large was friendly. After all, the well-paid *Luftwaffe* personnel plus the large army contingent stationed in the area must have added substantially to local commerce. According to my recollections most of the German occupation troops in the larger cities experienced a relatively peaceful and congenial atmosphere.

It may have been different in the countryside and particularly in the central mountain region where the Maquis were reported to be active.

As for myself, the fact that I came from Austria and spoke French might have helped.

'Tu n'es pas allemand — tu es autrichien!' my French friends would say.

Before I continue with my story, I think I should say few words about the history of KG 53.

Contrary to popular belief, KG 53 in its role as German *Traditionsgeschwader*, a unit designated to continue the name of a historical squadron, had no connection with the original *Legion Condor* which operated in Spain during the Civil War.

That title was given to the contingent of some 6,500 German soldiers who in November 1936 arrived in Spain to fight on General Franco's side. The politically motivated move followed the earlier arrival of Soviet armaments, aircraft and advisory personnel to support the Republican cause. Mussolini's Italy followed suit by dispatching between 40,000 and 60,000 soldiers to the theatre. During the ensuing operations, the German *Luftwaffe* personnel flew He 111, Do 17 and Ju 52 bombers.

There was a sprinkling of officers in KG 53 who had served in Spain. However, I doubt whether the bulk of our men knew much about that part of modern history, the now raging world war putting the preceding events into the background.

Since the identifying blue ribbon with the name *Legion Condor* embroidered in silver thread on the right sleeve of our jackets was a highly coveted adornment, newcomers were subjected to a qualifying period and only allowed to wear it after having been awarded the badge with the wireless operator and rear gunner symbols. That badge was the equivalent to the 'half wing' in the RAF and RAAF.

Originally, *Luftwaffe* squadrons were established in three active *Gruppen (*Wings*)*, identified by Roman numerals and consisting of three *Staffeln* (Flights) each. During the early stages of World War II when it became obvious that these units could no longer carry on the training commitments necessary to weld pilots, navigators, wireless operators and gunners into combat-ready crews, the squadrons formed a fourth group, solely designated to carry out training and conversions.

For reasons of military economy, these groups were often stationed on airfields in occupied territory, thereby relieving active army elements.

Without delay, we were drawn into an active training program that involved navigation flights, formation flying, bombing runs (either over the range or on an ingeniously designed simulator), instructions in tactical behaviour and so on. Many of the flights took us over picturesque country to exciting locations like Lyon, Perpignan, Lille, Tours, Chartres and other places.

Our Commanding Officer (CO), *Staffelkapitän* (Flight Commander) Hauptmann Eicke, who was a veteran of the 'Blitz', having flown over three hundred missions, hailed from a town near Hildesheim in Western Germany where his father was a school teacher. He often arranged long-range navigation flights back home over free weekends, usually selecting my crew for what in effect were 'jollies'.

He loved to fly the distance from Orléans to the destinations at very low level, which was an exhilarating experience.

Talking about low level flying! We had an established route for such practice, which led from Bricy south-east to Gien, from there north to Puiseaux and back to Bricy. The lap to Gien roughly followed the course of the Loire and pilots would always negotiate the river bed rather than fly in a straight line.

We would be flying very low indeed. When crossing the railway line near Puiseaux, I remember once having been able to read the name of the station.

Inevitably, accidents occured during training and we lost two aircraft and crews during my time. The first one had hit high tension wires, the second one touched the water of the river and broke up. I think the rear gunner survived in the second crash.

Another tragic accident occurred when two aircraft having practised close formation flight were returning to the base. Breaking formation, one aircraft clipped the tail end of the other. The leading aircraft fell to the ground and exploded on impact, the second managed to land.

A hastily detailed squad was issued with long rubber gloves and ordered to collect the human bits and pieces spread over the impact area and to distribute them equally into five coffins.

The sad sequel to these accidents were funeral parades at the war graves section of the cemetery at Les Aubrais, a sobering experience for the participants.

At one stage of our training several pilots were attached to a specialist course. During their absence, the remaining members of the crews were to be detailed for guard duties around the perimeter fence of the airfield. Not relishing the prospect of two weeks of sleepless nights, I had what I thought was a brilliant idea.

I suggested to the sergeant major that it would be beneficial for us wireless operators to gain practical experience at the base communication centre. The CO liked the suggestion and agreed.

The opportunity to participate in the communication process at ground level was indeed an exciting experience. Attached to the duty crew, we were able to gain valuable practice in sending and receiving messages passing between command and the three operating groups on the Russian front, as well as ciphering and deciphering with the ENIGMA.

To me, listening to Morse code signals coming through space had always been a mysterious and exhilarating sensation. Perhaps a yet unrealised psychic disposition manifested itself in an esoteric manner. Years later when I became involved in spiritualism, I was surprised to find how many communication engineers and scientists subscribe to that philosophy. I suppose the hypothesis of electromagnetic waves and that of 'vibrations' go well together, as both phenomena can be explained on common premises.

Our crew included an attractive blonde, a *Luftwaffenhelferin,* that is a female signal operator. Unfortunately, she was engaged to an officer serving at the Russian front and was, therefore, 'out-of-bounds'. Nevertheless, her status did not restrict her social life too much. When she found out that I spoke French, she readily co-opted me as her escort on many extended shopping trips, the highlight of which was the purchase of a glamorous fur coat, the envy of all the other girls.

But there was more! In the basement of the communication centre, the crew kept a few rabbits in cages, destined for the cooking pot. There were always sniggering remarks when the vivacious lady would announce:

'I am going to feed the rabbits. Franz! Are you coming to help me?'

Did I refuse? Who would?

The German fortunes of war turned sour when in July of that year Allied troops landed in Sicily. It was about that time that our crew was tasked with a mission to Corsica with the objective of dropping leaflets over the island. We were already strapped in and waiting on the tarmac for clearance when the mission was cancelled.

The Italians surrendered to the Allied Forces in September, a politically induced move which, based on the World War I experience, had been predicted by many Austrians right from the beginning. Most of my countrymen never understood why Hitler should trust Mussolini.

It created a new situation that further strained German resources and made the general situation look bleaker than ever. Nevertheless, morale remained high in spite of the military setbacks. It seems that we just accepted our lot, trusting in fate and the then common belief that the *Führer* knew what he was doing.

During the first few weeks of my stay at *Bricy* it was possible to go to Paris on weekend leave. Most of the new arrivals immediately jumped at the opportunity to see the city and savour the legendary sex life supposedly available there. As for myself, I had intended to save a sizeable amount of pay before joining in the fun.

Unfortunately, one week an unusually high number of men came down with VD, causing the cancellation of all leave to the capital. It was not until several months later that I had my first chance to explore the French capital.

However, there was enough recreation on the local scene. In Orléans, like in most other towns, the Army controlled a number of brothels that operated in the Rue de Juifs. In order to isolate the area which, incidentally, was affectionately known as '*Soldatenheim No 2*' (Soldier's Club No 2), the street had been closed on both ends by high fences and access was only possible through the medical centre.

Before being allowed into the establishments proper, one had to submit to a cursory checkup. If found clean, one had to hand in their ID tag in exchange for a docket annotated with their service number.

The purpose of the docket was to ensure that those who had engaged in sex would not only have a record of the name of the partner, but also had to undergo the prescribed prophylactic treatment afterwards. That procedure, called *Sanierung,* consisted of a rather unpleasant application of a squirt of Protargol (a colloidal preparation of silver and protein) into the penis, which was supposed to kill any *gonococci* that might have entered the urinary tract, plus a dab of antiseptic ointment for good measure.

The completion of the procedure was then certified on another docket which together with the 'dog' tag was handed back to the soldier.

Since many men often visited the establishments only in order to have a look around, a chat with the girls over a glass of wine, perhaps a dance or just for plain perving, any docket not bearing a signature from a girl would be exchanged with the ID tag at the medical post and nobody was to be any the wiser.

In the unlikely event that an infection might have occurred, the medical section had the name of the girl for necessary follow-up action.

The obviously cumbersome documentation process was necessary as standing orders made the wearing of a condom and undergoing *Sanierung* after intercourse compulsory. Accordingly, catching VD could be interpreted as a disciplinary offence on the basis of disobedience.

In order to escape punishment it was absolutely necessary to produce the compromising 'slip' at the hearing. This was particularly important in the case of aircrews and submarine complements where catching VD was a court martial offence. It was all very neat and tidy, at least in theory.

Why do I dwell on these unsavoury details? Well, there is an interesting sideline to the story.

During my stunt with the CMF in Melbourne, an officer once asked me what I knew about German 'brothel procedures'. He thought that, having served in the *Luftwaffe*, I could explain.

When I expressed astonishment, he told me that he had read an account of an incident in World War II, when British Intelligence had been able to ascertain the home-base of an aircraft shot down over England, by cleverly evaluating a *Sanierung* docket found in the pocket of a captured German airman.

The story was that the bloke apparently had enjoyed a 'quickie' before going on the mission and forgotten the slip in his pocket. On the basis of the time lapsed between the date/time annotated on the docket until the aircraft was shot down, plus the known cruising speed of the bomber, it had been possible to calculate the distance covered. By drawing a circle on the map, the home base of the aircraft could thus be identified.

Which goes to show that there is no safe sex!

With our training nearing completion, crews were progressively transferred to Russia in order to replenish losses on the front. Since these were not too heavy at the time, we had to wait for our turn. In the meantime, we continued with practice flying.

In November I came down with what I thought was a touch of the flu. The Medical Officer (MO), who was a conscripted GP with dubious diagnostic abilities, gave me ten Aspirin tablets and told me to stay in bed for a day and sweat it out. When it did not work, I asked him whether I could be admitted for a few days of proper treatment. He remarked 'Good idea!' and sent me to the sick quarters that had been established on a farm nearby.

That evening I developed a very high temperature and a flaming red rash on my body. In the morning, when the MO arrived for his rounds, he looked at me sadly and murmured:

'Poor boy. Very sick! Very sick!'

I could not resist suggesting: 'Sir, that rash — doesn't it look like scarlet fever?'

'Scarlet fever!' he exclaimed. 'Good idea. Take him to the hospital in Orléans.'

When the ambulance had come to a stop inside the hospital complex, a doctor clad in white and wielding a spatula appeared at the rear door.

'Come forward and open your mouth,' he ordered. 'Good God! Off to the isolation ward.'

The diagnosis was indeed scarlet fever, a rather rare occurrence at my age. For several days I was now in isolation, being dosed with sulphonamides and gallons of orange juice.

From the two nursing sisters and the two medical orderlies who looked after the section, I learned that I was the third case of scarlet fever in a row. Firstly, there had been an infantryman who was now in quarantine, and then *Fräulein* Thiese, a German pathology assistant, who was lying in the adjoining room. The theory was that she had been infected whilst attending to samples from the man. Since I had no contact with either of them, it was a mystery as to where I had picked up the 'bug'.

After a week or so, I was transferred to a larger ward where I had the company of an army bloke who hailed from the Alsac region and was fluent in both French and German.

I was also introduced to Miss Thiese in a quaint way.

I should mention that she was supposed to be 'friendly' with one of the fighter pilots stationed at our base. One morning he paid her a 'visit', buzzing the hospital in a light trainer aircraft, waving frantically from the cockpit, much to the excitement of patients and staff alike. But, let's return to my splendid isolation.

Apparently, the senior sister had a practical idea and came up with an astonishing proposal.

'You are an intelligent bloke with a good education,' she said. 'How would you like to help Miss Thiese in the lab? Like you, she is now quarantined, but since she is the only pathology assistant available, we need her services. How about it?'

Well, with my latent interest in medical science, I naturally was only too glad to 'help' and get some inside experience, apart from having the chance of meeting the lady. Contrary to my expectations, most of my work was quite menial, involving attending to urine samples, a rather simple procedure. And that led me to conceive a silly prank which temporarily damaged our otherwise cordial relationship.

One morning, I deviously substituted camomile tea for urine in my own sample and let her routinely test it. Unfortunately, the medical orderly, who had been privy to my practical joke, could not resist telling and teasing Miss Thiese about her 'professional' mistake.

In the afternoon, the door to the ward was violently torn open, Miss Thiese looked at me with blazing eyes and shouted:

'You and I are finished! Finished!'

It became painfully evident that our blossoming friendship had suffered a temporary breakdown.

There also was a French cleaning lady *d'un certain age* who often brought me 'goodies' from the kitchen and sat at my bedside, talking about this and that. One day she introduced me to her eleven-year-old daughter who stood in the door frame, smiling innocently.

Funnily, the next day an envelope was pushed under the door of the ward. Opening it, I found that it contained a not so childish love letter. For a moment, I was tempted to play along with a perhaps intriguing romance and write a *billet doux* (love letter) in reply, but then thought better of it.

Considering the wartime shortages, food in the hospital was excellent and plentiful. Every morning at ten o'clock we were handed a glass containing an eggnog, that is a mixture of egg, white wine and spices, to boost our resistance. When I was on my own in the ward after the Alsatian bloke had left, the duty nurse always brought me a glass of *Glühwein* from the huge and steaming bowl taken to the TB ward before lights-out. I was looked after really well!

We were now in Advent and the third Christmas since the beginning of my military adventures was approaching. The shops in town were still stocked with an amazing range of goods and in spite of the dismal situation, a glimmer of Christmas spirit prevailed.

On the evening after my tiff with Miss Thiese, the senior sister told me that a recital of Christmas carols had been arranged in the cathedral.

'Put on your uniform, Franz, you are coming with us' she said. 'Don't worry about your quarantine — the MO has agreed. You are practically over the period of infection anyway.'

The evening was to be a great spiritual experience.

The sombre atmosphere in the awe-inspiring, dimly lit medieval cathedral, with the deep voices of the mighty organ resounding in the Gothic edifice and a mixed choir of German servicemen and women singing, still remains vividly in my memory. It was one of those rare moments in life that cannot be described in words.

As we walked back to the hospital, I lightly touched Miss Thiese's hand.

'Are you still angry?' I whispered.

'Well, no', was the answer. 'But what a thing to do! Making me look a fool!'

To the great hilarity of our group, she then related the story of my silly prank.

'I should have sensed that something was wrong when I felt the test tube' she said. 'My, that bloke's urine is hot, I thought!'

And thus amicable relations were re-established in the pathology section.
Schacht, my pilot, and the rest of the crew visited me one afternoon, sadly announcing that they had to go to the Russian front without me. Much to my regret, we never got together again, but I met Schacht late in 1944 who by then was a seasoned and decorated veteran of many missions.

Early in December I was discharged from the hospital and granted two weeks leave. In accordance with the travel order, I was to report at the end of my holiday to the *Luftwaffensammelstelle* (Aircrew Reserve Unit) near the ancient city of Quedlinburg in the picturesque Harz Mountains situated in central Germany.

Being re-assessed at the reserve unit after hospitalisation was normal routine. On completion of the necessary procedures, squadrons were advised of the names of available personnel. To be reclaimed was then a matter of existing vacancies.

It goes without saying that I hoped to be posted back to KG 53 — you become attached to your squadron.

Chapter Three

A Link to the Antipodes

I don't think I gave Australia much thought in those years. It certainly never crossed my mind that one day I would migrate to a land that far away. However, as it turned out, I became unwittingly involved with the events on the other side of the world.

Although it was known in Germany that troops from the British colonies participated in the war effort, official communiques rarely made special reference to Canadian, Australian or other troops. To the public the enemies were simply the English, collectively referred to as 'Tommy'. I suppose that to the German mind it may have been difficult to understand why a country on the other side of the world should become involved in a European war.

The size of the Australian effort in World War I can be indicated by the fact that over 60,000 men were killed on the battlefields, at sea and in the air. A heavy sacrifice considering that Australia's population then was a bare five million people. The war memorials all over the country bear witness to the fact that hardly one little town was spared from the losses incurred in that war which was then fought under the banner 'For King and Country' and against German Imperialism.

The situation in 1939 may have been different, because anti-Nazi propaganda and forced Jewish emigration from Germany to Australia had added a new dimension to public sentiments.

Accordingly, when the war broke out, the call to arms was followed by a large number of volunteers. Furthermore, the emergence of the Royal Australian Air Force as a separate arm of the military establishment in 1921 provided an additional incentive to young men willing to participate in a war that evoked both national and ideological sentiments.

Amongst the volunteers was a young man from the Melbourne suburb of Brighton by the name of Leo Albert Kempson. Leo, who had worked as a clerk in the accounting department of the State Savings Bank in Melbourne, did his initial pilot training at Essendon in Victoria and was then transferred to Canada for advanced training under the so-called Empire Air Training Scheme.

During his stay in Ontario, he proposed by letter to Stella Lord, who was also working in the bank.

On completion of his training, Leo was posted to Northern Ireland and then to Scotland. Operating from England under Coastal Command against enemy shipping, he served with 455 Squadron, which had originally flown Hampden Torpedo Bombers. It was later re-equipped with the A-19 Bristol Beaufighter aircraft carrying a crew of two.

As fate would have it, Leo's life came to an untimely end in August 1944 during an engagement with a German convoy near the isle of Heligoland in the North Sea.

It was a hazardous mission. John Herington in his book 'Air Power Over Europe 1944–1945' describes it as follows:

No. 455 Beaufighter Squadron. Leo Kempson in centre. Wing Commander Davenport second from left (RAF Photo)

> A successful strike close to Heligoland followed on 10th August when one squadron of the wing lost formation and returned to base so that No 455 had to take the full responsibility for blanketing enemy ship-borne guns, which were also assisted by near-by shore batteries. Milson determined to attack the convoy of five merchant vessels and ten escort and, although three Beaufighters of No 455 were shot down, they had done their job so well that the following torpedo-carriers were able to sink a 6,000 ton freighter — a rich prize having regard to the enemy's acute shipping position.

Since the bodies of the crew were not recovered, Leo and his navigator were posted 'Missing believed Killed in Action'.

Twenty years later, I met Stella in Melbourne and, after a relatively short courtship, married her in November 1965.

Stella told me of course the story about her former fiancé and the circumstances concerning his tragic death, still believing that his body rested at the bottom of the sea. It was not until 1993 that she should learn what actually happened.

The revelation came totally unexpected, when we had lunch with our good friend Squadron Leader Ted Hewby at his home in Canberra. Also invited in the party were Air Vice-Marshal Alan Heggen with whom Ted had trained as navigators many years ago.

During the meal, Alan, who was then Director of the Australian War Graves Commission, talked about his recent trip to France where he had visited Australian War Cemeteries.

When the question of missing persons came up during the conversation, Stella related the story of Leo, mentioning that the fate of the crew had never been established. Alan seemed to think that this was strange and offered to check the records.

Much to our surprise he phoned the next day with the startling news that Leo's body had actually been recovered by the Germans a few weeks after the attack on the convoy. Having been intitially buried at the small town of Sankt Peter in Schleswig Holstein, Leo's body was exhumed by British authorities on 10 July 1947 and transferred to the British War Cemetery at Kiel-Holtenau.

The records also showed that the RAF navigator, Raymond Curzon, was buried in the War Cemetery at Hamburg, indicating that the two bodies were recovered at different points of the German coast.

There are some strange coincidences interwoven in the story.

Stella had visited Kiel after the war during a trip to Europe without being aware that Leo was buried there, I myself had lived in Kiel for a few years in accommodation close to the cemetery and worked in the adjoining Navy compound.

When I met Stella in January 1965, I could not have foreseen that I would become involved in a remote way in a tragedy that happened almost fifty years ago.

Neither did I have any inkling that one day I was destined to wear the uniform of the Australian air force myself.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Chapter Four

Wheels Must Turn for Victory

Räder müssen rollen für den Krieg. It was a well-known slogan, posted on signboards anywhere in Germany, reminding its citizens that unnecessary rail travel was detrimental to the war effort. As it happened, during 1944 I covered several thousands of miles across Europe. In retrospect, much of my travelling was absolutely futile, but I had of course no say in the matter.

One of my friends once remarked that I should be grateful to have had all those chances to see foreign countries without having to pay the fares. That may be true if the travel had taken place in more pleasant circumstances.

My stay at Quedlinburg was enjoyable, although short. Having had no physical injuries, my re-classification to flying duties was only a matter of form. The request for posting to IV/KG 53 came through quickly and soon I was on my way back to Orléans.

There was a surprise in store. Reporting to the unit, I learned the startling news that the squadron was to transfer to Szolnok in Hungary. This was quite sensational since that country, although allied with Germany, had no German troops stationed in its territory. The matter was supposed to be top secret, but our impending departure was already known in the Rue de Juifs.

The background to the German move is complex and in order to appreciate the situation, it is necessary to look back at history.

Hungary became independent after the collapse of the Hapsburg Monarchy in 1918. In the inter-war period, lacking Western support in its effort to recover land lost by the Treaty of Trianon, the country allied itself with Germany. Fear of the Soviet Union and Bolshevism in general induced Hungary to join the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1938, but it declared itself as non-belligerent when Germany invaded Poland in 1939.

However, as hostilities progressed, the government changed its stance and in 1941 declared war on the Soviet Union. The active prosecution of the campaign in the East came to an end in January 1943 when the Hungarian army suffered a crushing defeat at Veronezh.

Germany had meanwhile become aware of clandestine approaches to the Western powers and, as a precautionary measure, considered it necessary to move troops into the country. Following the established policy of using training units for occupation duties, the choice must have fallen on IV/KG 53. At least, that's what we were told.

Shifting a whole squadron across the continent is a major logistical operation and for weeks we were kept very busy with preparations. Eventually, the aircraft had departed and all the ground equipment plus personnel were loaded on a goods train standing at the Les Aubrais siding.

I forget how many men were allocated to each cattle truck, but it must have been a few too many for our sergeant major's liking. Having had some discussion with the railway staff, he returned with the announcement that two more trucks would be attached to the train. He then ordered some of us to take our kitbags down and wait on the side of the track.

Darkness fell whilst we were standing around. Suddenly, there was the familiar click of the couplings and the train started to move. As it gathered speed, the sergeant major waved frantically, indicating that we should jump. Considering the height and the speed of the train, plus our gear to be lifted, this seemed impossible. We were left behind.

A French railwayman explained: '*Train parti! Parti Paris — nix retour*!'

Perhaps our good sergeant major had met with language difficulties.

When we reported at the RTO office, the captain shook his head as he signed a travel warrant directing us to proceed to Paris under our own steam.

'I thought you Air Force boys were supposed to be the *Intelligentsia* of the *Wehrmacht*!' he muttered.

Well, travelling on a speedy passenger train was certainly better than lying on a pile of straw in a cold cattle truck. Arriving at Paris late at night, we were quartered near the station and issued with leave passes, pending departure of the regular military train on the following day. The break gave us a welcome opportunity to explore the fabulous city at leisure.

We arrived in Frankfurt am Main in the early hours of the morning. Since the next military transport to Vienna did not leave until late in the evening, we had yet another free day ahead, or so we thought.

Having deposited our gear at the station, we decided to proceed to the main street in search of available distractions. We had not covered half a mile when the air-raid sirens began to howl and we hurriedly had to find the nearest shelter. A few minutes later, the droning of heavy aircraft engines could be heard overhead and the anti-aircraft batteries opened up with an ear-splitting vengeance. The bombs began to fall almost immediately, shaking the five-storey building in the explosions. As the lights went out, the door to the shelter was torn open, a torch shone in and an agitated female voice announced:

'The building next door is afire! I am in charge — all you guys in uniform — follow me. We must try to extinguish the blaze!'

Hurrying after the air-raid warden, we stumbled onto the pavement. The scene was chaotic, collapsed buildings in the street, smoke, flames and people milling about with buckets of water. A chain was formed, and we raced up the stairs to the attic to direct the flimsy jet from the hand-pump towards the burning rafters.

We eventually succeeded in extinguishing the flames and started to shovel the glowing embers down onto the street in order to prevent them burning through the ceiling and incinerate the rooms underneath.

Whilst we were doing this, the second wave of enemy aircraft arrived. Again, the Flak began to fire at the bombers hidden by dense clouds. Bombs exploded all around us and we were thoroughly shaken, both physically and mentally.

After the 'All Clear' had sounded, fire engines appeared in the streets, one stopping in front of our building to inspect the damage. When the crew ascertained that the fire had been brought under control and there was no further danger, they sped away to more serious conflagrations.

Late in the afternoon, after we had a chance to clean ourselves, we partook of an improvised meal of sausages, provided by the butcher who owned the block, and prepared by the womenfolk living in the building. It was then that we learned that we had actually saved a burning brothel.

At Szolnok we found ourselves accommodated in a huge camp that served as a transit post for personnel travelling between Germany and the Balkan regions.

Troops returning from the southern front had to go through the inevitable delousing procedure, VD checks, kit inspections and all the other very necessary procedures before being allowed to proceed back into the Reich.

Before leaving France, our superiors had stressed to us that we would be officially considered to be 'guests' of the Hungarian Government. Under the circumstances, we had to be extremely diplomatic in our relations with the population and be on our best behaviour. In preparation for the perceived role we were subjected to extensive 'indoctrination' as it would be called nowadays, consisting of lectures on history, the political situation, local customs, etiquette and other finer points to be considered when moving about in a foreign 'host' country.

As soon as our education was considered to be complete, we were ordered to brush our uniforms, line up in perfect drill formation and march in style through the town in order to announce our presence.

Much to our relief, we received an enthusiastic welcome. People in the streets cheered. Many elderly men, who would have served in the Austro-Hungarian K & K Army, stood on the roadside, waving and shouting *'Servus, Kamarad'*, the traditional greeting used by Austrian and Hungarian soldiers.

Another proof of the legendary bond that often develops between fighting men.

With no restrictions imposed, we had the run of the town. As we moved about, indefatigable Hungarian veterans would drag us into the nearest tavern to treat us royally with strong Hungarian wine, apricot brandy and delicious food. Once we even became involved in a communal dance, clumsily trying to follow the rhythm of the vigorous *czardas*.

One afternoon, I was approached by a pilot who introduced himself as *Unteroffizier* Alfred (Fred) Engler and asked me whether I would like to join his crew. When I met the other members — *Gefreiter* (Lance Corporal) Horst Kopp the bombardier/navigator, *Feldwebel* (Sergeant) Walter Svensson the flight engineer and *Gefreiter* Karl (Karlchen) Kowalczyk the gunner — I concluded that they were a congenial bunch and readily agreed.

We harmonised well. Walter, the senior member of the crew, was a married man with two children and hailed from Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein. As it turned out, our budding friendship would be of great significance to me when I became stranded in Germany at the end of the war.

The question of training posed a problem since the local airfield had no advanced navigational facilities. To overcome the impasse, it was decided that this should be carried out at Grossenhain near Dresden in the German province of Saxonia. Because of increased crew requirements on the Eastern front, flying hours had to be accumulated at a fast rate.

I should mention that at this stage we had to cope with a number of officer pilots of non-flying background. I suppose, it had something to do with promotion prospects, rather than aptitude. Unfortunately, some of these latter-day pilots seemed to be unable to handle emergencies.

I don't know whether this was due to the much condensed initial flying training or to the advanced age of these officers. Flying with them, I experienced several frightening situations. In one instance it was only the combat experience of the navigator that saved us from disaster. Months later I learned that this particular pilot had crashed when he lost control of his aircraft. Only one crew member survived.

Discipline at our detachment was relaxed and we had almost unrestricted opportunities to move around in our spare time. Unexpectedly, we were given what turned out to be a very exciting and pleasurable assignment.

Holding a piece of paper in his hand, the CO announced:

'You wouldn't believe it! Remember the aircraft which was undergoing servicing when we left Orléans? Well, she is now ready. I want you to go there and fly her back. Have a good time.'

Mindful that we were still trainees, the CO selected a seasoned pilot, who wore the Knight's Cross, to be in charge of the party.

Paris in springtime was as enjoyable as one would have expected. In fact, life in the streets went on in a perfectly normal way.

The second crew: Frank, Walter Swenssou, Fred Engler, Horst Kopp (Karl Kowalczyk taking photo)

The airfield at Bricy seemed strangely deserted and there were only a few aircraft on the tarmac. When we arrived at the maintenance squadron, we noticed that the He 111 which we were supposed to fly back had no engines mounted and one wing was missing.

The technical officer was perplexed. 'Why did you come?' he asked.

'Well, didn't you send a message to the effect that our Heinkel is ready for collection?' we countered.

He produced a file. 'Listen, you guys', he said. 'The message clearly states: '*Heinkel 111 will be ready for collection in four weeks time'*. Your CO must have been drinking when he read it. I suggest you go back to Grossenhain.'

As we stood outside the building wondering what to do next, a staff car arrived and an agitated lieutenant colonel with an unmistakable Austrian accent charged towards us. 'Who the hell are you?' he bellowed. 'What are you doing on my airfield?'

We explained that we were supposed to fly the He 111 back to Germany.

'Great. I don't want any unnecessary aircraft on my airfield.' he said. 'The fewer we have the less likely we may become a target. When are you going to take off?'

Well, we had to tell him that there was a problem. The officer became irate. 'I'll get you your marching orders!' he shouted. 'Or even better, I'll put you on guard duties. Stay put. Don't move until I come back!'

While he hurried into the office of the Senior Technical Officer to be briefed on the situation, we looked askance. Guard duties, that's all we needed.

A thought flashed through my mind.

'Listen *Herr Oberfeldwebel*!' I said to our chaperone. 'Nothing is done without orders. Well, our orders were to fly back an aircraft, but due to unforeseen circumstances we can't comply. The changed situation calls for new orders, but the first priority is to get out of reach of that madman! Let's bugger off to Orléans, approach the local *Kommandantur* and ask for a message to be sent to Grossenhain!'

'You are a bright spark!' said the Flight Sergeant. '*Hauen wir ab!* — Let's bugger off!'

Thanks to our intricate knowledge of the airfield we had no problems in doing the disappearing trick. We quickly jogged to a side entrance at the perimeter fence and proceeded on the main road leading to the city.

A kilometre or so further down, we spotted the familiar roadside pub. As the French spotted us, we were greeted with great excitement.

'*La Legion Condor!*' they exclaimed. 'What are you doing here? You are not coming back, are you?'

Once inside and sitting around the heavy oak table, we told our story and were regally treated with grilled sausages, wine and brandy. There was gaiety and laughter and old memories were revoked. Remarkably, in spite of the impending invasion, the French appeared to be only too happy to see us back after only two months absence. I should remind the reader that this was March 1944.

Somewhat unsteady on our feet, we continued our journey towards the city. Passing the hospital, we had the great idea to call in. Much to our joy, we found that the same nursing sisters and medical orderlies were still there. As we expected, they made us cordially welcome and invited us to stay for lunch.
After that pleasant interlude and high in spirits, we arrived at the *Kommandantur* late in the afternoon.

The desk sergeant was cooperative. He agreed to transmit the message I had drafted, gave us accommodation slips for the *Hôtel du Commerce*, issued us with ration coupons and even arranged for an advance of pay. What more could one expect?

We were now completely free, almost like being on recreation leave. All we had to do was to report twice a day to see whether our unit had sent a reply. In the interim, we spent a week of leisure with sightseeing, visiting familiar places, drinking champagne and enjoying delicious meals.

Incidentally, we never heard from the lieutenant-colonel again. I suppose more pressing problems took his mind off that phantom crew who wanted to fly a disabled He 111 back to Germany.

Back in Grossenhain, the CO was in a jovial mood when we reported to him.

'Here come the travellers!' he exclaimed. "Did you have a good time? How is the *Pelican*?'

'The *Pelican*, Sir? But that's for officers only!'

'So it is, but you must have enjoyed yourselves anyway. Well, you have to catch up with your training very quickly. They need a few replacement crews on the front. Back to work. You've had your fun!'

There must have been some foreboding in these words.

Not long afterwards, on 18 April 1944 to be exact, disaster struck.

After having been practising formation flying during the day, we were tasked to go on a navigation exercise in the evening. The five-hour flight would take us on a triangular route to a radio beacon in northern Poland, from there to another one in the south-east and then home.

All went well until the return lap. By then, enemy planes operated over the area and, as was normal practice, 'MYO' — that is the code for 'Enemy Aircraft in the Area' — was declared. Radio beacons were now off the air in order to prevent the enemy using them for their own purposes.

Whilst the navigator had so far been able to determine positions and course, he suddenly was no longer sure. I frantically tried to make contact with any of the airfields en route for which I had been given call signs but received no reply.

Fred became upset. 'I must know where I am!' he shouted.

Eventually, I received a reply from the area control centre at Berlin, but because of the distance, the fix given was qualified as 'approximate' only. According to the coordinates we would have been at the southern edge of the restricted air space surrounding Berlin.

We must have actually strayed into it, because suddenly powerful search lights focused on us, lighting up the interior of the aircraft. Inside my tower it was like daylight whilst the reflections from the surrounding clouds made the wings of the aircraft glow in an eerie way.

Then tracer shells began to explode around us.

'They are shooting at us' yelled Fred. 'Quick, fire identification colours!'

As the colour-of-the-day lit up the sky below us, the shooting stopped and we were again in darkness. I frantically called the stations in the vicinity of our assumed flight path, but there was no reply. After all, no German aircraft was expected to operate when MYO had been declared and the signallers on the ground may have thought that there was no need to bother about incoming calls.

There just could not be anyone around! And if someone really tried to make contact, perhaps it was a *Tommy* aircraft trying to confound the controllers.

Suddenly, I noticed red position lights on the ground down below, indicating an airfield which for some reason had not switched off the red warning lights.

'Fred' I called out. 'Look down to starboard!'

Banking the aircraft steeply, Fred turned towards the lights.

'Fire an identification flare and also a red one to let them know that we are in trouble' he ordered.

Minutes later, a yellow *Very* light ascended from the ground.

'They have recognised us. We are to go into a holding pattern. Franz, try again. Perhaps you can make contact!'

Whilst we were circling the airfield, we noticed that marker lamps were placed along the runway. We realised that this was a small airfield, not equipped for operational use.

About thirty minutes later, a green flare exploded in the sky. Cleared for landing.

We came in too high. The aircraft hit the ground too far ahead on the runway, too hard and bounced heavily, quite unlike Fred's normal skilful handling of the heavy He 111. The engines roared under full throttle as we gained height for another approach.

What happened then I'll never know. I heard Walter screaming: 'The hangar!' and there was this terrific crash and the sound of breaking glass.

I was violently shaken about in my seat and then there was dead silence, suddenly interrupted by a hissing sound.

Fear gripped my heart. We are going to explode!

Emergency procedures drill flashed through my mind. Get out fast!

I then noticed that the perspex dome above me was no longer there. I released the buckles of the straps that held me in my seat and swung myself up onto the edge of the aircraft which seemed to be resting at a strange angle.

That's all I remember.

When I came to I realised that I was lying on a stretcher. I could hear some dreadful moaning and the rattling sound of heavy breathing. A voice yelled into the telephone:

'I have an accident here at Kamenz. A He 111 has crashed and three airmen are injured, two of them seriously. The ambulance will reach you in about half an hour. Prepare for emergency surgery!'

A face bent over me.

'This bloke is conscious now. Can you talk? Can you tell me where you came from and the names of your crew? Take it easy. You don't have to answer if you can't think straight!'

I tried to recollect myself.

'What happened?' I asked.

'Your aircraft hit a hangar. Two of your mates are dead.'

I had difficulties. I just could not remember all of them.

'Don't worry. Don't try to think too hard — you may have concussion — we'll get you into hospital soon.'

Still in a daze, I felt that I was being lifted up and carried into the building. When I eventually regained consciousness and heard the sound of the activities around me I realised that I was in an operating theatre.

I couldn't see much, but through the haze before my eyes I noticed white-clad people being frantically busy around the operating table. I also heard the clipped orders of the surgeon. And there was that dreadful rattling sound of someone's unnatural breathing.

A nurse bent over me. 'He is conscious now,' she called out.

'I've got to go to the toilet,' I muttered.

My flying suit was cut open and a bottle was applied. Relieved, I felt a bit better, but suddenly pain shot through my leg and my back. I groaned.

A needle pierced my thigh. Soon I was back in dreamland.

I woke up lying on a bed in a dimly lit ward.

'You are lucky to be alive.' said the nurse. 'Are you comfortable?'

'What happened to me?' I asked.

'Well, so far, we've only established a broken leg. Your mates were not so lucky. One has a broken hip and a deep cut across his forehead, one has multiple fractures and two are dead. Try to get some sleep, we'll talk to you in the morning!'
But I couldn't get back to sleep, because there was that light on the wall shining into my face. When the nurse reappeared, I asked whether the light could be switched off.

No, it could not, because it was an emergency light. Regulations!

I became irritable.

'Please, switch that damned thing off — I want to sleep!' I moaned.

Eventually, it was turned off.

The next morning, with daylight around me, I took stock of my situation. There were eight beds in the ward, some empty. Over my left leg I had a kind of cage that kept the blankets away from it. My right hand was bandaged, my head hurt as did my back.

Did they say we had hit a hangar? How on earth could that happen? Fred was such an experienced pilot.

At about ten o'clock the chief surgeon, a major, arrived for his early round, followed by a retinue of doctors and nurses.

'Well, young flyboy, how is it?' he asked. 'I hear you have been somewhat difficult last night. Insisting that the emergency light be switched off. This is an Army hospital you know!'

'You are very lucky,' he continued. 'You have a broken foot which we will reset and put in plaster once the swelling has subsided. In the meantime, you are not to attempt to get out of bed and put any weight on your foot. We'll soon get you right again!'

'My back hurts, Sir, and so does my head,' I ventured to say.

He examined my skull.

'You have a cut there that needs to be cleaned ... well, you fell down some twenty feet and probably knocked your head on the concrete. We shall also x-ray your back. Don't worry, you'll live!'

The CO then nodded to the ward sister and said:

'These flyboys like to be together. See whether you can transfer the other two guys into this ward. There are two beds empty anyway.'

Before leaving the ward he turned back and said with some irony in his voice:

'And put a picture of *Hermann Göring* on the wall behind his bed. That should keep him happy!'
His retinue broke into dutiful laughter.

Walter, who was soon moved into the ward for an emotional reunion, had his head bandaged and his right leg was in traction. Remarkably, he had not lost his unfailing sense of humour and during the following weeks often incited other patients to join in some nonsensical fun.

Our Karlchen never made it to the ward. He was transferred to another hospital for specialist surgery. I met him fleetingly when I was taken to the X-ray department. He was lying on a stretcher, his lower body and legs in plaster. We only managed to say 'hello' to each other, but I remember that he reached out and squeezed my hand.

Next to me on my right was a young Russian POW who was of course 'Ivan' to us. Because he did not speak German and none of us Russian, communication was mainly carried out by gesturing. In spite of a shrapnel wound in his stomach which would not heal, he was in good spirits.

Like most Russians he was keen on chess and draughts. Many times he asked me to play with him and, although I have never been good at either game, I obliged. Needless to say, he always won.

On my left was a tankman with an abscess in his groin and then there was a young Austrian who had one leg amputated below the knee.

The Austrian was a particularly active sort of chap who enjoyed leaping about on his crutches and occasionally succeeded in jumping over empty beds. One day he caught himself by the toes on the edge of a bed and hit the floor. When he exposed his badly bruised knee during the afternoon visit and asked to have it bandaged, the surgeon was upset.

You don't jump over beds with one leg!

The guy to the left of Walter was an elderly *Landsturmmann* (Dad's Army). I forget what his injury was, but one morning the chief surgeon remarked that the man's toenails needed clipping. Looking at me, he said: 'You seem to be an intelligent fellow. I am sure you could do that job — the nurses will give you the necessary equipment in the dressing room.'

'*Him*?' exclaimed the senior sister.

'Yes, *Him*!' said the CO.

It occurred to me that I may have a medical future after all.

The sad case in the ward was a chap who had lost a leg. The man certainly was in a bad state. During the following week gangrene set in and they took him into surgery twice to amputate further.
Apart from physically deteriorating, the man's spirit had been broken too. The story was that his fiancée had visited him once, but when she found out that he had only one good leg left, she never returned. Not unreasonably, it was thought that the inflicted hurt had broken the boy's spirit and thus his will to live.

The mother, a simple woman from the country, who had come a long distance and boarded at a guesthouse, sat at his bedside every day from morning to late in the afternoon to keep her son company.

One morning, there seemed to be an unexpected improvement in the man's condition. The CO appeared and formally presented him with the Iron Cross Second Class. The mother was elated and produced a bottle of wine to be shared between us.'My son is getting better.' she beamed.

I had my doubts. Somewhere I had read that, not uncommonly, terminally ill patients seem to recover for a short time. Sort of the last flicker of the life force in the body. Also, the presentation of a decoration at this stage made us suspicious. Someone had remarked that they always did that when a man was about to die.

I had not been wrong. In the evening, the duty nurse said in a subdued voice: 'We hate to take that poor boy into the 'dying' chamber. If you guys don't mind, we would like to let him die here. It will be less traumatic for him.'

All the men nodded silent approval.

The soldier survived the night, but early next morning, he pressed the emergency bell and doctors and nurses came rushing in. One of the doctors inserted a drip in the man's arm and stood back, closely watching his eyes. Suddenly, he withdrew the needle and pulled the sheet over the body. The bed was rolled out and, five minutes later, a freshly made bed stood in its place.

When the mother arrived at the customary hour and saw the empty bed, she screamed and broke down. The nurses gently moved her outside.

It was a dreadful, heart-rending scene which I shall never forget. We were all in a dazed state and lost for words for the rest of the day, but it was the old *Landsturmmann* who sobbed uncontrollably.

The poor woman returned later to say goodbye to each one of us. We had meanwhile taken up a collection and handed her the envelope. She must have spent a fortune on accommodation and fares.

After a week or so, the CO decided that my foot was ready for setting. Two days later I was allowed to move around on crutches, a strange experience when your leg is in plaster right up to the knee.

One afternoon, a *Luftwaffe* delegation arrived at the hospital.

It caused quite a stir in the army environment to observe a group of senior officers, one of them a lieutenant colonel decorated with the Knight's Cross, to visit a mere *Unteroffizier*. It was, of course, the Committee of Investigation.

After taking my statement they showed me photos of the crash scene. I was horrified to see the He 111 entangled in the superstructure of a hangar, the fuselage hanging down. The engines had been torn off by the force of the impact and were stuck in the opposite wall.

I was told that pilot, navigator and engineer were lying on the ground inside the hangar, whilst I was found outside beside the wreck. Karl was still strapped in his seat in the rear of the aircraft. It must have been a sorry mess.

Fred was already dead, Horst lived for a short while, but died later in the emergency room.

The lieutenant colonel shook my hand and, as was the custom in the *Luftwaffe*, congratulated me 'on my Birthday'. He then moved over to Walter to continue with his investigation.

We basked in our glory under the envious glances of our infantry colleagues. Obviously, it couldn't happen in the Army!

All that happened over half a century ago, but being involved in a fatal accident poses a mental burden which one can never fully eliminate. Although the investigation cleared me on my part, there remained the nagging doubts whether one has done everything possible in the emergency situation that could have prevented the accident.

Now and then, I still relive the traumatic experience of that fateful night.

As I stated earlier, I could not remember all the names when I came to after the accident. Strangely, even until recently one of the names of my crew still remained a blank. It was not until I started writing my memoirs that I approached the Central Archives of the former *Wehrmacht* in Berlin for information. They kindly supplied me with the details of the accident and the names of the crew.

But back to my story. One afternoon, when I awoke from a nap, I was startled to find a lovely girl sitting beside me. Another young lady was at Walter's bedside. The two girls were recent acquaintances from Grossenhain who, when hearing about the disaster, had decided to go on a train journey to visit the boys and to bring them flowers and gifts.

It was a pleasant surprise, a few tears were shed but, as so often happens in war time, nothing further eventuated.

20 April was Hitler's Birthday, a national holiday in those days. Early in the morning, a group of ladies from the *NS Frauenschaft* (the Nazi Women's Organisation) appeared in the yard and entertained us with songs and music. Later, they came into the ward to present us with little parcels of cakes and sweets.

Our Chief Surgeon was mentioned in the Birthday Honour's List and created a Professor. We congratulated him with a banner written in Gothic lettering and draped across the door to the ward.

The hospital came good with a bottle of *Ponsardin Veuve Cliquot* champagne for each patient. I had mine with lunch and slept for several hours afterwards.

After full recovery, I was once more posted to Quedlinburg. Fortunately, IV/KG 53 requested me back in due course.

Before returning to *Szolnok*, I was granted two weeks recuperation leave which I spent at Minden in Westphalia with Ulla, the girl I had met on one of those weekend jollies with my CO when we were stationed at Orléans.

Chapter Five

Confusion Reigns Supreme

The fortunes of war had meanwhile deteriorated further. In June, the Fifth US Army had entered Rome and the Allied Forces landed in Normandy fighting their way eastwards into German territory, whilst the Russians made steady progress in the East. The situation was certainly grim but, surprisingly, we carried on as if everything was normal.

Future generations may not understand why there was no internal revolt against a regime which, on the strength of its performance, should have become most unpopular. Yet such was not the case. In fact, the opposite was true. Thanks to Allied threats, particularly statements which advocated the total destruction of Germany, the population at large had come to the conclusion that the war was now one of national defence and survival.

The horror stories of Russian reprisals in the recaptured territories were also an important factor, instilling fear and thus strengthening the will to continue the fight. Incredibly, many still believed in the *Führer's* mission and Dr Goebbel's veiled hints that Hitler had some mysterious weapons at his disposal which would be used should things become really bad.

The first visible demonstration that a new weapon had actually been developed, was the launch of the V1 *Vergeltungswaffe* (Retaliation Weapon No 1), technically known as the *Fieseler Fi 103*. The first attack on London took place on 13 June and must have come as a great shock to the British. For the Germans, the unveiling of the weapon was a considerable morale booster.

On 20 July, accompanied by another man posted to IV/KG 53, I embarked on the long train journey from Quedlinburg to Szolnok. Whilst waiting for the departure of our connecting train at Halle an der Saale we heard on the radio the perplexing news that an attempt on the life of Hitler had been made at his headquarters at Rastenburg in East Prussia. The *Führer* had escaped the bomb blast, the conspirators were arrested and draconic retaliatory measures had been proclaimed.

This was both sensational and disturbing news.

Immediately, emergency measures were announced which were drastic, to say the least. The most dramatic one was the appointment of Heinrich Himmler, the Master of the SS, as Commander of the *Ersatzheer*, that is to say of all reserve troops stationed on German soil. Up to then there had been strict segregation and even animosity between the *Wehrmacht* (the German Navy, Army and Air Force units) and the *Waffen SS*, the latter being an independent elite and politically motivated fighting force.

Another surprising development was that the 'military' salute was abolished forthwith and replaced by the 'Nazi' salute. Contrary to popular belief, the salute with outstretched right arm, indicating '*Heil Hitler*!', was originally the privilege of the Waffen SS. By regulations, Wehrmacht personnel used that salute only in situations when headgear was not worn.

How ingrained the myth about the Nazi salute has become in the Western mind may be illustrated by the story that during the filming of *The Longest Day*, the director insisted that in a certain scene the General confronting *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring had to salute with outstretched arm. It seems that a violent argument ensued with the German military adviser who pointed out that this would have been unthinkable at that point in time and objected to historically incorrect features appearing in the film. As could be expected, the director won.

In the aftermath of 20 July, political instructors were appointed as an additional measure. Clearly, Hitler no longer trusted his officer corps.

I remember vividly one of the newly introduced indoctrination sessions because it turned out to be a somewhat amusing experience. I feel that I should include the incident in my story for the purpose of illustration.

It happened somewhere in Germany. Assembled in a large lecture room, we were awaiting a presentation on the military situation. Much to our surprise, a smartly dressed army captain appeared on the platform. There were gasps from the audience followed by an outburst of irreverent hilarity, when the officer reached into the top pocket of his blouse and extracted a monocle which he nonchalantly placed into the socket of his eye.

Swivelling about to face the large situation map on the wall, he announced in a clipped voice:

'Gentlemen, when we look at the situation on the Eastern Front, we have to say ....'

Seemingly lost for words, he stared at the map.

'I think I am going crazy,' he muttered.

After a moment's perplexity we noticed that the big location map had been mounted upside down. The recognition of that comical situation caused the audience to roar with laughter. Yes, when looking at that map and noticing the line of advance of the Russian Army one could indeed have gone crazy.

The good captain recovered his composure quickly.

'Put that thing up the right way!' he ordered in an annoyed tone and, by now fully in control, delivered his well-rehearsed moral booster spiel.

I don't think we were impressed. Perhaps we did not take political indoctrination too seriously — but I am digressing.

When we arrived at Szolnok, it became obvious to us that the news of the events in Germany had not yet reached the military there. Passing a group of officers in the main street, we gave the 'Nazi' salute. They stopped dead on the spot and looked at us in amazement.

One of the officers called me over. 'What's the matter with you *Unteroffizier*?' he asked. 'Trying to be funny?'

'No, Sir' I replied, '*Führer's* orders. We now have to use the 'German' salute!'

'What? That's unbelievable!'

The officers who had gathered around us were stunned when we brought them up to date.

At the airfield, the news had meanwhile been broken, but activities went on in the usual manner, interrupted only by the occasional air-raid alarm. Austria and some Balkan areas were now within reach of the Allied bomber force. The transit camp had already been bombed once and the airfield itself copped it that very afternoon.

Following the usual routine, we had been detailed straight after our arrival to dig holes at the perimeter of the airfield. I had just burrowed to a suitable depth in the sticky clay, when a flight of some three hundred enemy aircraft came overhead.

I immediately jumped into my raw shelter, mentally shrinking in size, whilst hundreds of fragmentation bombs exploded around me. Fortunately, we had no casualties and only one of the parked He 111s was damaged.

Meanwhile, on the Western Front, the Americans pushed forward relentlessly. Paris fell on 25 August and General de Gaulle made his triumphant entry into the city.

This time, I did not have to wait too long for an assignment. I was attached to another crew that had originally flown on Ju 88s, but because of a stomach complaint, the pilot was no longer fit for dive bombers and had converted to the He 111.

During the next few weeks we travelled hundreds of miles on trains from the south to the north and from the east to the west, but we never flew together.

Eventually, we were posted to III/KG 53, stationed at Jesau near Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia. Having to change trains at the latter, we spent a few hours wandering amongst the ruins of the once splendid city. It was a shocking sight to see great buildings reduced to rubble and to smell the stench of death and decay lingering about over the scene of senseless destruction.

Having finally arrived at *Jesau*, we found that the III Group was no longer there. They had flown a few sorties but, unknown to us, relocated to support the army against the advancing Allied forces in the west. Our new orders were to report at the airfield of Reppen near Frankfurt an der Oder in the eastern part of Germany, where another Group of KG 53 was stationed.

With hundreds of people fleeing from the advancing Russians, travelling on the overcrowded trains had by now become a veritable nightmare. One had to be fortunate to find a vacant seat and more than often finished up squatting in the corridors amongst kitbags, prams and other luggage.

Now, over half a century later, my recollections of those weeks are somewhat blurred and I cannot remember the exact sequence of our peregrinations and the constantly changing scene. In particular, I don't recall much about our stay at Frankfurt, except that we spent days sitting in a pub, playing cards and drinking bad beer that made you feel sick.

After a few days of tiresome waiting we were called into the CO's office for a briefing. Completely taken aback, we received the startling news that we were to go to the experimental station at Peenemünde-Karlshagen for special training.

The CO explained that the V1 flying bomb could no longer be used against England because the coastal positions from where it had been catapulted were lost to the advancing Allied armies. Trials were now taking place, designed to develop new means of launching the weapon.

The boffins had come up with an amazing alternative solution, suggesting that it should be possible to mount the rocket under the right wing of the He 111 and fly it to a point over the North Sea that was within the operational radius of the Fi 103. The weapon could then be launched in midair and make its own way towards the target. To us, it was a mind boggling scenario and we were truly stunned.

It was impressed on us that the operation was Top Secret. To that end, we had to sign a declaration concerning the dreaded *Sippenhaftung* (literally, the Liability of the Clan). That not widely known ancient concept was based on the assumption that the liability of an individual offender extended to the whole family.

It was put to us that anyone who broke the code of silence in our particular situation would not only face Court Martial, followed by possible execution, it also meant that his Next-of-Kin could be interned in a concentration camp. A shocking imposition when one considers that the relatives of an offender would most likely have had nothing to do with the matter.

The revival of an obscure notion lost in the mist of history may be taken as yet another indication of the desperation in which the military command found itself at that point in time.

Once again, Karma kept us out of harm's way. Just before our impending departure to Karlshagen we were recalled to the orderly room. By some fluke it had been discovered that our pilot had never flown a He 111 during the night. Since conversion training was a responsibility of the Fourth Group, we were to travel back to Szolnok to rectify the discrepancy. An incredible decision, since the limited training could have been done on the spot. But, the military system is often inflexible.

This time, we only got as far as Vienna where we were advised by the RTO that IV/KG 53 had left Hungary because of the advancing Russian armies. Anyway, the Group was about to be disbanded. We were now to go directly to III/KG 53 at Grottkau in the eastern province of Silesia.

There, we learned to our dismay that we were posted to another squadron, IV/KG 55 stationed at Pilsen. And that's how my flying career came to an unexpected ending.

We were totally confused at the time, and did not know the circumstances or the chronological sequence of events that led to the disbandment of the bomber force.

It was not until 1997, that I managed to get hold of a copy of Heinz Kiel's book *Kampfgeschwader KG 53 Legion Condor*. Kiel's account of the squadron's history not only confirmed my own patchy recollections of certain episodes, events and dates, it also provided interesting details which I had not known previously.

Some of the data presented in the book throws much light on the various moves that the squadron made across Europe in 1944, which at the time seemed incomprehensible to the uninformed. It also became clear to me why we never caught up with the III Group which had moved ahead of us from one place to another in order to give air support to the retreating German ground forces, as determined by the rapidly deteriorating strategic situation on the Western Front.

Reading the stories of the many heroic missions that the squadron had flown, the dramatic description of the horrors of the war in the air and the account of the dreadful losses incurred over six years of action was very upsetting. I often wonder why fate had saved me from becoming actively involved and most likely another casualty figure. Unlike the 1,493 members of the squadron who made the supreme sacrifice, I am amongst the lucky ones who are still around and able to reminisce about those turbulent years in our lives.

Many of the operations during the final stages of the war may seem irrational in retrospect. As far as our squadron is concerned, the final straw was perhaps the ill-fated airborne launching of the V1 weapon.

Strangely, my first pilot Schacht was wounded whilst flying the V1 over the North Sea. I met him by accident somewhere in Germany. He was then already a veteran of a hundred missions, wore the Iron Cross First Class and had lost two fingers of the left hand. According to his account, the operation with the flying bomb had been a complete disaster.

I suppose it was somewhat ironic that I should finish my air force career at the same place where it had started one cold winter morning in November 1941.

Like all the former proud bomber squadrons of the *Luftwaffe*, IV/KG 55 was no longer flying. Because of a combination of circumstances, in particular the failure of the German aircraft industry to produce a suitable four-engined long-range aircraft, bomber operations had become ineffective.

According to postwar literature, the solution to the dilemma facing air power was then thought to be the utilisation of rocket-driven missiles like the V1 and the much heavier V2. Production effort was concentrated on these new weapons and also on the production of the revolutionary jet engines employed in the Me 202, the He 280 and the He 162.

How seriously this switch to mainly defensive weapons was considered may be illustrated by the fact that during the last few months of 1944, the *Luftwaffe* actually detailed a considerable number of aircrew personnel with technical or mechanical background into industry to work on the production line.

Our lot at Pilsen was a rather dispiriting one. With nothing else to do, we were employed on emergency construction work and also guarding the camouflaged He 111, mothballed in the forest.

One morning, while I was on guard duties, patrolling around my three assigned aircraft, an air raid on the Skoda works took place. Because of the importance of one of the largest armament factories in Europe, several anti-aircraft batteries were stationed in the vicinity. These started firing as soon as the massed American bomber force approached.

I could see the cotton balls of hundreds of shells exploding high up in the sky whilst the bombers off-loaded their deadly cargo. A short while afterwards, I was startled by an infernal roar that sounded like hundreds of organs playing with all stops drawn. Suddenly the forest echoed with the sharp bangs of branches being cut down by violent blows, just as if a team of axe-wielding woodcutters was in full action.

Whilst initially perplexed by the phenomenon, it did not take me long to realise that, following the law of gravity, the fragments of the shells which I had observed exploding high above the clouds, were now coming down. It literally rained steel from heaven.

When it was all over and I resumed my patrol, I found a few of the fragments lying on the ground. Some of them were quite large — a foot or more — with ugly-looking, jagged, razor-sharp edges. No wonder they were so effective in chopping down the tops and branches of trees! The thought flashed through my mind how terrible the impact of artillery shelling must be on troops on the ground.

A few minutes after the bombers had moved off, there was another unusual noise in the skies. Hundreds of fighter planes could be seen, streaming at considerable altitude in an easterly direction. Immediately, the anti-aircraft batteries began to fire again.

Two aircraft were hit and plummetted down to earth. Tragically, they were our own. Killed by 'friendly fire' as they would say today.

There were more attacks on the city and the Skoda works during those months. The airfield itself suffered some damage, but none serious enough to put it out of action. We also witnessed the destruction of Dresden, albeit from a great distance.

That night, enemy bombers approaching from the south flew overhead on their final approach to the target. Millions of narrow aluminium strips floated down, released in an attempt to confound our Würzburg and Freya devices (forerunners of RADAR). Later, we could see the sky across the mountain range brilliantly lit. It was of course the reflection of the fearsome firestorm that raged in the city.

In the meantime, we continued with our lacklustre efforts on the airfield. Once again, something out of the ordinary happened to me. *Hauptmann Schmidt*, who as CO Base Squadron was now our superior officer, called me into his office. After some preliminaries, he asked:

'You have a clerical background, haven't you? And you also had a good education, we notice. How would you like to run the orderly room? Since your unit is being disbanded, there will be a lot of paperwork. You would have to look after general administration, write out marching orders, post personal files to the gaining units and so on. For all intents and purposes, you would be the acting sergeant major without having the rank. How about it?'

What could I say? 'I'll be happy to assist, *Herr Hauptmann!'* I replied.

That amazing assignment provided the climax of my otherwise uneventful *Luftwaffe* career.

It was an interesting task in many ways, giving me great scope to gain valuable administrative experience by looking after accommodation, attending to filing systems, drawing up duty rosters, supervising the cleanliness of the quarters and many other chores. It also gave me a good deal of authority which I'd never had before. On top of that I had my own private room and unlimited freedom of movement.

The CO seemed to place a great deal of faith in me and gave me practically a free hand in the day-to-day running of what was left of the squadron.

I was kept busy writing out posting orders — the pilots for conversion training on to the new jet fighters, the radio operators to tank units and some unfortunate personnel to the Army.

There was yet another unusual situation I had to deal with during those weeks. It so happened that there were six men of *Oberfähnrich* (Senior Ensign) rank. *Hauptmann* Schmidt told me that they were waiting for their promotion to Lieutenant, but that for some unknown reason it had not yet come through.

'I want them kept busy!' he said. 'Roster them for routine duties and see that their quarters are kept neat and tidy. Although they outrank you, I'll make it clear to them that you are running the outfit!'

The situation needed a lot of tact and diplomacy. Fortunately, the *Herren Oberfähnriche* accepted the unusual situation in good spirit.

'You should be quite conceited about your role under the circumstances,' one of them remarked at a frustrating moment when I had to convey an unwelcome order to that illustrious bunch of hopefuls.

Thinking back, I feel that I should mention another intriguing fact, which I believe was not widely known and most likely remained unchronicled in the history of the war.

Before moving to Pilsen, IV/KG 55 had been stationed at Dijon in France. When the Group relocated, they took with them five or six young French girls who had been working with the unit in domestic capacities. I don't know what inspired that extraordinary move. Was it coercion or was it a voluntary move on behalf of the girls out of loyalty or perhaps out of fear to be branded collaborators by the French? Were they victims of circumstance? I'll never know.

The presence of the girls was no secret, but they lived secluded in a hut of their own and worked in the kitchen. Thanks to my knowledge of the language, I had much friendly social contact with them, occasionally taking one or the other out for an evening at the local cinema.

On New Year's Eve 1944, together with two mates, I had been invited to the girls' quarters to celebrate. It was a congenial party, but also a rather sad occasion. I shall never forget the moment when the German national anthem came over the radio at the stroke of twelve and we stood to attention, as protocol demanded.

One of the girls collapsed on her bed and sobbed uncontrollably whilst the others tried to comfort her. I must admit I felt ill at ease.

I don't know what happened to the girls after our departure. I often think about them. All I can hope for is that they were not harassed by the Russians and eventually repatriated without repercussions to their own country. Wartime can indeed produce strange stories.

Unfortunately, yet another tragic event occurred during my short time in office. One day I was ordered to select a crew to fly one of our stored He 111s to Munich. The men were excited to have the opportunity, having been grounded for such a long time. Alas, they never made it.

Late in the afternoon, I received a telephone call from the airfield at Munich, telling me that a Heinkel bomber from Pilsen had hit an obstacle on approach to the airfield and exploded on the ground. Did the aircraft belong to our unit and could I give the names of the crew?

The next day I had to type letters of condolence to the Next-of-Kin on the squadron's embossed stationery and attend to the disposal procedure concerning personal effects. It was yet another disturbing experience.

Eventually, only myself and another NCO, a good mate of mine, were left. Our posting advice indicated transfer to one of the still active Groups of KG 55 stationed at Straubing in southern Bavaria.

After having dispatched existing files to their destination and destroyed all classified material, I reported to the CO to hand over the official seal of the unit. I received a pat on the shoulder, the captain wishing me the best of luck for an uncertain future.

At our new location, we were once again placed 'on hold' and kept busy with rather unpleasant activities like work at nearby farms and digging trenches.

High above us, American fighter planes controlled the skies. I remember an elderly peasant woman who looked accusingly at my uniform and commented in a sad tone: 'There they are. Flying over our beautiful Bavarian land, and no one can hinder them. It's a disgrace!'

I could not help feeling embarrassed.

The military situation indeed looked grim. Following a massive offensive in the east, the Russians had taken Warsaw and reached the *Oder* River. In the south, the Red Army were threatening the approaches to Vienna, whilst British and American troops had reached the River Rhine in the west.

By then, postal communications had become irregular, mail would arrive late and much was lost in the general chaos. Nevertheless, one day I received a re-directed letter containing the sad news that dear old Papa, my foster father, who had lovingly cared for me during the first twelve years of my life, had died.

When I asked the CO whether it would be possible to get compassionate leave, he advised me that my name was on a list of operators posted to an obscure Army Signal Regiment at Belzig near Berlin. However, he would grant me ten days leave, provided that I would proceed from Vienna directly to the unit.

It was to be a very slow trip down south. Frequently, enemy fighter planes streaked at low level over the countryside in search of moving targets. Several times the train came to a halt, we had to disembark and take cover in the fields.

On one such occasion I found myself in a ditch next to a lovely young girl wearing the uniform of the female *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (National Labour Service). She tightly held my hand as a Mustang roared over us.

Back on the train, I learned that she was on her way to HQ, carrying safe-hand mail. We became very friendly and, during the rest of the journey, she kept feeding me with sandwiches from her lunch pack. By the time we arrived at the city of Passau we were really smitten.

Having time on my hands, I accompanied her to the HQ where she delivered the locked briefcase. When she came out of the building, she informed me that she had to report back at 4 pm. Thus, we would have a few hours together, enabling us to go sightseeing and explore the ancient town which is situated on the confluence of three major rivers.

I remember sitting with the girl on top of a hill overlooking the picturesque valleys. In that unreal and peaceful atmosphere, we were observing the scene and exchanging tales. It was Spring, the weather was lovely, there was bright sunshine and the breeze from the valleys down below wafted the scent of the flowers up to us.

When we returned to HQ, she was told that she had to stay overnight and take classified mail back next morning. I accompanied her to the hotel where she happily waved the accommodation voucher to the receptionist. The good lady behind the desk looked at us benevolently. 'Single or double?' she asked with a smile on her face.

Somewhat embarrassed, my lovely friend gave me a pleading glance. With great regret I shook my head — I had to catch my train to Vienna at 10 pm. Nevertheless, we still had the opportunity to spend a few hours together and were determined to make the best of it. When the time for my departure arrived, she asked once more: 'Sure you won't stay ...?'

Admittedly, it was a tempting offer. I wanted us to be happy — goodness only knew what lay ahead of us — but with just ten days leave to my credit and the uncertain transport situation further along the line, I sadly had to decline. We were still hugging on the platform when the 'all aboard!' sounded. Noticing our reluctant efforts to part, a frustrated stationmaster said: 'For God's sake. Break it up. I have to dispatch the train!'

I often think back to that 'brief encounter', which happened so reassuringly amongst the turmoil of the deteriorating situation, as one of the few happy human experiences worth remembering. What I witnessed in the next few weeks and months demonstrated to me man's inhumanity to man which can develop when survival is the only consideration.

In spite of more hold-ups due to bomb damage of the tracks, I reached Vienna the next day. There, amongst continuing air raids, I managed to wind up Papa's affairs with an extremely nervous solicitor. I also had an opportunity to meet my uncle, who had returned from a long spell on the Russian front. Having survived the battle of Stalingrad and been decorated with the Iron Cross, he was now an instructor at a local medical unit.

Finally, it was time for me to depart. I did not know then that I would not see my city, nor my relatives for another four years. The MP sergeant who checked my papers shook his head when he noticed the destination on my travel warrant.

'You should stay here and help us to defend our city!' he said.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Chapter Six

The End of an Era

When I stepped out of the railway station at Belzig in der Mark, I immediately felt at home, remembering that lovely holiday I had spent there during my childhood, many years ago. Amongst the *Luftwaffe* personnel which disembarked were a few old acquaintances. Since it was late in the evening, the RTO advised us to sleep in the transient accommodation of the very school building where, for a short while, I once sat in a class room. Strange, how things work out in life!

In the morning, being familiar with the location, I took charge of the men and we made our way to that mysterious signal regiment. Approaching a hill in the south of the city, we were baffled to see a forest of unusually shaped antennae on its slopes. It definitely looked spooky and we were wondering what was going on there. We were soon to find out.

Assembled in a large training room, we were addressed by a sophisticated young lieutenant who told us that we had arrived at the communication headquarters of the *Abwehr*, that secret intelligence organisation of the *Wehrmacht* of which everybody had heard, but nobody knew anything about.

The lieutenant informed us that before being accepted, we would be subjected to a Morse key speed test, since the radio transmissions of the network required the highest standard of proficiency. Only those who passed the test would remain, the rest would be posted to infantry units. Reason enough to try our hardest!

By lunch time our fate had been sealed. We learned that only about twenty-five of the assembled sixty operators had survived the test. Those who had failed were unceremoniously shunted off.

Considering the deteriorating state of the war, what happened to us during the next few weeks must seem bizarre in retrospect. Oblivious of the fact that the war was practically lost — which the *Abwehr* should have known better than anybody else — we were trained and integrated into the system, just as if everything was functioning normally.

After we had the inevitable briefing about secrecy, training began in earnest. We learned to our amazement that the organisation extended all over the world and had outposts in many locations which came on the air at scheduled times. Their transmissions were monitored in the operations room.

We were shown fascinating equipment, including miniature radio sets disguised as attaché cases and other intriguing implements. The store even had a selection of brand new enemy uniforms and weapons. It seemed that there was no limit to one's imagination.

We were soon put to serious work and detailed into the operations room. Everything was state-of-the-art as far as communication technology was concerned. As we learned the ropes, we were surprised to find that all radio traffic followed English communication patterns, like call signs and GMT, designed to confuse the enemy.

Since transmissions occurred with outposts at all points of the globe, selection of suitable directional antenna was essential to ensure the quality of the incoming signals. For that purpose, the operators had to select the appropriate antenna on a huge switchboard. Incoming messages were forwarded to the decoding section which would pass them on to the various staff sections for evaluation.

Incidentally, we did not use the ENIGMA machine but a far more advanced cryptographical machine, unknown anywhere else in the German defence organisation. I forget its name and don't think I ever came across any reference to that device in the postwar literature I've read.

When I said before that the apparent normality of our training and practice was astonishing under the circumstances, even more amazing was the fact that we were introduced to those neatly disguised handsets used by operators parachuted behind enemy lines. In that context we were told some intriguing stories about the methods used by the agents, like for instance the man in Spain whose radio set was contained in an electric iron. The clothes line on the balcony of his flat was his antenna!

Did the High Command really think that we still had a chance? Did they too, believe in Hitler's ultimate wonder weapon?

Within the strange environment of the unit, we fellows from the *Luftwaffe* felt rather isolated. As an elite unit, the *Abwehr* was a closely knit family and we were probably considered to be intruders. I don't think that it was a question of distrust, but they obviously knew too much and did not want us to be privy to that knowledge or to whatever plans they may have had. Under the circumstances, we were not able to make instant friends and my only close contact was a flight sergeant with whom I seemed to be on the same wave length.

It also came about that a certain *Oberleutnant* was beginning to treat the two of us like trusted partners. I don't know why this should have been so, but we had the feeling that the officer himself was not a member of what I would call the 'Inner Circle'.

In the meantime, the Russians were moving towards Berlin. Amazingly, in spite of the heavy losses, Germany was still able to deploy one million men for the defence of the city. Before it fell to the enemy, I had the unexpected opportunity to visit the capital on two occasions in order to collect essential equipment from a stores depot.

Travelling on the S-Bahn through the suburbs, I witnessed the unbelievable damage that the unrelenting bombing had done. As far as the eye could see, there were the eerie shells of the facades of once handsome apartment blocks, now reduced to rubble. Having spent two years of my childhood in Berlin I was deeply shocked.

Yet strangely, life seemed to go on amongst the debris. The trains were running and we could see people moving about in the street. It made us wonder where and how they lived. What was left of the cafés in the *Friedrichstrasse* still operated, albeit with *Ersatz* coffee and beer, and there seemed to be no shortage of girls willing to join the weary warriors for a drink.

At the stores depot, a senior NCO sporting full dress uniform, even wearing peacetime regulation kid gloves, took care of our requirements. He seemed strangely confident.

'Let them come,' he said. 'We are ready for them. We shall defend our city to the last man!'

Having a few hours to spare, we ventured to the tranquil setting of a restaurant on the shores of Lake Wannsee, which in normal times always had been a popular recreational spot. There, whilst soaking up the sun and engaging in light-hearted conversation, we had a delicious fish dinner. In that illusively peaceful setting it was difficult to realise that the Russians were already at the doorstep.

People sitting around us cast searching glances in our directions and we could not help noticing the absence of the usual congeniality accorded to the man in uniform. There is nothing more despicable than a defeated army in retreat.

On our last visit we had difficulties with the Military Police.

Although our travel orders had been annotated to the effect that we were carrying important equipment and return to the unit was essential, the sergeant at the railway station insisted that the *Kommandant* of the city had ordered that every available man must remain in Berlin and participate in its defence.

With great apprehension we referred to the annotation on our documents.
'That does not impress me one bit,' said the MP sergeant. 'You are to stay and to fight!'

I did some quick talking, dropped the word *'Abwehr'* and hinted at the essentiality of our mission. The sergeant began to waver and we finally succeeded in bluffing our way through the gates. Sitting in the carriage, we wiped the sweat off our brows. What a close shave!

When we arrived back at 'Spook Haven', there were already feverish preparations in train to establish some form of defence. Trenches were being dug and infantry troops had been deployed on the outskirts of the town.

The next morning, American fighter planes flew low over our antenna forest and attacked the nearby railway station with blazing guns. There, hundreds of fleeing civilians were waiting for a train.

The strafing caused dreadful carnage. Although I had by then seen enough torn bodies, it gripped my heart with cold fear when later in the streets I encountered little children with bloodstained bandages. The war had certainly turned ugly.

Our camp came under fire too. Much to our shock, the young lieutenant who had briefed us on our arrival was hit by a shell whilst he was sitting on the toilet. His stomach had been ripped open and he died an hour later.

The war in the air must have still been going on, because one afternoon I saw a group of twenty to thirty dejected American airmen being escorted through the main street. The *Luftwaffe* was not quite finished yet, it seemed.

By 20 April, the German resistance on the River Oder had been smashed and by 25 April, the Russian armies led by Konev and Zhukov met west of Berlin. On the same day, Russian and US forces made contact on the River Elbe at Torgau. On 26 April Zhukov's armies from the north and Konev's from the south drove in on the city's defences.

There was great apprehension at our Headquarters. One afternoon, the direct microwave link with the *Führerhauptquartier* — Hitler's bunker — in Berlin had suddenly broken down and the teleprinter link had also become silent.

In the distance we could already hear the rumbling sound of artillery fire. In view of the uncertainty of the situation, someone suggested that an observation post should be set up on the platform at the top of the mast that carried the directional microwave antenna. As nobody volunteered, I decided to step forward.

'Good, Körbl!' said the first lieutenant. 'You'd better put your greatcoat on and wear a balaclava. It's windy and cold up there. Take that field telephone with you and a pair of binoculars. Report what you can see and keep us posted. We shall relieve you in good time.'

Having collected my gear, I made my way up the iron steps and settled down on the platform some fifty feet above the ground. The small frame swayed in the wind, but I found a bit of protection from the stiff breeze behind the solid antenna casing.

Staring through my binoculars, I could see the flashes of artillery fire south-east of Berlin, the unfamiliar spectacle becoming more and more lively as darkness fell. As instructed, I reported what I saw over the telephone.

After some four hours on my lofty perch I heard the clatter of steps moving up the ladder. A helmet appeared over the edge of the platform and a voice said: *'I've come to relieve you. I suppose you've had enough!'*

Early the next day we began manning the trenches. The sound of the artillery fire had become more noticeable and two Russian light spotter planes ventured to fly over our position. A burst from a machine gun made them bank steeply and they quickly disappeared at tree top level.

In the afternoon, the first lieutenant who had been tasked with organising the defence, took the flight sergeant and myself on an inspection tour around the southern slope of the hill. As we moved through the antennae forest, the sound of two rifle shots rang out and we could actually hear the bullets whizzing past our ears.

I suppose we were wondering where the shots could have come from, but gave it no further thought, our minds being occupied with more urgent tasks. It was not until months later, that I learned the story behind those two shots.

The battle of Berlin was fierce. Konev's forces had advanced almost to the Tiergarten area, Zhukov's armies had reached the River Spree. Between them lay the *Reichstag* building and Hitler's command bunker. The savagery of the fighting is given by the fact that it was not until 2 May that the armies met across the Charlottenburg Chaussee.

In the meantime, the *Reichstag* had fallen on 30 April. Hitler was reported to have named Admiral Dönitz as his successor and then committed suicide. Incidentally, nobody had ever heard of Eva Braun.

The night before, our officer accompanied by the flight sergeant and myself inspected trench positions to the west of the quarters. There was noticeable tension amongst the troops and little was spoken.

When we returned to our huts, we had the ominous feeling that something unpleasant was about to happen. We did not know what it was, we just sensed that something sinister was afoot and that we had to be extremely careful in case we should be sidelined, as it were.

Discussing the situation, we decided not to sleep in our quarters, but share an unoccupied room in another hut for the night. We locked the door, loaded our sub-machine guns and placed them within easy reach beside our beds and conversed only in whispers. I don't know why we did this, but we must have had an obscure foreboding and clearly, we were afraid.

Lying awake for a long while, we could hear unusual movement in the corridor, subdued voices and noises indicating hectic activity. After midnight the commotion subsided, it became quiet and we finally dozed off.

How right we had been with our suspicions! Assembling at the parade ground the next morning, we faced the painful truth. Visibly distraught, the *Oberleutnant* paced back and forth before he addressed the assembled troops. Shaking with emotion, he disclosed that during the night the senior officers and practically all the headquarters staff had left the unit in a clandestine fashion.

'I am sorry to say that this is the most disgraceful moment of my entire service career!' he said. 'I have advised the local *Kommandant* of what has happened. I am now the senior officer and in full charge. Following the advice received, we are to prepare to withdraw and move westward until we come to the Elbe River.'

'The American and English armies have reached the river at two points and, with the Russians behind us, we are now encircled. Negotiations are in train to surrender the troops in our area to the Americans on the other side of the Elbe. The Russian advance can no longer be halted and you all know what fate would await you in their hands. Becoming a Prisoner of War is not a joyful prospect, but the *Ami* may be a better proposition than the *Ivan*.'

'A final word!' our First Lieutenant added. 'May I remind you that you are still under military discipline. I plead with you to stick together since we shall have a better chance this way. We'll travel light, that is to say we take only combat gear and emergency rations.'

By then, it should have been obvious to all of us that the war was lost.

The wonder weapon had not been brought into action, perhaps it never existed.

Hitler was supposed to be dead.

I don't think we were convinced. Surely, some escape route would have been prepared for our *Führer*?

Chapter Seven

Humiliation, Barbed Wire and Survival

Once we were on the road to the west, we merged with a multitude of military personnel moving in the same direction. It was a sorry sight. Emaciated bodies, haggard faces tired from lack of sleep and long deprivation, unshaven, the uniforms torn and filthy.

A defeated army fleeing from the Russians.

When we reached the lowlands bordering the mighty Elbe, we encountered a scene of utter disarray. Scattered under the trees were abandoned vehicles, piles of equipment, weapons and ammunition. Groups of soldiers lay on the ground, exhausted and hungry. Some wore bloodstained bandages, some moved about on crutches. But the sound of battle was no longer around us.

The *Oberleutnant*, who had attended a meeting called by the senior officer at the scene, rounded us up. He informed us that there were now close to a hundred thousand soldiers assembled in the area and that the commanders were still negotiating with the 9th US Army. The situation was delicate as we were in the agreed Russian sphere of influence and it was not quite clear whether the Americans would permit such a large number of German soldiers to cross into their territory.

One of the ironic consequences of the demise of the NS (National Socialist) regime was that the 'military' salute was restored immeditately. With Hitler presumed dead there was no point in hailing him anymore. We were also told that we were no longer bound by the oath to the *Führer* and each man could choose to be on his own. However, our officer strongly recommended that we should stick together. How wise his recommendation was became clear during the following days.

We were indeed lucky to have a capable leader. I still remember with great admiration the man who was a true officer, a clear-headed professional, very much concerned with the welfare of the men under his charge. Thanks to his unfailing foresight, we fared much better than many other units during the chaos we were to encounter in the following weeks.

It was a confusing situation. The established order had broken down and some troops became unruly. Rumours began to spread and speculations were rife. Whilst the pessimists warned that the Americans might execute prisoners at random like the Russians were wont to do, others seemed to think that the Americans would organise the German armies to recapture the areas taken by the Ivan.

Perhaps we were naive to think that the Americans would turn against the Russians, but we thought that the possibility existed. After all, weren't the Americans capitalists and totally opposed to Communism?

I suppose it was all wishful thinking, instilling some glimmer of hope in our minds that our war effort against the USSR and international Communism had not entirely been in vain.

Ironically, the Alliance collapsed shortly after the German defeat and the Cold War erupted.

After a long night camping under the stars, we learned that the Americans had agreed to a local surrender. Their only condition was that every man must carry a rifle which had to be symbolically thrown to the ground. It was explained that the Americans were great military traditionalists who equated unarmed surrender with despicable desertion.

Meanwhile, a never ending stream of men and women had commenced moving towards the embankment. When we arrived at the huge bridge we were stunned to find that it had been blown up. The superstructure had been broken off on our side and was lying in the water at a steep angle, but it was still attached to the stone foundations across the river.

Army engineers had constructed a makeshift passage over the water by connecting a number of small boats and laying planks over them. That shaky walkway enabled safe advance to the point where the water level reached the partly submerged superstructure. From there on, we had to climb over narrow boards that had been rigged to the girders.

With a height difference of some thirty feet, the angle of the planks was steep. Since there was only one guide rope to hold on to, the ascent became a frightening experience for those suffering from acrophobia.

Having advanced halfway up the incline, I foolishly glanced down into the abyss where the torrential waters of the river roared through the mangled steel. I wavered for a moment, but cheered on by two engineers standing on firm ground on the other side, I made the remaining thirty or so feet with rapid steps and pounding heart. Losing one's footing would have meant certain death.

Having reached *terra firma,* I had no chance to collect myself. American soldiers dashed about in an agitated state, shouting '*weg! weg*!' (*off! off!*) indicating that I should throw my rifle on the heap of weapons already piled up on the ground. Others, wielding long white sticks, chased us along the road leading from the bridge.

And there was this constant shouting of '*Let's go*!' and '*Fucking! Fucking*! *Fucking*!'

We then noticed a huge banner on the road side, printed in large letters:

DAS DANKEN WIR DEM FÜHRER!

DIE NEUNTE US ARMEE

(For this we have to thank the Führer! The Ninth US Army.)

A nice welcome gesture, we thought.

Surrounded by PR men who were filming and photographing from all directions, we were herded into a large paddock close to the residential homes.

A black soldier from a tank crew jumped about, waving a forty-five in his hand. He seemed to have gone completely berserk, screaming incessantly and pushing the gun into the backs of the miserable soldiers who came along on the double.

Whilst the treatment meted out to the men was rough, we observed that the American soldiers were extremely correct in handling the wounded and also the sprinkling of female personnel which had come across. Soldiers in that category were immediately given shelter in a nearby church.

After an hour or so had passed, orders were given to line up in rows ten abreast, with three feet distance between the ranks.

GIs with scared expressions on their faces began to frisk us, relieving us of valuables like wristwatches, wedding rings, cameras and the like, items which they gleefully put into their pockets. The guy who took my camera said with a big grin on his face 'Gee, thanks!'

He and his mates then went through our kits, removing knives, scissors, individual tent canvasses and anything they thought to be of military value. Their actions were interspersed with frequent shouts of '*weg! weg!*' and a profusion of that apparently indispensable word of which we did not know its meaning.

Eventually, a bloke next to me who spoke reasonable English said to one of the GIs:

'Tell me! What is the meaning of this *fucking* business? I have never heard that word at school!'

The GI laughed. 'You will find out!' he said with a smirk on his face. 'It's the best word in the English dictionary!'

Mindful of the advice of our leader, we had managed to stay together so far. As darkness fell, he passed the word around that we should try to retrieve anything of importance that we had been made to throw to the ground, in particular, the triangular canvas planes which were part of our standard equipment. It was a most valuable direction.

Eventually, we were lined up on the road and set *en march*. Judging by the position of the Big Dipper in the sky, we were moving in a north-westerly direction.

The slouching figures of listless GIs moved silently along with our column. Now and then, a man would fall to the ground, exhausted and tired from the battle that lay behind. Swearing GIs would then throw the kit of the unfortunate bloke into the ditch and toss the unconscious body onto one of the slowly following trucks.

The endless column moved on through the night, oblivious of the drama that happened around us.

Daylight was breaking when we arrived at a railway siding. Alighting from the train, we collapsed on the ground that was cool and wet from the morning dew. An hour or so later, we heard the sound of shunting trucks. With the help of the dreaded white sticks which provided a more effective communication than incomprehensible words, we were moved onto the train, sixty men to every truck.

Whilst this was going on, a group of women, carrying cans with steaming coffee and laundry baskets filled with sandwiches, approached the train.

The GIs immediately fired rifle shots over their heads. The women stopped, looking shocked. They pleadingly gestured to the Americans, but the guards shook their heads. I don't think they were nasty, but rather frightened and not prepared to take any risks.

After a boring journey of several hours, the train came to a halt on a siding that faced a vast compound surrounded by a barbed wire fence.

In the distance, we could see a brick building, otherwise the enclosure was bare with the exception of the tall tubular steel structure in the centre of the paddock that rose to a height of about two hundred or three hundred feet. The diameter of the tube at its base would have been at least ten feet across. From the top of the mast extended an array of antennae wires that were attached to smaller masts on the periphery, the latter secured by guy wires.

We had arrived at Kalbe an der Milbe, the central communication station of the German Navy.

Somebody pointed out that the antenna system resembled a giant spider web. The symbolism was not lost when it dawned on us that the paddock would be our open air prison.

As we were prodded through the open gate, we noticed that squares had been measured out on both sides of the roads running through the compound. Each one of the squares, which were indicated by barbed wire strands laid out on the ground, had a number.

The white sticks quickly separated us into groups of a hundred men, each group being led into one of the squares. The guards shrugged their shoulders.

'That's it! Sorry, you guys!'

After initial assessment of the situation during which tempers flared, the multitude of novice POWs succumbed to the inevitable and settled down in a fashion. Some of the luckier ones had their canvas sheets which could be buttoned together to form tents for three or four men. Those who did not have such protection had to dig holes, covering them with cardboard from the ration packs that were issued later in the evening. Fortunately, it did not rain during the next few weeks.

We soon realised how lucky we were to have a leader. Whilst everywhere around us was in a chaotic state, arguments developed and officers and NCOs had to resort to shouting to maintain order, our *Hundertschaft* — a team of hundred men — quietly proceeded to erect the tents, properly aligned in regulation order as prescribed for a normal field camp.

Our first lieutenant maintained his authority unopposed, co-opting the flight sergeant and myself to attend to organisation and discipline.

Soon our officers were called to a briefing by the American camp commandant who stressed that he expected normal military discipline to be maintained. Insubordination would not be tolerated under any circumstances.

During the following days it became clear that the promulgation of that directive was indeed necessary, because many exhausted and disgruntled soldiers seemed to be under the misapprehension that they no longer had to carry out orders. The Commandant's stance and the extremely harsh treatment meted out to offenders quickly quelled any disturbances. As a warning to all, unruly men were immediately put into an open wire cage — a kind of medieval, but very effective form of solitary confinement.

American K-Rations were issued in the evening, each pack to be divided amongst twenty men, that is to say, half the normal ration. This caused a problem, because how does one divide a tin of tomatoes, beans, tins of spam and packets of dry biscuits amongst twenty men?

We solved the question the next day, when we learned that the German Red Cross and well-meaning civilians from the surrounding villages had carted potatoes, carrots, turnips and other vegetables to the camp. Taking up my suggestion that we could perhaps prepare proper meals with the available ingredients and that I would be happy to act as cook, the *Oberleutnant* decided not to issue the rations in kind.

We immediately went to work. Whilst some peeled potatoes, carrots and swedes, I prepared a stew. Others built frames from sticks on which mess tins filled with my imaginative concoction would be hung. Fires were lit and soon we cooked just as in the good old days when we had been camping in the field. Everybody got his fill and was happy, much to the envy and open resentment of the neighbouring groups which were less ingenious.

The number of POWs had by now swollen to over 80,000 men and there was great concern about hygienic conditions. Toilets were of course not available and practically all soldiers were infested with lice. In accordance with American instructions, deep trenches had been dug along the perimeter fence to serve as open latrines.

The only water source was the trickle of the Milbe River in which we also bathed. Realising the danger, the Americans brought a water purification plant into the compound to pump river water into jerry cans. It tasted strongly of chlorine, but conscious of the possibility of an outbreak of typhoid and cholera, we felt that it was better to swallow the evil-tasting liquid than drink untreated water.

Aware of the necessity to keep everyone occupied in order to prevent boredom and psychological damage, the Flight Sergeant and myself were asked to draw up an activities program. In doing so, we set aside an hour in the morning for personnel hygiene, detailed kitchen parties and organised PT sessions.

At night-time, we gathered around small camp fires to sing the many familiar tunes we knew so well. That singing impressed the American Commandant on his inspection round and he made it known that he wanted the sing-song sessions to become a regular feature.

I recall that we received some kind of news sheets. From these we learned that the provisional German government under Admiral Dönitz had unconditionally surrendered. Salzburg and Innsbruck in Austria had fallen. Germany and Austria were to be divided into four zones of occupation, the cities of Berlin and Vienna were also to be administered in four individual sectors. Mussolini had been assassinated, Himmler, Goebbels and his whole family had committed suicide.

We now had sufficient time on our hands to reflect on the nation's situation in general and our own fate in particular. The events of the last week had been traumatic and most of us would agree that our ideals had been shattered. We had no illusions about the future and wondered how the occupation forces would cope with the disorganised state of the country and how food supplies would be ensured. It was all a big question mark. In the meantime, one had to concentrate on survival.

Amazingly, in all the turmoil our captors had given thought to our spiritual needs and arranged a divine service on the first Sunday. It was held at the base of the giant, hollow antenna mast tube in the centre of the camp. Not too many POWs attended, because the experiences of the immediate past and the dreadful present were not yet conducive to that sphere of intangible human aspirations.

For about four weeks nothing happened until one afternoon, when we were assembled for an unscheduled roll call, the purpose of which was to inform us that demarcation lines between the zones of occupation had been decided. Under the agreement, the British forces would be responsible for the north-western regions of Germany, including Schleswig-Holstein, Westphalia, part of the Rhineland, Hanover and Brunswick.

A list had now to be prepared showing the names of all soldiers who previously had lived in or had relatives in these areas. Eligible personnel would be shifted into the British zone the next day.

This certainly was exciting news, opening up many new possibilities. I had no relatives in Germany, but here was an opportunity to get out of this dreadful camp where 80,000 men were forced to live in the most primitive circumstances, exposed to wind and weather, underfed and in constant danger of epidemic disease.

Furthermore, there was still the frightening prospect that the Americans would hand us over to the Russians. I had to get out at all costs!

Scanning my brains, I thought of the memorable holiday I had with Ulla in Westphalia. Without hesitation, I wrote down the name and address of the landlady where we had stayed, designating her as my 'aunt'. It was my first experience of the importance of quick and positive thinking in a dangerous situation. In the following weeks and months that approach kept me out of trouble on more than one occasion.

Act now, worry later. Survival, that's what it was all about!

The next morning, I said goodbye to our stalwart *Oberleutnant*, my flight sergeant friend and the people from the *Abwehr*. We wished each other good luck, wondering whether we would ever meet again.

The men selected for transfer were assembled on the main road of the camp. In order to travel light, we were only allowed one small kitbag, to be carried hanging down in front of the chest. Once again, the white sticks came to the fore, prodding us into these remarkably effective small squares, indicated by strands of wire and numbers. In a most astonishing display of American organisation and efficiency, three thousand POWs were thus quickly divided into fifty groups of sixty men each.

Next, a convoy of fifty heavy army trucks arrived at the scene, each one stopping in front of one of the squares. The driver and the co-driver alighted from their cabin, moved to the rear, let down the tail board and shouted:

'Let's go! Let's go!'

Sixty men quickly climbed aboard, to be squeezed together like sardines. There was the usual swearing, the tail boards were shut and the drivers returned to their cabin. The whole operation might have taken about ten minutes.

Then, a jeep appeared from the direction of headquarters. As it approached, the officer sitting beside the driver rose to his feet and tossed the balled fist of his right arm twice up into the air. The engines came to life and within seconds the trucks roared off in hot pursuit of the leading jeep.

We were now heading towards Hanover. The future was still uncertain, but I suppose we all were glad to have left the dismal camp. Whatever happened next could not be worse than the experience of the last few weeks.

Several decades later, I was surprised to see on television a BBC documentary about an American POW camp at Remagen on the Rhine River. There, the Ami had amassed over one hundred thousand German prisoners under similar circumstances at Kalbe. It appears, the conditions there were even worse, but the true story of that camp in which a number of Germans died, was only revealed fifty years later.

As we moved along towards the British zone, we had no chance to talk or even to reflect. Our attention was concentrated on our present situation of extreme discomfort. At first, we were thrown about every time the heavy truck cornered. Being alert, it did not take us long to adjust to the situation. By taking the cue from a man in front who would call out 'left' or 'right!', we immediately leaned as one body into the indicated direction, thus moving with the mass of the cornering vehicle, counteracting the centrifugal forces.

Racing through populated areas, our convoy caused sensation. Women and children rushed out from the houses, staring at us in disbelief. The glorious German *Wehrmacht* in defeat!

In a small village the truck in front of us struck a dog, killing it instantly. I can still see the horrified looks on the faces of the womenfolk who watched the drama.

We travelled throughout the day, hot, sweating, hungry and thirsty. There weren't even any comfort stops. Obviously, it was considered too bothersome and too dangerous to let us down and board again. I often wonder how we survived that long and arduous trip, behaving like camels in reverse.

Arriving at the outskirts of Hanover, the convoy entered a compound of army barracks. There was widespread bomb damage and the place looked deserted.

As soon as the trucks came to a halt, the tail boards were opened and we were quickly moved down onto solid ground. The empty trucks left the scene without further ado. I don't remember that any orders were given, indeed that any words were spoken at all. The Americans had simply dumped their human cargo in accordance with instructions and, having no further responsibilities, returned to their unit.

'Mission completed,' so to speak.

Night had fallen. Three thousand men were sitting silently on the ground, waiting for orders, but nothing happened. Eventually, the most senior German officer called a meeting to assess the situation.

The strange absence of British military personnel seemed to indicate that they either did not know of our arrival or had not expected us that early. Unknown to us, we were thus totally unguarded for several hours.

In retrospect, one wonders why nobody had thought about escaping. Although this may have been possible, survival in the city would have been difficult. In order to eat one needed ration cards and these were not available to anyone not registered at the local employment office. Registration without a discharge certificate from the *Wehrmacht* was not possible, neither could one obtain an ID Card. Furthermore, without identification, one was likely to be picked up by the Military Police.

Still, during the following weeks some men managed to disappear. More about that later.

At an advanced hour, the officers' council decided that something had to be done. Why not follow the American routine with which we were by now so familiar? Let's form up into groups of a hundred men each, appoint officers and NCOs in charge, explore the empty barracks, allocate space and most importantly, immediately dig latrine trenches.

Food? Well, we just had to wait.

Several hours later, a detachment of frustrated British soldiers arrived. Under much confusion they surveyed the situation and I suppose their officer-in-charge had to rely a good deal on the cooperation of the German commandant to establish some kind of order.

With much swearing — the same vocabulary as the Americans, only a different accent — the British posted sentries, obviously hoping for the best.

Our demand for food caused some consternation because there just wasn't any. After strong representations — we had not had anything to eat for over twenty-four hours — the British brought in some K-Ration packs, to be divided amongst *forty* people each. Not much, but better than nothing.

Meanwhile, our group had been sorted out and accommodated under the roof of one of the three-storey blocks. There, we would sleep on bare concrete for the next four weeks, but at least we were not exposed to wind and weather. Exhaustion took its toll and soon we were in a deep sleep, in spite of the uncomfortable situation.

The extent of the dilemma of the British forces became evident during the next morning. They were totally unprepared to cope with the situation and unable to supply food.

As a first priority, perimeter security was established by the simple means of drawing white lines on the ground and positioning machine guns around the fences. We were warned that stepping over the white lines meant to be shot at without being challenged.

Our most pressing task was now to clean up the bomb damage as far as possible and to get the kitchen into working order. Food supplies were meagre and for about two weeks, our daily ration consisted of a sixteen ounces tin of thin soup, dubbed *Blauer Heinrich* (Blue Henry), plus one loaf of bread to be divided amongst twenty men. Although German voluntary organisations did their best to augment our dismal rations, there was not enough to satisfy our needs.

The hitherto rarely encountered pangs of hunger had a devastating effect on morale. To watch how the individual coped with the situation was a sobering and frightening experience. It seemed that accepted civilised behaviour could quickly disappear in such a chaotic situation and that the attitude of individual prisoners indicated a return to the darkest stages of human evolution.

One morning, I witnessed a riotous scene as a group of Red Cross personnel pulled a handcart through the main gate. On top of the cart stood two large containers filled with potato salad. As soon as the group was past the gate, a mob of some fifty men rushed forward, throwing themselves over the cart, digging hands into the container and stuffing whatever they could grab into their mouths. In the process, a lot of the salad was spilled onto the ground. The Red Cross ladies stood back, watching in horror and dismay.

Once, whilst on a working party in the city, a *Hitlerjunge* caught a packet of *Kunsthonig* (synthetic honey) thrown to him by some well-meaning civilian. The men tore the packet from his hand, ripped it to pieces, fought over the debris and devoured the lumps of gluey, sugary spread on the spot. The kid did not get a morsel for himself.

I am still haunted by the memory of the sight of men squatting over the latrine trenches, twitched in pain while thin faeces slowly trickled down from their emaciated bodies.

Then there was the boy who had been suspected of stealing food from his comrades. He was closely watched during the following days. One night, he was caught rifling the kitbag of the man sleeping next to him.

The next morning he received *Die Decke* — the blanket — the traditional German army punishment for *Kamaradendiebstah* (stealing from your comrades) which in the military environment was considered to be a most despicable crime. In accordance with time-honoured ritual, a blanket was thrown over the man's head at a convenient moment. Punches then rained down at the offender until he managed to escape, running away screaming.

To me, the most disturbing observation was the regressive behaviour that seemed to emerge amongst men irrespective of their previous standing in life. It was as if our cherished culture had completely disappeared, the individual driven by basic instincts and survival being the only consideration.

Witnessing such frightening behaviour, I came to the conclusion that 'civilisation', as we like to think of it, was just a thin veneer of superimposed culture which so deceptively obscures our intrinsic animalism. Yet the strange phenomenon is that the individual returns to the learned behaviour as soon as the normally accepted conditions have been restored. Most likely, he will wipe from his conscious memory all the unpleasant associations gained.

The presence of a large number of *Hitlerjungen* amongst the seasoned warriors worried me considerably. These children, most of them barely sixteen years old, had been conscripted during the last weeks of the war and thrown into the battle of Berlin. Observing how the boys tended to associate with the older men, participating in their card games late at night, being exposed to adult conversation and profuse swearing, I expressed my concern to our officer. Agreeing with me, he relayed my thoughts to the camp commandant who immediately issued orders to organise the kids into separate platoons. From then on, the youngsters were kept busy with sport and other recreational activities under the supervision of dedicated NCOs suited for the task.

In spite of the lack of adequate food and the resulting deterioration of our physical condition, we were forced to work. Initially, it meant cleaning up the rubble from the bombing damage in the city, later on to carry out restoration work in a cable factory. I think its name was Hanomag Werke.

Since the restoration of the German communication network was considered an administrative priority, there was concern to get the works back into production. As for myself, I gained valuable experience in the carpenter's shop, being introduced to wood-working machinery and taught useful handiwork by experienced and ingenious foremen.

At Hanomag we had our first opportunity to mix with the civilian work force. Most of the men proclaimed proudly that they were Socialists or Communists, the 'Red Boys', as they liked to call themselves. We listened to their stories of opposition and resistance, but kept silent, realising that a lot of their boasting had no foundation.

The cleaning operations in the factory grounds produced several hidden bodies, one of them concealed inside a furnace. The bodies were identified as former supervisory employees of the works who had been killed by Polish workers in revenge for alleged cruel work practices. A gruesome thought that made us shiver and brought home the realities of total war and its far-reaching implications.

Inside the camp conditions improved slowly, security seemed to be less stringent and the guards were not as nervous as during the first few days. It was then that a few bold characters managed to escape.

The opportunity arose when on Sundays hordes of townsfolk would flock to the perimeter fence to talk to us and most of all, obtain information about missing loved ones. Impromptu friendships were formed and some men, hastily changing into civilian shirts and jackets thrown over the fence, managed to slip through holes in the wire when diversions were created and the sentries looked in the other direction.

Once outside, they took hold of the offered arm of a girl or even better, would grasp the handle of a pram. With a demonstrated air of belonging, the instant families would then move off in the direction of the town. I don't know whether these audacious boys were able to survive without being recaptured, but they deserve full credit for trying.

As a result of the unhygienic conditions, lice were bothering everybody. It was about that time that we were introduced to the new wonder insecticide DDT. In due course, every man was treated to two puffs of the yellow powder, one puff down the opened shirt front and one into the trousers. I don't think that any lice would have survived the treatment. Ironically, it was not until 1962 that it was recognised that the chemical compound was extremely dangerous.

One of my closest friends in those days was a young airman whom, for the purpose of the story, I shall call *Hans*. Having been at Belzig for some time, he seemed to have a better insight of what had been going on in the Abwehr than newcomers like myself. One night, when we were lying side by side on the concrete floor, he came up with an astonishing tale.

'Franz!' he said, 'Do you remember when you, the First Lieutenant and your Flight Sergeant friend were wandering about the antennae masts on the hillside? Do you recall that two shots rang out then?'

Yes, I did. In fact, I could still hear the sound of bullets whizzing past my ears.

'Well', said Hans, 'What you don't know is that there was a conspiracy. Some members of the unit had planned to desert if things turned bad. You and the Flight Sergeant were not trusted because you did not belong. Neither was the *Oberleutnant*. The two shots were for real. Fortunately, they missed.'

But that was not all. Hans then continued to recall the events in the evening of that day, when we had moved around the defence positions of the camp. As I mentioned earlier, sensing the tension around us, we had felt that something unpleasant was about to happen. We had not been wrong. According to Hans, the conspirators had planned to execute the three of us. Even graves had already been dug under the trees. What saved us was the unexpected presence of the Paymaster who apparently was a very popular officer.

I was stunned. Since I lost contact with anyone connected with these days, I never had confirmation of the story from other sources. However, recalling the mysterious goings-on that night, I am inclined to believe what Hans told me. Life can sometimes be stranger than fiction.

We were now in mid-June of 1945. The unconditional surrender was followed by the total occupation of all the territories of the German Reich. The *Wehrmacht* was crushed and what was left was disarmed and taken prisoner.

The Nazi organisation disappeared practically overnight and the German State ceased to exist. Administration, transport networks, food supplies and social welfare services were now the responsibility of the occupation forces.

Of course we did not know the extent of the chaos around us. Being isolated behind barbed wire, we had to rely on our new masters for news. It stands to reason that after years of exposure to Government propaganda which through bitter experience, now proved to have been misleading in many areas, we did not always believe what we were told.

We may be forgiven that we considered any Allied proposals to solve the German problem with great scepticism. It seemed to us that the Allies did not have any contingency plans and that public administration had broken down.

How little the British Government had been prepared to handle the postwar situation in the occupied Germany was well documented in a recent BBC television production. The historical facts that were disclosed in the interviews with retired senior officers and former high-ranking officials confirm my own recollections of the impressions I'd gathered in those turbulent days.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Chapter Eight

Scavenging with Regiment Paulsen

The situation in the camp remained grim, but unexpectedly something extraordinary happened. One morning early in July, word spread around that a British major would speak to the troops. Whilst I did not feel like going, Hans thought that he should listen to the address. He came back very excited.

'Franz' he said, 'You won't believe this! The *Tommy* officer told us that he has been tasked with the rehabilitation of the communication network in the area. Since the restoration is essential for effective administration, it has to be done as quickly as possible. To do this, materiel and equipment is urgently needed.'

'Well, the Brits have discovered that there are considerable stores of equipment lying about in the countryside. Now, here is the plot! Imagine, the Major intends to form a regiment of volunteer POWs with a signaller's background. The unit would be tasked with the salvaging of these stores.'

'He has promised that the regiment would be established along German lines. We will be equipped with new vehicles, get new uniforms, be allowed to move about freely, subject to curfew of course, and be put on half of the British Army rations. The companies will be located in different regions and there is a prospect of getting weekend leave to visit our families, should these live within reasonable distances.'

Hans looked at me.'It sounds too good to be true, Franz. Getting out of this rat hole! New uniforms. No more dirt. Adequate food. Well, I have decided to volunteer and I would like you to join too. We are friends and you could come with me and visit my folks on the coast once we should get leave. I am sure my family would make you welcome. How about it?'

As I said before, in order to survive, one has to take the chances as they present themselves. And be quick about it! Getting out of the 'rat hole' certainly was number one priority. My friend did not need to provide more arguments in order to convince me. I volunteered!

That the idea of forming a regiment recruited from German POWs could be conceived amid the existing chaos and the general ill feeling against the Nazis, is encouraging proof that enlightened thinking, common sense and practical considerations still have a place, even in wartime.

Major Pape (or was it Pope?) became quite a legendary figure. I never met him personally, but only saw him from a distance. People would forever talk about what he had done, how he brilliantly had dealt with situations, how he had made snap decisions with as little fuss as possible and how much he was concerned with our wellbeing. It also appears that he was one of the few people on the winning side who realised that there are always two sides to a story.

I wonder whether he is remembered in the annals of the United Kingdom.

The new unit became known as the *Signal Salvage Regiment Paulsen*, named after *Hauptmann* Paulsen, the German Captain in charge. The account of our adventures during the following four months could fill a book of its own, but I'll concentrate on the main events which may best illustrate our truly amazing experiences.

We were operational almost immediately, equipped with brand new Opel trucks and an army issue model of the famous Volkswagen for each company commander. The selected personnel were put into the black uniforms worn by German tank crews. It was an eye-opener to discover what huge stores Germany had left after six years of exhausting warfare.

Our first location was a small place in the area south-west of Magdeburg on the Elbe River, where we camped in tents erected on a compound at the perimeter of the town. If I remember correctly, its name was Osterwieck.

To be out of the dreaded camp at Hanover was an enjoyable sensation. The new identity, the familiar military organisation, the discipline and the relative freedom were a tremendous morale booster. Although our future was still under a cloud, for the moment we felt on top of the world.

One of our first operations took us to a disused underground rock salt mine at Grasleben near Helmstedt, the place that became known throughout the world as a border check point on the Russian demarcation line.

By chance, whilst driving to that destination we were able to witness a historic event. Along the roadside stood a convoy of British vehicles with troops in smart new uniforms and gleaming weaponry. It was the 1st Battalion of the British Grenadier Guards selected to take up their mission in the British sector of Berlin.

I don't know how long the convoy had been waiting there, but the men looked weary and dejected. Perhaps the local Russian Commander may not have been certain about the legitimacy of British access into territory just captured by his troops and was waiting for orders. As we sensed, all was not well between the wartime Allies, in spite of the much publicised propaganda pictures showing Russian and American officers shaking hands at the demarcation line.

Never having been underground, I was looking forward to the impending adventure with great excitement. The unaccustomed setting and the unusual welcome offered by the lift operator made us immediately aware of the sombre atmosphere that existed at the pithead. To hear the meaningful phrase of '*Glück auf!*' (Happy ascent!), which is the traditional German miner's greeting, hinted at the many superstitions that surround the mining scene. During the fast descent in an open cage, the realisation of lingering dangers filled many of us with apprehension.

After emerging from the lift about 700 metres down below, we proceeded on top of small trolleys through dark tunnels to an immense excavation that resembled a huge cathedral. The unexpected sight of such a vast vault deep down in the bowels of the earth was indeed overwhelming.

The scenery that opened itself before our eyes immediately brought back memories of pictures of those mysterious secret caves in hidden mountain ranges where, according to the fairy tales of our childhood, gnomes and pixies dwelt. Hundreds of electric bulbs illuminated the hall, the myriads of gleaming saline crystals that formed the soaring walls reflecting the light in a unique display of scintillating rays, gloriously radiating all the colours of the spectrum. Alas, there was no time to wonder and to dwell on romantic visions.

We were surprised to find that the *Wehrmacht* had stored a mind-boggling array of materiel in these underground locations. The tunnels contained a multitude of warlike stores, technical spares, communication equipment, clothing and many other invaluable items.

There were many strange things, amongst them piles of intriguing small silk pouches.

Someone with an artillery background had the explanation. He told us that because of their anti-static quality, silk pouches were used to contain the explosive charges required to propel the projectiles from the shell cases!

Ingeniously, we used them in lieu of toilet paper. The height of luxury!

Engineers sorted, listed and packed the targeted items into wooden crates. Our job was to load the cases onto trolleys and couple these together. The assembled trains were then pulled by electric locomotives through the endless tunnels to reach the mainshaft. From there we moved the cases up to the surface and transported them by road to Brunswick, where the postal authority had its depot.

The work was hard and demanding, as we had to move quickly in order to keep up with the continuing flow of cases. Pushing the trolleys along the rails required considerable physical effort, particularly on the primitive turntable, which was nothing else but a large steel plate that had to be spread with water in order to reduce friction. We worked without shirts, but because of a constant temperature of 30 degrees Celsius, we were covered in perspiration throughout the day.

Our camp soon became a popular meeting spot. The large group of healthy and well-fed young men quickly attracted many women in search of company and fun. Someone even brought a record player to liven up the scene. Since most of the men were still behind barbed wire, our presence was something not to be missed.

Unfortunately, our happy sojourn came to an abrupt ending. Late one afternoon, there was a shock announcement: the dreaded Russians were coming. Orders from Headquarters directed us to break camp and to proceed to Hanover immediately.

It transpired that much to the consternation of the Western Allies the Russians had demanded that the region known as the *Magdeburger Börde* be handed over to their control. The request was clearly in excess of the territorial distribution agreed by the four powers at Yalta, but as the newly elected Labor Prime Minister Attlee apologetically remarked, Britain thought it should concede to the demand in view of the Soviet contribution to the defeat of Germany.

The news caused widespread panic and we were besieged by people who pleaded with us to smuggle them to the West. Strictly against orders, we managed to hide four women on our trucks.

Our next location was Langenhagen, a suburb of the city of Hanover. From there, the salvaging operations started in earnest.

In accordance with Major Pape's instructions, the mayors of all the small towns in the region had been directed to list any communication equipment found and indicate the exact locations on the British Army maps supplied to them. The *Regiment Paulsen* was then tasked with retrieving these stores. To that end, headquarters issued daily orders to the companies operating in the allocated areas.

It was an exciting episode. Every day we would move into different villages and towns, salvaging reels of cables, stacks of insulators, coils of wires, switch boards and other valuable items.

Several weeks later, our company was transferred to Königslutter am Elm, a city high up in the pristine mountain range about twenty-two kilometres east of Brunswick, where a disused sugar factory provided suitable accommodation. It was comfortable, the rooms were undamaged and there were toilets and wash basins in the building. After the deprivation in the dismal camp at Hanover, we much appreciated the new comfort.

As promised by Major Pape, we were supplied with British rations. These we supported with provisions obtained by barter at the black market — a few versatile and resourceful men looking after the catering.

Our work was interesting and the workload not excessive. By rotating the recovery parties on a daily basis, everybody was given a chance to see new vistas. There were forays into the picturesque Harz Mountains, Wolfenbüttel, Bad Harzburg, the university town of Göttingen and many other fabulous holiday resorts of which the ordinary citizen could only dream. I can honestly say that in those days I saw more of the lovely German landscape than ever before.

The independent location enabled us to get well organised and for the following two months we were able to lead an enviable, almost leisurely existence.

By ingenious means, we were even able to promote our 'headquarters' as a kind of social centre. It all started when we were allocated two ex-army field kitchens. Since we only needed one for our requirements, an industrious sergeant had the bright idea of converting the second one into a still, using it to produce spirit from fermented shredded dry sugar beets, normally used as winter fodder for cattle.

The local chemist assisted in the operation by giving technical advice and selling us the necessary essences in order to convert the raw spirit into Cherry Brandy, Crème de Menthe and other popular brands of liqueur.

The result was better than expected, but the product was fearfully potent. Although not pure, it found an eager market. One of our best customers was an American Army outfit engaged in salvaging explosives left behind in the area.

The next development on the social scene occurred when one of our members also had a brain wave of his own.

The man in question was a congenial type who wore a non-descript uniform, but never disclosed where he was from nor in which unit he had served. According to his fascinating yarn, he had been everywhere and done practically everything possible, including driving railway engines.

He once boasted that in his younger years he even had a spell as *Eintänzer* at the posh *Femina* nightclub in Berlin. That is to say, he professed to have been working as a hired dancing partner at that 'Ladies Only' establishment where wealthy females sought company, entertainment and adventure.

Well, out of the blue, our self-confessed 'Jack of all Trades' came up with the remarkable suggestion that, with his experience, he could organise ballroom classes. By consensus, the proposal was enthusiastically accepted and the classes materialised in the large storage area under the roof of the building. There, on the dusty floor, firstly to the accompaniment of a mouth organ and later of a generously donated record player, our mysterious adventurer took us through the paces of the foxtrot, quickstep, slow waltz and the tango.

After two weeks practice, our Dancing Master pronounced us 'proficient' and began to organise a ball in the barn of a nearby farm. The event was widely publicised and the response was better than expected.

The local police said they would not have any objections to the venture, provided the doors to the barn were kept closed after 10 pm as they did not want any problems with the MPs.

The venture turned out to be a roaring success.

Girls flocked to the farm in droves, because for most of them it was a new experience. You see, during the war dancing was generally prohibited by Hitler's orders. Not unreasonably, the *Führer* had decreed that it was immoral to dance whilst soldiers were dying on the front.

Aided by our potent brew, spirits were high, the dancing energetic and the atmosphere congenial.

After the barn doors had to be closed, it became almost unbearably hot and some of the more adventurous types repaired into the adjoining stables. There in the dim light, wide-eyed Friesian cows played involuntary hosts to amorous couples who leaned against their warm black and white spotted bodies, hugging and kissing, oblivious of the heat of a midsummer night and the unpleasant odours wafting through the air.

The restrained moaning of the lovers mingled with the soft mooing of the bewildered, rightful occupants of that unlikely venue for improvised nocturnal passion. Whilst the bovine creatures indifferently swished their ungroomed tails over the bodies of the leaning couples, the lovers fired by fiery, illicit spirit, indulged in long forsaken pleasures until the light of the approaching dawn brought them back to reality.

Apart from such occasional frivolous diversions, our future still looked dim. The first breakthrough came when it was announced that an initial batch of POWs would be processed for discharge, priority to be given to family men and skilled tradesmen.

Amongst those who nominated was our medical orderly who had conscientiously looked after our physical wellbeing. This chap, an intelligent and well-educated person, had a colourful history. After being taken prisoner in North Africa, he had been transferred to the south of the United States where he spent a year in a POW camp. By a stroke of luck, he was eventually repatriated to Germany under an exchange program for members of the Medical Corps.

Having a common interest in first aid and medical science in general, we spent hours talking about this and that, becoming close friends in the process.

When the man nominated for discharge, the CO would not have it, maintaining that we could not do without a medic. My friend had the answer to the problem: he suggested me as his replacement, giving an exaggerated account of my medical knowledge.

Thus, I found myself unceremoniously put in charge of the treatment room.

Before his departure, my friend introduced me to the staff of the pharmacy at the local German military hospital where he had established good relations with the NCO, who let him have whatever supplies he wanted. As it turned out, I definitely needed the pharmaceutical connection.

The spell in the treatment room gave me a lot of experience and provided many unforseen opportunities. Naturally, the cases I was expected to deal with were only minor injuries, sore throats, headaches and — not to forget — the all important attention to VD prophylaxis. Serious cases would have been referred to the MO at the hospital.

Quite unintentionally, however, I got drawn into the outside world, treating members of the local population.

It all started quite innocently one evening when, whilst sitting in a pub, we were joined at the table by the landlady. Looking at the attractive woman, I noticed she had a terrible rash on one side of her pretty face.

I should point out that following my new appointment, my mates had taken to addressing me as '*Sani*', short for the German word *Sanitäter* — the medic.

When I ventured to refer to her infliction as politely as I could, the landlady told me that she had suffered from it for a long time, but could not get any help from the local GP. Listening to her sad story, it flashed through my mind that we used *Dermatol* powder in treating minor skin conditions. Since this preparation, which is based on *bismuth subgalicum,* was very effective, I thought that it might also do the trick in this case.

The next day, with some audacity, I wrote out a 'prescription' for '*50 grams ung.bis.subgal'*. Much to my surprise, no questions were asked at the pharmacy. Incredibly, the treatment worked and the rash disappeared after a week or so. I had succeeded where others had failed and achieved instant fame.

Soon the landlady introduced me to a woman who had ulcers on her leg. Could I help? Well, in my stores I had several containers with rolls of impregnated bandages, labelled *Brandbinden* (bandages to be applied to burns). I knew that they contained *Prontosil,* a red aniline dye which had been used during the Spanish Civil War with considerable success in treating severe burns. In the days before sulphonamides and antibiotics, the preparation was also applied in the form of intramuscular injections to combat infections and fever.

With these thoughts in my mind, I figured that the bactericidal properties of the substance contained in the bandages might also suppress surface infections and skin ulcers. Amazingly it worked! Thus, by sheer luck (or was it intuition?) I became an unlikely success.

The unforeseen sequel to this was that rumours of that clever '*Sani*' at the sugar factory spread around town. Suddenly, other patients appeared on the horizon. More than once I would return to my quarters finding a lady waiting for advice.

Today, nobody would believe the intimate stories I listened to during that strange interlude. Naturally, I was careful enough to point out that I had not studied medicine and stuck to the treatment of sore throats or conditions that needed nothing more than an aspirin.

Although I did not yet know the word *psychosomatic,* I may have intuitively sensed that many imagined illnesses may have been due to emotional problems. As I learned much later, the secret of professional success in the medical field is often the result of being a good listener. Symptoms often disappear after the patient has a chance to air the problem. I suppose I must have been a good listener!

The dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, brought the end of the conflict in the Pacific theatre and World War II to a final close.

With the end of hostilities, our own discharge into civilian life came closer. However, there were some vital personal problems to be resolved.

There were three Austrians including myself in the company. Not knowing what would happen to us, we had many discussions concerning our status. Repatriation may have been a possibility, however, knowing that part of Austria was under Russian domination, we felt that a return to our homeland could expose us to unpleasant surprises. Not only were the Russians determined to keep hundreds of thousands of German POWs indefinitely, they were also known to deport returning members of the former *Wehrmacht* to Siberia wherever they could lay hands on them.

Whilst we were agonising about what to do, one of the chaps mentioned that he had heard of an 'Austrian Delegation' in the city of Brunswick. Perhaps we could learn something there. By concensus we decided to look up that mysterious body on the next delivery run to the depot.

After stating our business at the reception, we were led into an office in which a big gentleman sat behind the desk. As soon as he noticed our German uniforms he eyed us disapprovingly. I felt we were not in for a good start.

When I began to explain our dilemma, the countenance of the gentleman dropped. I had made a dreadful mistake: I introduced ourselves with the announcement that we *had been* Austrians!

Strictly speaking, this was technically correct because the 1938 legislation had made us German citizens. Not knowing of any post-war developments that may have repealed the *Anschlussgesetz* and the legal consequences of such revocation, I did not think that I could have said 'we are Austrians'. After all, we were still carrying German papers and wore German uniforms.

'You *have been* Austrians!' exclaimed the man indignantly.

'You *have been* Austrians!' he repeated, looking at us with an expression of horror and disgust.

I suppose we were saved by the bell, the bell of the telephone, that is. The visibly offended gentleman answered the call and became involved in a lengthy conversation.

We were relieved when another man, who had been addressed by staff members as '*Herr Ingenieur*', came to the rescue. He took us into a quiet corner and, after having listened to our story, talked to us with great understanding and compassion.

However, the information we received disturbed us considerably. In essence, we were told that in accordance with the agreements reached at the Yalta Conference, Austria was considered to be a liberated country and would now revert to her former independent status. The four-power occupation was expected to come to an end after ten months and Austria would again be a free state with a democratically elected government.

Herr Ingenieur pointed out that it was imperative to have a military force available to take control of law and order after the departure of the Allied Forces. Accordingly, it had been decided to remove all POWs of Austrian extraction from Allied custody. They would be congregated in special camps and trained in order to form the nucleus of the *Bundesheer*, ready to march into Austria as soon as the occupation forces left.

To this day I am not sure whether we were informed of the official policy conceived at that time or whether the spokesman had expressed nothing else but the wishful thinking of a group of Austrians in exile.

It should be obvious that we were not enthused by the revelations. Having served four or more years in a futile war, none of us was keen to continue life in uniform for an indefinite period, not even in the country of our birth.

Considering our options, we decided on an individual course of action. Assuming that we could find shelter somewhere in Germany, we would adopt a wait-and-see attitude and return to Austria only when the situation was safe. If *Herr Ingenieur* was correct, that should not take too long.

Alas, because of emerging disagreements between the Allies, it took not ten *months* but ten *years* before the occupation forces were ready to leave the country and a *Staatsvertrag,* the treaty that restored the full independence of the nation, was only signed in 1955.

As for myself, I had made contact with Walter, the flight engineer who had survived the crash at Kamenz. Because of his injuries, Walter had been discharged after he left hospital and now lived with his family in his home town of Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein. With great understanding, my friend offered shelter, suggesting that for the purpose of discharge documentation I should name him as an 'uncle'.

As anticipated, our incongruously carefree existence as specially privileged POWs at large came to a sudden but not unwelcome ending. One day we received orders to relocate, this time into a small town near Hildesheim. Being in the advance party, I was appointed *Quartiermacher.*

For the purpose of selecting suitable accommodation, the Mayor handed me a list of residences that could take in one or more of our personnel. Making our rounds, we eventually arrived at a dwelling near the school house. When I rang the bell, the door was answered by a tall gentleman who looked at me in amazement.

'*Unteroffizier* Körbl!' he exclaimed.

Totally perplexed, I realised that I faced *Hauptmann* Eicke, my former *Staffelkapitän* of IV/KG 53 of our days at Orléans! I think he had some difficulty in understanding the situation. After explaining our mission and stating that I was the Billeting Officer, he agreed to take two men for temporary abode. He also invited me to call in one evening for a drink.

I responded to the invitation the following week. With the help of several bottles of wine and spirits plus the company of a young lady teacher, we spent a memorable night reminiscing and exchanging experiences.

Listening to the stories of *Hauptmann* Eicke's exploits, I was fascinated to learn that he had eventually become weary of his uneventful existence in the IV Group and volunteered for a posting to a night-fighter unit. In the course of his new duties, he distinguished himself by flying the latest models of German engineering, the jet-powered He 219 and Me 262.

After the exciting activities of the previous month, life was now rather boring. Eventually, we received marching orders, said farewell to our hosts and moved to the village of Immendorf near Wolfenbüttel where we camped rather primitively at a farm.

When the day of discharge arrived, we had to assemble in a large hall of an industrial complex where the formalities took place. As a preliminary, we were examined by a non-committal ex-army doctor who pronounced practically everybody 'fit to work'.

We were then guided along a row of tables behind which clerks checked our pay books against the names listed in black-covered files. It was a chilling experience, as we realised that they were looking for members of the *Waffen SS* and personnel of units suspected of war crimes.

It should be understood that members of the SS could be easily identified by the blood group tattoo under the left arm.

The idea of indicating the blood group of a soldier that way had actually been pioneered by the SS as a life-saving device, thought to eliminate the need for cross-matching before a blood transfusion. However, for obviously political reasons, the *Wehrmacht* had opposed the idea in respect of its own troops and as a result, members of the *Waffen SS* were thus branded for life.

Having passed the identification parade unscathed, we moved to a row of interrogation booths.

Whilst I was agonising as to how I would get through the interview, I saw one of my Austrian mates walking away smiling — a free man. Turning around, he waved with a gesture of farewell.

My friend Bertl was not so lucky. I could hear a loud argument going on in the adjoining cubicle. Suddenly, two MPs appeared and frogmarched Bertl to a long bench near the wall. There he joined a few dejected figures who were already under guard. Bertl threw up his hands in a defeated gesture.

My heart sank.

The interviewing sergeant checked my paybook and fired a number of questions at me.

'Are you a Party member? Have you been in the Hitler Youth? Are you an SS man? Where are you going to settle? Why?' he asked.

I answered the questions truthfully except for that phony business with my 'uncle'. Incredibly, my interrogator did not seem to recognise my native background and passed me on to the next stage of the discharge procedures.

Captain G. Ruddick 25 DCU (No II DCC) signed my discharge certificate without even looking at me. The date shown is 20 November 1945, five days before my twenty-third birthday.

In yet another symbolic gesture I had to surrender my military cap and then I was free. It was an unreal sensation and I felt that I had to get away from the scene as quickly as possible. Asking for directions, I found my way to the railway station where I boarded the next available train to Hamburg.

Many years later, whilst walking through the centre of Vienna, I accidentally bumped into Bertl. He told me his interrogator had queried the discharge address which he foolishly had given as 'Austrian Delegation, Brunswick'. Not having prepared his gambit thoroughly enough, Bertl quickly got himself into a muddle. Realising that he was dealing with an Austrian subject, the sergeant had him arrested on the spot.

Sadly, my friend spent two long, lonely and bitter years in an internment camp somewhere in West Germany. The Cold War was then already in full swing and disagreements amongst the Allied Powers concerning the final liberation of Austria prevented an earlier return. He was eventually repatriated, having lost another two years of his life because of a single mistake.

Looking at my tattered discharge certificate which for almost two years I had to carry in my pocket as means of identification, I find that it makes interesting reading. Apart from personal particulars, it incorporates a medical certificate that reads:

'No distinguishing marks, no disability, able to work'.

There are also a few more telling annotations made by the authorities at Kiel, certifying employment and housing offices registration, the issue of ration cards, clothing card, coupons for entitlements of soap, cigarettes, shaving soap and firewood. Facets that provide proof of the many incredible administrative restrictions that we had to endure under foreign military occupation.

It never occurred to me then that twenty-five years later, I would participate in another war on the other side of the globe and eventually obtain another discharge certificate, only this time under different and honourable circumstances.

But that's another story!

Chapter Nine

Working for the Tommy

The night air was cold and crisp. In the four corners of the open wagon nestled the shapes of human beings wrapped in blankets and greatcoats, uncomfortably huddled together in an effort to keep warm. Darkness surrounded the scene and only now and then could one catch a glimpse of the stars through the fast moving clouds.

Nobody talked. There was no point in trying to converse, the monotonous clatter of the wheels and the whistling of the wind would have drowned our voices. Sometimes a match would light up, the glimmer of a burning cigarette penetrating the darkness. The miserable looking passengers resting against the slopes of a heap of black coal were a mottled bunch, the human flotsam of a Europe devastated by six years of war.

There were no regular passenger train services in the months following the German surrender. Only goods trains were rolling to the big cities, particularly those carrying badly needed coal supplies. Station masters often closed their eyes when soldiers returning home, refugees from the east, displaced persons and foreign workers lost in the turmoil, would climb onto the trains in a desperate effort to get to their destinations.

Whilst waiting on the platform at Hamburg, I spotted a coal train and lost no time in climbing aboard. That journey concluded four years of my peregrinations across the continent. I had no plans for further travel at this stage.

We reached Kiel in the early hours of the morning. Standing on the big square in front of the *Hauptbahnhof*, I looked around. On my right was the waterfront with its profusion of small boats and the twisted steel of bombed vessels, on the other side a vista of incredible destruction. The empty facades of former stately buildings stood ghostly against the skies and only the tower of the town hall rose high against the bleak November sky.

Incredibly, smoke rose from the heaps of bricks and rubble, indicating that amid all that chaos people were still living, hidden in cellars and dugout caves.

The reunion with Walter and meeting his family was an emotional event. I was welcomed and assured that I could stay with them as long as I wished.

As far as I was concerned, I had no idea what I could do to earn a living. I had not completed the last two years of high school, I had no apprenticeship and all the experience I could offer was in the administrative field.

I'd thought that I had finished with the military for good, however, such was not to be. When I fronted up at the employment office and presented the certificate which stated that I had worked for the British Army in a salvage operation, the officer asked me whether I spoke English. When I confirmed that I had studied the language at school, he said:

'I'll send you to the *Tommy*!'

As directed, I reported to the Sergeant Major of No 63 Anti-tank Regiment stationed at the airfield of Holtenau. I was not quite sure what that meant when he asked whether I could do 'general work', but I had visions of a warm kitchen and an abundance of food.

'Yes, Sir!' I replied without hesitation. Here was an opportunity not to be missed. Whatever the job entailed, I would come to terms with the situation when I faced it.

Reporting for work the next morning, I was met by a grinning corporal in his late twenties who handed me a bucket, mop and toilet brush.

'Follow me' he said.

I should have guessed. No kitchen, no mess halls and no food. Toilets, wash basins and showers instead. The ablutions! Three floors of them!

My new boss got straight into the cleaning job and, swallowing my pride, I followed his instructions.

At 10 am we took a break, settling in the cleaner's room on the ground floor. The corporal dashed off to the canteen and came back with two mugs of steaming tea, two slices of white bread and a chunk of cheese. I thought it was Christmas.

Munching the sandwich and sipping our tea, we managed to converse in spite of my limited knowledge of English.

My supervisor seemed to be a friendly man, telling me that he harboured no grudges and hoped for a discharge into civilian life as soon as possible. I learned that he was married and that he had worked on a farm before being called up for military service.

During the midday break I was on my own. Sadly, it was not much of a lunch that we could afford in those days. In fact, it consisted of two slices of dark brown bread on which Hansi, Walter's wife, had spread a mixture of fried onions and boiled semolina. It was not very appetising, but it was a popular way of stretching the meagre margarine ration.

One day, the corporal happened to join me during the lunch break for a smoke and a talk. Noticing the strange looking sandwiches, he asked:

'What's that?'

When I explained, he shook his head in disbelief. I think I even noticed a tear in his eye. Without a word, he hurried off and returned ten minutes later. From under his bulging battle dress jacket he produced a covered plate which he handed to me.

'Here,' he said. 'have some proper food.'

I could not believe my eyes. Roast lamb, potatoes, pumpkin, peas and a slice of bread.

Realising the risk the man had taken, I was overwhelmed. As we all knew, supplying food to locals was a serious disciplinary offence that could have led the man into deep trouble. There were even units which doused leftover food with petrol to make it inedible to scavenging civilians.

In that moment I had cause to reflect that there was still human kindness around in spite of the hatred incited during the war and a still hostile propaganda that talked about 'collective guilt'.

I had no means of repaying my benefactor, but I vowed that should I ever encounter a reversed situation, I would do the same without considering the consequences. I never forgot my vow, but it took me more than two decades before I had a chance to redeem it. In order to tell the tale, I have to jump over twenty-five years of history.

As it happened, it was 1970 and I found myself serving with a helicopter squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force in Vietnam. The situation in that country was as dismal and as confused as one would find in any war-torn area. Just as in 1945 in Germany, the local people did not have much food nor any of the other necessities of life.

There was, however, a vital difference — now it was me who had all the advantages.

Although the handing out of 'unauthorised' goods to the local civilians constituted a disciplinary offence, I resolved to be kind to the local women who worked for us in the barracks and to assist them in an inconspicuous way. This I managed to do for several months without any problems until someone 'dobbed' me in.

One afternoon, the flight lieutenant in charge of the service police called me into his office and asked me whether it was true that I had given goods to the girls working in our block. I answered in the affirmative.

'Do you know that this is forbidden?' he asked.

I paused for a moment before replying.

'Look John' I said, 'let me tell you a story!'

When I finished recounting my experience with the English corporal in that bitter and hungry winter of 1945, I could see that John was deep in thought and that his face had taken on a serious expression. Eventually, he sighed and said:

'Please, don't do it again Frank!'

But back to my time with the *Tommy*. With the so-called Denazification process in full swing, working for the occupation forces required a security clearance. Being interviewed by a sergeant of the Field Security Service, I was asked how I came to live in Kiel.

'I am staying with my uncle!' I said.

'What did you do during the war?' he asked.

'I was aircrew — a wireless operator.'

'Been over England?' he asked threateningly. 'Thrown bombs at us?'

'No!' I answered truthfully. 'When I finished my training the Battle of Britain was already over.'

Then came the vital question: 'Are you a Nazi?'

'I thought I was' I replied. 'I have now changed my mind!'

'I see. But your uncle — he is a Nazi?'

'My uncle is unemployed' I said.

I suppose the facetious undertone in my reply was not lost to the sergeant and no further questions were asked.

In the earlier part of 1946, No 63 Anti-tank Regiment was replaced by the 1st Battalion of the Grenadier Guards, the very unit that we had seen camped alongside the road to Berlin when I was working with the Regiment Paulsen. As I learned from the soldiers, their term of duty in Berlin must have provided many amazing experiences, both from the human angle and also in view of the emerging confrontation between East and West.

Under new management, I was removed from my cleaning job and appointed gardener in charge of the sports grounds. I was coming up in the world.

In my spare time I concentrated on intense English studies. In fact, I attended two courses simultaneously, one at the local grammar school and one offered by a private language school. Soon my proficiency improved considerably and eventually landed me a clerical job with the Royal Navy on their headquarter ship, the renamed HMS *Dar-es-Salaam.*

The former German passenger vessel had been bombed whilst in port but, except for a partly missing stern that had been closed up with welded steel plates, all other facilities were intact. The ship was thus ideally suited to be used as the Headquarters of the Senior Naval Officer Schleswig Holstein, in Navy parlance known as SNOSH.

Working on board ship was indeed a pleasant change from the drudgery of the previous months. My job was with the civilian employment office of the Royal Navy, inappropriately referred to as the 'PCLU', an acronym adopted from the *Pioneer and Civilian Labour Unit* of the Army which attended to civilian staff requirements of the British forces in general.

Our office, under the direction of Lieutenant Baker, a voluntary reserve officer, controlled over a thousand German civilians working for the Royal Navy. That figure did not include the Small Boats Pool, nor were we concerned with the German Mine Sweeping Administration (GMSA). The latter two units were in effect German Navy branches with all its officers and sailors, although technically prisoners of war, left intact and allowed to wear their uniforms.

The arrangement is yet another incongruous example of POWs employed in their former military capacity. However, it was a matter of practicality. Small boats were needed for communication purposes and mines had to be cleared, formidable tasks that would have strained British resources beyond their capacity. Using the former enemy for these objectives was the obvious alternative.

I once read that the Brits actually used Japanese POWs to maintain law and order in parts of Indochina after the surrender and before the French resumed control. Such is life!

Curiously, the personnel of the German Mine Sweeping Administration wore shoulder flashes on their Marine uniforms, with the letters GMSA embroidered in yellow. The population was quick to interpret the initials as standing for *'Geh Mit Such Adolf!*', which in English means:

Come With Us — Let's Look for Adolf!

Well, not everybody believed that the *Führer* was dead.

Lieutenant Baker was an incredibly correct gentleman in all respects, extremely polite but very strict. He often tasked me with attending to his private correspondence and also to the minutes of the Wardroom committee of which he was the secretary. Being a stickler for format he would send back any typed page that did not conform to his expectations, marking in pencil the desired layout. Needless to say, I learned fast.

A memorable event during my six months with SNOSH was the Admiral's inspection. The visit to the ship was preceded by two weeks of hectic activity — touching up paint, attention to minor maintenance needs, cleaning, cleaning and more cleaning.

Concerning the inspection routine, our supervisor *Herr Ulrich*, a former German Marine two-ringer himself, advised us that the Lieutenant had decreed that, in the event of the Admiral entering the office, we were to get up and stand to attention, but we were not to turn around to face him.

My collegues were perplexed, but I knew already from my time with the Grenadier Guards that, contrary to German practice, troops did not turn at the command 'Officer on Parade!'

The day before the visit, a sailor with whom I was friendly, asked:

'Have you ever heard of Captain Hook? Well, as you probably know, that legendary captain had an iron hook to replace his lost arm. Now, this Admiral is like him, however, his hook is made of fucking 18 carat gold!'

Making a telling gesture with his fist, he then added:

'You ought to be careful ... if he doesn't like you he might clobber you over the head with his hook!'

Thus suitably briefed, we were full of anticipation.

The next morning about 10 am, we heard a commotion in the corridor outside the office. The door was forcibly opened, the Admiral and his retinue entered and we jumped to attention.

A junior officer, wearing the aiguillette of an ADC announced stiffly:

'Lieutenant Baker's PCLU, Sir.'

'*Who*?' queried the Admiral.

A senior officer came to the rescue: 'It is the civilian labour office, Sir.'

'They are all Germans?' asked the Admiral in a disapproving tone.

'Aye, aye, Sir.'

The Admiral uttered a grunt, swivelled about and left the office without further comment.

As he departed, I turned my head to get a glimpse of the legendary officer. The hook on his right arm was indeed of shining gold, intricately chiselled in the Damascene style.

Having resumed our seats we could not concentrate for some time. Nobody spoke a word. Judging by the look on their faces, it seemed my ex-German Navy colleagues mentally compared notes.

During the later part of the year, we were advised that SNOSH was about to curtail the local activities. Lieutenant Baker, the ever conscious and correct officer, was much concerned about securing positions for the members of his staff before his own office would close down.

The first one for whom he found a job was a former submariner, who was transferred to a clerical position of the PCLU in town.

I was lucky enough to be the next. One morning I was called into the Lieutenant's office.

'Do you know what the NAAFI is?' Lieutenant Baker asked.

'Well' I replied, 'they run the canteen.'

'That's right' the Lieutenant said. 'But they also have a large Families Shop at Kronshagen which caters for married military personnel. I have been told that they need a chief clerk — I have recommended you for the position — I think you could handle it. Go and see Captain Knight at the PCLU in town!'

Much to my amazement, I passed the interview and got the job.

Fortunately for me, the manager Mr Sims, a Scot from Glasgow, was a reasonable man. Very sensibly, he did not throw me into the deep end, but introduced me to my duties step by step.

In the following thirteen months I learned more about store management and personnel administration than I could have acquired in four years of apprenticeship. I also improved my English vocabulary considerably by adding to it the names of a thousand grocery items, wines and spirits, haberdashery, cosmetics and chemist lines.

I had meanwhile married Ingeborg, a refugee from the former East-German province of Pomerania that had now come under Polish control. Our son Harry arrived at Easter, 22 March.

A year or so later, when postal communications were restored, I learned from my relatives that the initially turbulent situation in the Russian-occupied sector of Austria had now much improved. In their opinion, there was no longer any danger of haphazard deportation and they all pleaded with me to return home.

Once again, it was a move into an uncertain future, but luck was again on my side. Thanks to the references I had been given in Kiel, I immediately found employment at the NAAFI Families Shop and Store at Schönbrunn Barracks in the British occupied part of Vienna, albeit as a humble storeman. Luckily, I did not have to work long in that capacity. About six months later, the English chief clerk married a corporal and left for home, leaving the vacancy for my succesion.

Vienna in the days of the Cold War was a convenient meeting point for East and West and the scene for many clandestine operations. Perhaps, it was for that reason, in contrast to Berlin, transport and communications in the city were kept open by tacit agreement with the Russians.

A peculiarity of the occupation in Vienna was the arrangement that the inner city — that is the historical First District with all its famous buildings — was administered by each one of the four Allied powers on a rotating basis. One month, the Russians would hand over control to the Americans, the next month the Americans to the British, then the British to the French, the French back to the Russians and so on. That unique routine remained in place until the end of the occupation in 1955.

The handover parades were always preceded by full dress rehearsals in the barracks of the powers concerned. Since Schönbrunn Barracks was the venue for the preparation for the American/British and the British/French parades, we had many opportunities to watch the colourful proceedings and ponder about the fascinating differences in drill procedures.

Not to forget, there were the legendary 'Four-in-a-Jeep', immortalised in the film version of Graham Greene's *The Third Man*. That unique vehicle, manned by a quartet of Russian, American, English and French NCOs, patrolled the city of Vienna in a gesture of international cooperation towards law and order. There is even anecdotal evidence that the men on the jeep overcame language difficulties by conversing in the Viennese vernacular picked up in the course of their duties and presumingly also by way of the inevitable and always very effective 'female grammar'.

During the day, the jeep would call at various Allied barracks for meals. At Schönbrunn, they always arrived in time for morning and afternoon tea. On such an occasion someone souvenired the radiator emblem of the jeep that consisted of a miniature assembly of the four Allied flags. The theft nearly sparked off an international incident and everyone was thoroughly searched before being allowed to leave the barracks. I don't think the valuable historical emblem was ever recovered. I wonder in which attic it is buried today.

The spectacle of the handover parade rehearsals with the Americans and the French was outdone by the festivities staged on the main square of the barracks to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II in June of 1953.

At that time, the battalion stationed in Vienna was drawn from the Cameron Highlanders. The pageant, held at Schönbrunn, included a parade, a demonstration of Scottish dancing and a performance by the massed bands. It was an Affair of State — the government, the diplomatic corps and the commanders of the Allied Forces all being in attendance.

Work with NAAFI was certainly exhausting, since we not only catered for the needs of Service personnel and 'accredited' local businessmen, but also supplied a number of British embassies in the Balkan region. Fortunately, there were compensations. Whilst local employees had no access to the many attractive goods that we stocked, a notable exception was made during the Festive Season.

Our relationships with the multitude of customers coming from all walks of life were generally very amicable. In particular, the members of the local British business community were most friendly and helpful. Austrians had the political advantage of being considered as early 'victims' of the Nazis and, in contrast to the Germans, were not treated as former enemies.

As was the custom, a Christmas-box for staff gratuities was put on the cashier's desk at the beginning of Advent. Our customers were always generous, freely putting coins and BAFSV (*British Armed Forces Special Voucher*, the official military currency) into the box in recognition of the services received during the year. On Christmas Eve, the donated funds were then distributed in equal shares to allow us to buy some of those fabulous items which we normally could only admire on the shelves.

Whilst the Russians and the Western Allies were still at odds about the continuation of the occupation, the Austrian government forced the issue by a surprise visit of Chancellor Dr Figl to Moscow. Some compromise in the hitherto inflexible confrontation between East and West was achieved and the so-called *Staatsvertrag* — the State Treaty ending the occupation — was signed on 15 May 1955.

Thanks to the recommendation of one of the resident English businessmen I was lucky enough to find employment with an automotive firm that imported Jaguar and Standard Motor cars. Apart from office management, my duties included the translation of English operation manuals and technical service instructions into German. It was a valuable experience.

Strangely, I became progressively unhappy. My marriage had broken up in the interim and eventually I decided to migrate to Australia under the Assisted Passage Scheme.

I have often been asked what made me leave Austria and embark on an uncertain future on distant shores. There is no ready answer. I suppose the main reason was a nagging doubt about the future of Europe clouded by the escalating Cold War and a disenchantment with the new 'politically correct' philosophy that seemed to fail in coming to terms with the unfortunate legacy of the Hitler years.

Furthermore, working in an Anglo-Saxon environment had led to a sudden bewilderment with the authoritative German-style workplace discipline and its hierarchical management structure which I had almost forgotten. That rigid system, indifferent to human feelings, no longer appealed to me.

As my friends would cynically observe, during the long years working with the *Tommy* I had perhaps unwittingly become anglicised.

Chapter Ten

A New Life Down Under

In those days, the voyage from Genoa to Melbourne aboard the M/N *Flaminia* took four weeks. Lacking modern facilities and because of the crowded conditions on the former troop transporter, the trip was neither comfortable nor enjoyable.

There were plenty of shipboard activities to counteract boredom. These included English classes and 'assimilation' lectures conducted by a few selected passengers under the guidance of Miss Graveur, an officer from the Department of Immigration. I was one of those instant instructors, being briefed every evening about what to teach the next day. We even were paid for our services!

We reached the Port of Melbourne on 17 June 1956. The sky was blue, the sun was shining and the skyline of the city looked impressive and inviting. To our dismay, we were not allowed to venture into town. As soon as we had been cleared by Customs and Health we were put on a special train that took us straight to the Commonwealth Immigration Centre at Bonegilla in the wilderness of Northern Victoria. The huge camp which had originally been constructed in 1939 for army training, was now the main reception centre for Australia's ambitious postwar immigration program.

Having been issued with the Alien Pass, we were told that after five years residence we could apply for naturalisation. In the meantime, we were simply 'New Australians'.

Because of my background, I was immediately approached to work in the supply section as a ledger-keeper and costing clerk. As it was put to me, working a couple of years in the camp had great economic advantages. If I remember correctly, staff members paid only three guineas per week for full board.

Ironically, although the camp was administered by a civil department, there was a distinct military flavour. The director was a retired colonel, my supply officer a former army captain and the camp was run along regimental lines. The Administration Officer even told me that his job was to 'maintain discipline'.

After two years of learning how to become an Australian, I thought I had been conditioned sufficiently to try my luck in the real world and decided to move to Melbourne. Captain Norman Duncan kindly gave me an introduction to one of the partners of the stockbroking firm of J.B. Were & Son, with whom he had served in the army.

In spite of possible reservations about employing a foreigner, I was accepted. There, under the guidance of Mr Lake, who incidentally flew in air operations over Germany during World War II, I was quickly introduced into the mysteries of stock exchange procedures and the intricacies of financial investment. Once again, I learned a lot in an entirely new field, most of which came in handy at a later stage.

Unexpectedly and without any prior design on my part, two events occurred at the beginning of 1965 that had unforeseeable consequences for me. The first providential and crucial event happened when I met Stella, my future wife. The second far-reaching decision was triggered by a newspaper advertisement that accidentally caught my eye.

It happened at a time when I was not entirely happy in my job. Although I enjoyed the interesting work in the financial and economic sector, received adequate remuneration, and was well thought of within the firm, I had some latent doubts about the culture that surrounded the investment scene.

It was in that state of personal dissatisfaction that I saw an ad in the Melbourne *Herald*. I don't remember the exact wording, but it said something to the effect that there was a rare opportunity to join the Royal Australian Air Force (Administrative Branch) as a Commissioned Officer.

Reading the blurb, which outlined in glowing terms the mission of the Branch and the opportunity of extended overseas travel, I was induced to engage in some weird daydreaming, picturing myself wearing a glamorous uniform and acting in an imaginary military scenario.

Although I was conscious that seeking a commission in the RAAF may be a preposterous idea for a foreigner who had served in the *Luftwaffe*, the seeds of the idea had been planted in my mind and, with the moral support of Stella, my son Harry and many of my friends, I eventually submitted an application, just for the heck of it.

Much to my surprise, I received a positive reply, inviting me to see the Recruiting Officer. The gentleman discussed the proposal in a congenial manner, explaining that my business experience would qualify me as 'Direct Entrant', but that in my particular case there were other details to consider, like foreign background and security implications.

He then outlined the conditions of service, promotion prospects and pointed out that because of my age and the retiring threshold of 55, I may not be able to accumulate the minimum fifteen years of service necessary to qualify for a pension. But, conditions could change in the long run and I still might have a chance. It basically meant that I had to take a calculated risk.

A few weeks later, after having gone through the exhausting rigmarole of aptitude testing, psychological evaluation and a medical examination, I appeared before the selection board. Dressed in a new business suit and clutching a leather portfolio containing my personal papers I perched nervously on a stool in front of a large table behind which sat a group captain, flanked by two wing commanders and an enigmatic civilian.

It was an overwhelming situation and I experienced a sudden feeling of inferiority. It seemed to me that I had shrunk into a diminutive figure, waiting to be closely scrutinised, evaluated, classified and probably in the end found to be unsuitable. 'What have I let myself in for?' I thought, as panic constricted my heart.

The chairman was very polite and made me less apprehensive as soon as he began to speak. He introduced himself, Group Captain Greenaway, and then the two wing commanders, one from Administrative Branch, the other from Equipment Branch. The civilian revealed himself as the RAAF psychologist.

I was informed that they had studied my application and the test results. They thought I had potential. Had I considered the conditions of service and my promotion prospects? Was I aware of the limited time I had until retirement? What was my experience in the *Luftwaffe*? What was my attitude towards discipline?

I replied that I thought discipline was the very foundation of any military organisation.

'That's true!' remarked the Wing Commander Admin. 'However, in our situation you will have to be careful. Australian soldiers do not blindly follow orders as the Germans might. We do of course rely on discipline, but it is a different kind to that which you would have experienced!'

The gentleman from the Equipment branch then began to interview me. I immediately realised that he had studied my NAAFI background, because he questioned me intensively on warehousing, stock control, invoicing, and write-off procedures. At each of my answers he nodded with a satisfied expression and took notes.

The RAAF psychologist was next. Leafing through the evaluation test papers he asked why I was studying accountancy.

Somewhat perplexed, I explained that I was working with a stockbroker as investment analyst. Accountancy was the nearest relevant subject that I could have chosen to obtain a tertiary qualification.

'You should never have attempted it,' said the headshrinker. 'The test results clearly show that you have absolutely no aptitude for figures.'

I was then asked whether I was aware of the fact that Equipment Branch was also looking for applicants. Why did I want to become an Administration 0fficer in the first place?

I said I liked to work with people.

'Do you mean to say that you prefer humans to nuts and bolts?' asked the Wing Commander Admin.

'You could put it that way, Sir.'

'Well' he said, 'having looked at your background, we think that you would be of greater value to Equipment than to Admin. Mind you, most Equipment officers control a large staff right from the beginning. You would have enough opportunities to concern yourself with human problems. We would suggest that you should consider changing your application!'

The chairman then asked me to take a seat outside the conference room. He reappeared after a seemingly long interval, informing me that the board had been impressed with my qualifications and my performance during the interview. I would be recommended for a commission, but they would prefer that I opted for the Equipment branch.

'One more point,' he continued. 'You will have to be security cleared. For Australian-born subjects that takes about two weeks. In your case it might take longer, as you would understand. Thanks for coming, please send us a note if you wish to change your application and you will hear from us in due course!'

Early in May I received a letter advising me that the RAAF was offering me a four-year short-term commission with the rank of Pilot Officer. If I accepted, I would have to be ready to join the next officer's training course at RAAF Point Cook.

When I announced my resignation from J.B.Were & Son, Mr Staniforth Ricketson, the Senior Partner, called me into his office. He wished me well in my new career emphasising how proud the firm felt that one of their members was now to be an officer in the RAAF. Having been a decorated officer in the AIF during World War I himself, he then took the opportunity to give me a fatherly talk about what the Australian soldier expects from his officers.

On 25 June, the time had come to front up at the recruiting office in St. Kilda Road to sign the necessary papers. Don Gauntlet, a former British Army officer, gave me a lift to Point Cook. When Don announced our names to the sentry at the gate in the assured manner of the professional officer, the guard stood to attention and saluted.

For me it was a very strange sensation.

No 51 Officers' Training Course comprised twenty people of varied and interesting backgrounds. As a hitherto unheard of novelty, it also included five female officers. Because several trainees came from various overseas countries like the UK, Rhodesia and Austria (including one from Tasmania) we were soon dubbed 'The Foreign Legion'.

The CO of OTS at the time was Wing Commander Guthrie, his assistant Squadron Leader Sandercock, MBE, a veteran of the Antarctic Flight, and our Chief Instructor Flight Lieutenant Ted Ilton.

Once we had been kitted, we had to assemble in a lecture room to introduce ourselves. Our speeches were taped with the intention of playing the recordings back to us at the end of the course to demonstrate how much we had learned in the way of public speaking.

Being called forth in alphabetical order, a flight lieutenant with the name of Bill Kendall, was in front of me. His presentation was faultless. Speaking with a clipped voice, he told the audience that he had been a Squadron Leader in the RAF, and flown many missions over Berlin in bomber aircraft as a wireless operator. In recognition of his wartime service he had been decorated with the DFC. He also mentioned that in his younger days he had been an amateur boxer — *Never had a glove laid on me* — and that his hobby was breeding English bull terriers.

Listening to all that, I felt it was a hard act to follow. Somewhat meekly I took the mike and said:

> *I am Frank Korbl. I was born in Vienna, Austria and educated in that country. For several years I worked for a stockbroker in Melbourne and I am studying accountancy. During the war I flew with the German Luftwaffe.*

It brought down the house.

I would like to stress at this point that I had no problems in being accepted. Within the quickly emerging camaraderie I became just another one of the group. Much to my relief, nobody made any nasty remarks about my 'Nazi' past. I think that my presence was rather an interesting talking point.

The course syllabus was tough, an immense spectrum of items to be crammed into a mere three months. There were the subjects of military organisation, drill, and weapon training. Introductory lectures were given in psychology, management, disciplinary procedure, Air Force law, administration, and casualty procedure. This was followed by extensive lectures on English usage, logical argument, public speaking, service writing, current affairs, moral leadership and, last but not least, Squadron Leader Sandercock's unique sessions on customs of the service.

Alas, concerning the traditions we were to uphold, Stradling's booklet about *Customs of the Service* was even then already somewhat out of date. As I found out later, many of the intricacies of traditional social life and protocol had been watered down over the years or completely disappeared. The Administration Officer at East Sale had a good laugh when I asked him about the 'calling procedure' that we had learned at Point Cook.

And then there was the dining-in ritual in the Mess. I must confess that I look back to those occasions with sentimental feelings. Yes, we were proud to be members of the officer corps, dedicated to a cause and the Sovereign whose emblem we wore on our cap.

Because of the frequent written assignments, the syndicate work which involved much research and many hours of evening study, we were kept busy all the time. In spite of all that we still had a lot of fun. The practical jokers amongst us saw to that.

We also had several educational outings, the most memorable being a visit to the Supreme Court of Victoria where we watched a murder trial. This was all part of the 'Law' phase where we had to study the rules of evidence in preparation for our duties as 'Subordinate Commanders', when we would have to hear disciplinary charges and 'dispense justice' in accordance with the the Manual of Air Force Law.

At the social functions we were closely observed in order to ascertain whether we had acquired the social graces expected from an officer and his partner.

The first counselling took place about halfway through the course.

During the interview, our chief instructor told me that my progress was satisfactory, but that because of my age the chance of being promoted beyond the rank of squadron leader was slim. 'We can't all become air commodores', he said.

Squadron Leader Sandercock's interview was motivated by different considerations. After commending me on my progress, he said:

'There is something I have to tell you. I hope, you don't mind. It concerns the dinner-dance last week.'

I sat up. Here it comes, I thought. He is going to tell me that jitterbugging with Carol on the dance floor was not officer-like behaviour. Wrong!

'I noticed that you were wearing a brown silk suit.' he said, 'You see, officers don't wear brown suits. I suggest that next time you wear a grey or perhaps a navy suit. And another thing: try to acquire an Australian accent.'

'Yes, Sir! Thank you Sir!'

When I returned to the class room, my mates called out: 'What did he tell you?'

My report caused great hilarity as did those of the others. It seemed that I was not the only one who had been given strange advice. One of our girls was told that she needed more lipstick!

The much discussed highlight of the course was the tactical exercise in the nearby You Yangs mountain range. Being August, it was bitterly cold and the night in a tent was less than comfortable. Apart from that, the girls had decided to disturb our sleep and attack us with thunder flashes.

As soon as we arrived on location, the ground defence instructor designated me as one of the platoon leaders. I was briefed on the situation and given the compass bearing that would get my group to the destination indicated on the map.

Having been through all that twenty years ago in decidedly more dangerous situations, I was alert enough to spot the ambush party on top of the hill, gleefully awaiting our arrival. I immediately deviated from the given compass bearing and, leading my group into the cover of the dense bush, succeeded in surrounding the ambush party. Greatly embarrassed, they had no choice but to throw down their weapons and surrender.

It was a great joke at the debriefing session. That evening in the Mess a senior officer called out laughingly, 'What's this I hear, Frank? You ambushed the ambush party?'

Well, I had to stand my ground. After all the reputation of the *Luftwaffe* was at stake!

The crowning event was the graduation parade and the social function afterwards in the Mess to which I had invited Stella.

Bill Kendall, who with the rank of flight lieutenant was the senior member, acted as parade commander. All went well, but I was surprised when Bill and I were called aside and asked to pose for photos. I was taken aback when Ted Ilton informed us that with the value of public relations in mind, he had issued a press release to the effect that two former enemies would serve in the RAAF.

I was mobbed the next morning, my colleagues waving a copy of *The Age* that featured a photo of Bill and myself on the front page, holding a ceremonial sword in our hands. The caption read:

> Now they will fly together! During the Second World War these two men fought for opposite sides. Yesterday they graduated together at Point Cook as officers of the RAAF.

Making the frontpage of the *Age*. The author and FLTLT Bill Kendall DFC at the graduation parade, OTS RAAF Point Cook 16 Dec 1965.

Disturbed by the fact that the item also incorrectly stated that I had participated in air operations over the UK, I pointed out that this was not true. I was told not to worry.

'That's what the media want to print, it's more exciting!' they said.

Whilst family and friends were thrilled, the exaggerated publicity that I had to endure in later years was not always to my liking.

The next step in the initial training was No 21 Equipment Officers Course, which was conducted at No 1 Stores Depot, RAAF Tottenham with Wing Commander Bellamie as Chief Instructor (CI).

On the day of our arrival the Senior Equipment Staff Officer (SESO), Air Commodore William Mason, nicknamed *Ming the Merciless*, was expected to join us for morning tea. Just as we were about to assemble, I was called into the foyer to answer the telephone, a media representative wanting more information re the photo in *The Age*.

When I returned to the anteroom, I was presented to the Air Commodore who had already met the other new officers. 'And what did you do outside?' he asked.

'I was answering a phone call, Sir!' I replied truthfully.

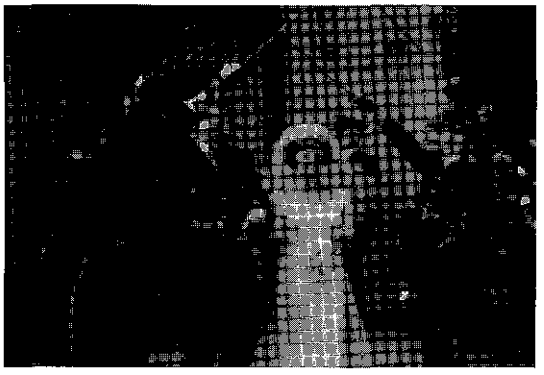
'No,' he said. 'I mean *outside* — in civilian life — before you joined the Air Force.'

If I thought that I had already acquired a reasonable knowledge of the Australian idiom, I was obviously wrong!

During the following three months we concentrated mainly on basic equipment procedures like warehousing and stock control. There was only a cursory introduction to Airmovements and Catering and Barracks Administration, subjects that would be covered in separate courses. No specialist training was proposed for the latter sphere of Equipment activities. The impending introduction of computerisation was also on the agenda, involving a good deal of introductory lectures.

Considering my immediate future, I thought that now was the time to propose to Stella. Luckily for me, she accepted and we decided to get married before the end of the course.

My colleagues had organised a glamorous Air Force wedding to be held at Wesley Church and formed a guard of honour under the command of Sandhurst-trained Pilot Officer Richard Thwaytes. It was a truly memorable affair. To describe our feelings as we moved out of the church and passed under the crossed swords would be difficult.



Marrying in style — Wesley Church, Melbourne, 27 November 1965

Our honeymoon a was rather short-lived affair since we all were due back at Laverton on Monday for a familiarisation flight to RAAF Edinburgh. My mischievous colleagues had arranged for a stretcher to carry me to the aircraft.

The visit to Edinburgh was an enlightening experience. Firstly, there was the customary tour of the Base, interspersed with lectures by the various specialist appointments on the Base.

Then, later in the afternoon, we were taken to a winery that produced a well-known brand of champagne. There, we learned all about the making of the sparkling drink and the exquisite tastes to be acquired.

Suitably primed, we adjourned into town for an evening with a dinner deep down in the subterranean coolness of the *Gawler Place Cellar* restaurant. Delicious food and good South Australian wines were served and as the mood became exuberant, we started to sing.

The choice of songs must have baffled the staff, because one of the waitresses asked me who we were and where we came from. When I explained that we were RAAF officers on a visit from Melbourne, she exclaimed in amazement: 'But you are singing the *Marseillaise* and German war songs.'

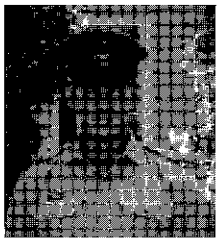
Well, they did not call us the *Foreign Legion* for nothing!

Chapter Eleven

Learning the Ropes

In compliance with my posting instructions, I had to report to RAAF East Sale straight after graduating, but my actual duties would only begin in earnest after I had attended No 5 Catering course at Wagga Wagga in New South Wales. The attachment was to be a most interesting and entertaining experience. I say 'entertaining', because catering was not a very popular facet within the Equipment functions and unfortunately not taken too seriously by some of the members.

Not unexpectedly, there was a lot of horseplay, particularly from one individual called George acting as the joker *par excellence.* His pranks caused a lot of disruption, much to the despair of the unfortunate Flight Sergeant Chef, who had the unenviable task of teaching and keeping us disciplined as well. Being outranked did not help his situation at all.



George

Much of the Chief Instructor's lectures centred on contract administration, the absolute necessity to ensure that contractors did not cheat concerning quality and, most of all, to make certain that no foodstuffs purchased at public expense were used for unauthorised purposes.

'Fraught with danger, gentlemen! Fraught with danger!' was the continuous exhortation.

How often did I think of these words when I was confronted with dicy situations during the years to come! Fortunately, the experience I had gained at Bonegilla where we sometimes catered for 5,000 people and often had to fight with the contractors, helped me a lot.

During the course we visited many food processing plants in the region. Once, we made an excursion to the abattoirs at Cootamundra. It was a dreadful experience and as soon as it was all over, we decided to go to the local RSL for a much needed drink.

As we walked along the main street in the searing heat of the January day, a young woman approached us.

George

George was quite a character. During his 12 year career as LAC he achieved notoriety at a certain base when he addressed the air officer inspecting the parade as 'Sire'. The gentleman was not amused, but George talked him out of the situation by explaining that his mates had impressed on him the 'Sire' was a higher and more appropriate form of addressing a two-star officer than 'Sir'.

George eventually became a Wing Commander, effectively carrying out his duties. However the many anecdotes that came to my ears make me think that he is still the eternal LAC, still bullshitting his superiors and getting away with it.

'I am from the local paper!' she said. 'What's the Air Force doing in town?'

As always, George was quick with an answer.

'Don't tell anybody,' he whispered into the ear of the reporting lady, 'we are looking for a lost nuclear warhead.'

Well, some readers might remember that about that time the USAF had actually lost a nuclear warhead in the sea near the Spanish coast, an accident that made headline news around the world. I suppose the editor of the local paper was a wake-up, because no such headlines appeared in the Cootamundra rag.

After some practical cooking acivities in the kitchen, we had to sit for a number of written exams and on the final day our graduation certificates were handed out. Unexpectedly, both George and myself were awarded 'Distinction'.

RAAF East Sale has a varied and colourful history. At the outbreak of World War II the unit was responsible for the training of aircrew members for reconnaissance and bomber operations. The aircraft included Beauforts, Hudsons, Oxfords, Fairy Battles and one Tiger Moth.

Strangely, the base was rumoured to be jinxed. There is conjecture about the undeserved reputation, but it was apparently conceived in the light of two unfortunate episodes.

During the early war years a number of Beauforts disappeared on training flights over the sea. According to the RAAF publication *Always Ready,* which traces the history of East Sale, 140 Beauforts had crashed in the period from July 1942 to October 1943. However, certain evidence suggested a defective elevator control as the main cause for the twenty-one unexplained accidents.

Yet there is another explanation. In his book *Crime Chemist*, Alan Dowes traces the life story of Charles Taylor, a former Victorian forensic scientist, who investigated the cause of death of a number of airmen whose bodies had been recovered from a swamp near Bairnsdale. Since the autopsy had disclosed the presence of a high rate of carbon monoxide in their blood, Taylor concluded that the gas had permeated the Beaufort cockpits through the disabled heating ducts, instantly killing its crews.

I don't know whether that explanation was included in the findings of the Board of Inquiry, but it adds another possibility to the faulty elevator story.

There had also been a more recent disaster involving the aerobatic team of the 'Red Sales'. The accident happened on 15 August 1962, when all four Vampires crashed during recovery from a barrel roll about 500 yards from the Dutson Bombing and Gunnery Range.

There was nothing demonstrably supernatural about that accident nor of the losses of the Beauforts during World War II. However, such events stay in people's memory and may lead to all kinds of speculation.

At the time of my arrival the base also hosted an American contingent, No 58 Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. That detachment operated two B-57F special aircraft, the latter having succeeded the controversial U2 'Spy Plane'.

The relationship with the USAF officers was very cordial. Occasionally, we would sit in the Mess in the evening and, accompanied by someone playing the guitar, join in the singing of those lovely, sentimental American folk songs like 'Home on the Range', 'Country Road' and many others. We had no problem with the words, since there was a booklet titled *Singing Along With the 58th.* I could not help remembering my days in the POW camp at *Kalbe.* Obviously, the Americans like their sing-song, irrespective as to whether the tunes are of their own vintage or those of the captured enemy.

During my time at East Sale, OCs of the Base were in succession, Group Captain C. Cornish, Group Captain J.G. Blackwell and Group Captain A.R. Hodge. The Commanding Officer of Base Squadron was Wing Commander Christofis and my Senior Equipment Officer (SEQO) Squadron Leader White.

Catering Officer at RAAF East Sale, 1966 (RAAF Photo)

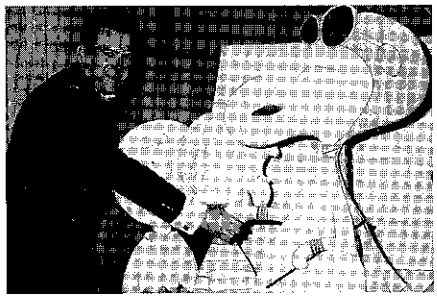
Getting your teeth into a catering job is not easy for a fledgling pilot officer. There were three Messes to be looked after, a tremendous amount of equipment to be accounted for, and the administration of more than a hundred service personnel and civilians provided continuous and sometimes involved problems.

The Wing Commander of the selection board had not been wrong when he suggested that I would have enough opportunities to concern myself with human relations!

Within the service environment, junior officers get involved in 'secondary appointments', like being OIC Football Club, OIC Tennis Club or whatever association dominated the social scene at the Base. Not being particularly interested in sport, I was lucky to be appointed as Messing Officer, OIC Airmen's Mess and Cinema Officer, activities that were definitely more in my line.

Many public functions had to be catered for during the year. A particularly splendid event was the annual Battle of Britain Ball held in town. For that occasion, Stella and I spent months with the preparation of elaborate stage

designs and posters, conceived under the motto 'Snoopy and the Red Baron'. In the following year, it was 'London during the Blitz'.



Artistic Contribution to the Battle of Britain Ball

There was a veriety of other duties I was responsible for also. Every fortnight I had to act as Paying Officer. Now and then I was rostered as Orderly Officer. Had to hear charges and some-times carry out Safe-hand duties. The latter task was very popular as it involved a day-trip to Melbourne. Once I had to go on such a mission at short notice. It happened on Maundy Thursday. The CO asking whether I would like to go to HQSC. When I pointed out that my name was a long way off on the roster he said:

'Never mind the roster! It's the Easter break and no one else is available! I'll give you a staff car and driver, because there is one catch — you will have to call at Monash University and pick up the OC's daughter and her girlfriend!'

We had no difficulties in finding the indicated accommodation block where we were met by two young and beautiful blonde ladies. Our arrival had not gone unnoticed. As we drove out in style, eyes were glued on us from all directions. One has to remember that this was the time of anti-Vietnam protests and the military was not popular, particularly not amongst students and definitely not at Monash.

Now there was a sight. A chauffeur-driven staff car with an officer clad in full dress sitting in front and two lovelies in the back.

Unknown to us, we were followed by a dilapidated vehicle packed with a bunch of hippy-type students. As we sped along Dandenong Road, the bomb pulled up alongside, a scruffy boy stretched his neck out and yelled at me:

'Capitalist!'

My driver was quick to retort: 'Beats working, mate!'

Right from the beginning, my strange name often caused perplexion. One morning after church a Scottish doctor exclaimed, 'Corbel. A good old Scottish name.'

I had to disappoint him by correcting the spelling.

At that point, the doctor's wife looked Stella up and down. 'And where do you come from, my dear?'

Yes, an officer of foreign descent was still a novelty in those days.

Eventually, I became fed up with the inevitable questions about my origins. Thus, when someone bent across the table at a dinner in town and asked,'Where do you hail from?'

I nonchalantly replied: 'Melbourne!'

I heard Stella gasp.

'Yes', said the old Australian, 'but don't I detect an accent?'
'You are right,' I said. 'Collingwood.'

My frivolity earned me a swift kick under the table.

'I don't know how you thought you could get away with this', Stella scorned.

But that was before multiculturalism.

My position gave me ample opportunity to get around the country, accumulating many flying hours on Dakotas, Hercules and Caribous to Richmond, Williamtown, Dubbo, Hobart and Townsville. With my background, it was only natural that I should enjoy these gratituous trips. I even earned the nickname *The Flying Catering Officer*.

As we settled into the local community, our involvements increased considerably. By accident, I once attended a meeting in town at which I stood up and made my point. I was surprised when I was approached afterwards by two gentlemen who asked me whether I would like to join Rostrum.

Listening to their description of the club's activities, I felt inclined to accept the invitation. My CO gave his blessings, but stipulated that I must never wear uniform at the meetings. He was afraid the press might one day report that a RAAF officer had stated something in public which was not in line with Air Force policy.

I learned a lot in those months under the tutelage of experienced public speakers and English teachers from the local high school. All that was very useful, because specialist officers had to present lectures, address visiting teams, and occasionally give presentations at public functions.

My probationary year had meanwhile come to an end and the promotion to Flying Officer was gazetted. I now had to start studying in earnest for the 'B' Exam in order to qualify for promotion to flight lieutenant in three years.

I did, of course, also continue with my studies towards the accountancy qualification.

A memorable event was the attachment to No 57 Moral Leadership Course at RAAF Edinburgh. Surprisingly, senior officers seemed to know little about these courses and would discard them as irrelevant, not recommending my nomination at unit level. However, as far as I am concerned, it was a profound experience. In the years to come I often faced situations which required a deep knowledge of the human condition in order to give counselling where necessary and to maintain authority at the same time.

To illustrate my point I would like to mention a specific incident. One day, I had to deal with an application for discharge, in which an airman had stated that he had no respect for the RAAF.

In the *Luftwaffe* I would have considered such a statement as a serious insult and dealt with the man most severely. However, mindful of the human management considerations I had learned, I made him sit down comfortably and talked to him in a fatherly way.

When I finished, he asked me to hand him back the application, which he tore up and then apologised.

In another incident many years later, I successfully managed to pacify the crying wife of a corporal, who had burst into my office, claiming that her husband had been unjustly treated on his annual PP 207. When she left, she seemed to understand that a serviceman was assessed by his performance on the job and not by his qualities as a good husband and father. The corporal later told me that he now better understood his shortcomings.

There is definitely something to be said in favour of applied psychology.

In January 1968, I was attached to No 29 Airmovement Course, conducted by the Air Movement Training and Development Unit at Richmond. It was the most exciting training I had undertaken so far. There was much flying involved, but we also learned a lot about aircraft stability, loading criteria, mathematical calculations, documentation, safety considerations and the transportation of dangerous goods.

Chapter Twelve

The Lure of the Tropics

At the end of the fifty-one week course, cadets from the School of Air Navigation (SAN) had to undergo a crucial navigation exercise with a flight from Sale to Amberley, and from there to Townsville. As I had always wanted to see the tropical part of Australia, I approached the CO of SAN, Wing Commander Staib and asked whether I could go on one of these so-called 'route checks'. He readily agreed and my own CO gave his approval on the understanding that I would have to sacrifice part of my leave credit.

We took off on 17 April on the first lap to Amberley, where we stayed overnight. From there, the flight took us over the sea providing an exciting view of the Barrier Reef.

Throughout the trip I had the opportunity to observe the activities on board. Making comparisons of proceedings on operational flights during my own time some thirty years ago, I realised how much things had changed through advanced technology. I should mention that this was one of the last occasions I would fly on a DC3, as the trainers were later replaced by the HS 748.

At Amberley I had already been thrilled by the glory of the tropical vegetation, the colourful bushes whose leaves looked as if a painter had gone quite mad with his brush, decorating them with splashes of colour in fascinating patterns, the scent of the frangipani, the beauty of the multi-coloured hibiscus blossoms and the balmy evening air.

The environment at Townsville, home of No 10 Maritime Reconnaissance Squadron, was pleasant. There was the open-air bar under the Mess where we gathered in the evening, the profusion of colour in the surrounding garden and, most of all, the relaxed atmosphere, in which everybody seemed to be so happy.

Back at East Sale, still overwhelmed by the impressions of tropical splendour, I went straight to the orderly room and asked to record Base Squadron Townsville as my first posting preference. Although I did not think that I would be posted to a location of my choice at this early stage of my career, I thought that it was well worth a try.

Unexpectedly, the Administration Officer phoned me one morning and tersely read out a 'PZ', that is to say a Posting Order, to BSQN Townsville. I suppose he was jealous because he would not make any further comment. Even the CO seemed surprised, asking me whether I had been 'talking' to someone at Townsville.

At the farewell party the CO commented on my success as CATO, praising the improved standard of the menu at dinner dances and other functions. I was pleased about those kind words, but the most important comment came from a Flight Sergeant Chef, who in a quiet moment took me aside and said:

> Sir, I hope you don't mind me saying this: Your success on this Base is to a large extent due to the fact that you always had the cooperation of all the NCOs. What impressed us most is the fact that you never gave an order that could not be carried out! I and all my mates wish you the best of luck for the future!

I think it was at OTS that a senior officer once gave me an unsolicited briefing in the Mess. I particularly remember his advice that, in order to become established, a newly appointed junior officer had to get the NCOs on his side.

To that end, the encouraging words of the Chef boosted my confidence considerably and made me feel that East Sale had been a successful training ground at that most important initial stage of my career.

One morning, with my VW station wagon packed to capacity, I set out on my way to the North. Driving along the New England Highway and through the Moonbi Ranges, that winding stretch with its astonishing sights, was an unforgettable experience. There was so much to see and there were many telling incidents.

Intending to stay at Tamworth overnight, I found all motels booked out, the town swarming with squatters wearing their broad-brimmed hats. When I wondered about the crowd, I was given a startling lecture by the receptionist.

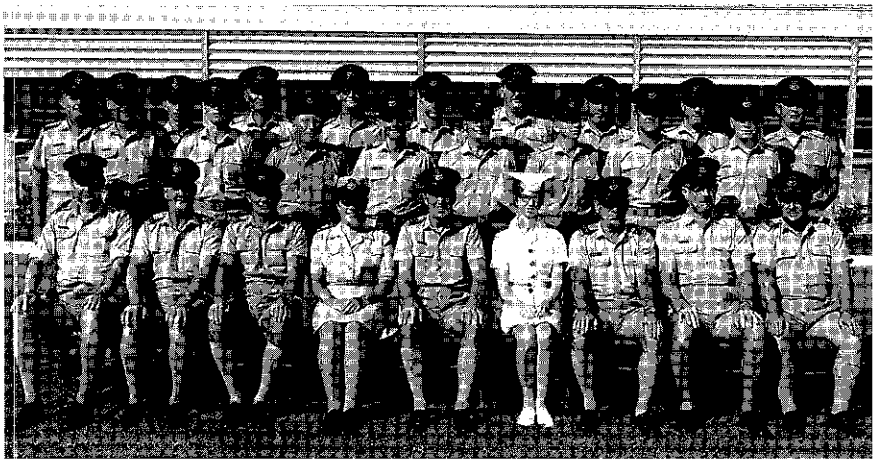
'This is our Field Day you know! Agricultural shows, shooting, entertainment and so on.' said the lady.

'You could not possibly find accommodation here tonight' she continued. 'What's your name? *Caldwell*? I shall ring a hotel near the bridge. You understand *bridge*? The thing that leads over the water. I shall get you a booking!'

Admittedly, I still had not been able to acquire an Australian accent.

The Officer Commanding the Base at Townsville was Group Captain Cannon, a veteran of World War II and Korea. My CO was Wing Commander Jeff Kilby, the SEQO Squadron Leader Lennard and my immediate superior the Barracks Officer, Flight Lieutenant George Dickie.

Initially, I was appointed Assistant BKSO/Housing Officer. As I stated earlier, specialist courses for Barracks and Housing did not exist and newcomers simply had to acquaint themselves with their duties as they went along.



Base Squadron Townsville 1970: Wing Commander Jeff Kilby in centre. Author back row, second from left. (RAAF Photo)

As one would have expected, the sensitive housing administration caused many problems. Dealing with disgruntled wives and their many complaints required a lot of maturity, tact and understanding — certainly more than should have been expected from an untrained person. It did not help that the Housing Officer's task was always given to the most junior Equipment Officer on the Base. Inevitably, there was dissent with the local Housing Commission. This was made clear to me by the officer-in-charge, who told me that the Housing Officer of the Army was a Major.

'You RAAF blokes come and go' he said. 'I myself have been in the job for over twenty years.'

Fortunately, we hit it off well and developed a close relationship. I suppose my advanced age and my training in human relations had a lot to do with it. Luckily, by having direct access to the top man, I was able to obtain immediate attention when problems had to be sorted out or remedial work was required. On top of that, we had a lot of enjoyable social contact outside working hours.

Feeling strongly about the unsatisfactory housing situation, I began to write papers emphasising the need for specialist training. I did not at that time envisage that fifteen years later I would become instrumental in the training field myself.

Amusingly, my biggest problem was caused by those blessed refrigerators which always seemed to pack it in. Whilst the wives insisted that they should be replaced, the Works blokes assured me there was nothing wrong with them. It was just that in the humid and extremely hot tropical climate, refrigerators behave differently than in the cooler parts of the country and require regular defrosting.

Many of the women did not like the idea of an additional chore to be attended to in the heat of the day and raised hell when the refrigerators did not do the job they were supposed to do. One particularly difficult lady who, having failed with approaches to my predecessor, came to my office and demanded that I should get into her car to discuss the problem.

'It's too damned hot in your office,' she declared.

I wisely refused. I don't think she was too pleased when she received good advice but not a new refrigerator. The men from Works defrosted it the next day.

On New Years Eve, when we had gathered in the garden of the Mess and midnight struck, the lady in question walked across the lawn, put her arms around my neck, kissed me and said, 'Good luck to you and your bloody refrigerators!'

In later years I often used that story when lecturing on Facilities administration to illustrate the trials and tribulations of a Barracks Officer in the tropics.

Early in June 1969, I received an attachment order for Airmovement duties in connection with Exercise *Townhouse* at RAAF Darwin. The event, which was described as one of the biggest in the 'Top End' since World War II, was planned to simulate the defence of Darwin and was to be jointly conducted with RAF, RAAF and RNZAF participation. The actual operational activities extended over a week, but there was a lot of preparatory work to be done in advance.

As expected, there was concern within the local community because a newspaper release advised the population that Darwin could expect a series of day and night air raids and that sonic booms were certain to occur. One unhappy citizen even wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper, suggesting that Canberra should be the selected target because it had most of the heads and brains of the country. He signed himself as 'Captain Wide-awake'.

The Officer Commanding RAAF Darwin, Group Captain Mick Mather, brushed negative criticism aside by stating *Better Booms Than Bombs,* referring to the Japanese attacks on the city during World War II. The Minister for Air, Dudley Erwin, also felt compelled to remind the population that not so long ago Darwin had been devastated by enemy attack and that in the event of another conflict Darwin was still strategically placed as a target.

The exercise brought 1,000 men to the base and 500 to Tindal, which was then only an operational airstrip. Hundreds of tons of cargo had to be moved in a series of 40 air lifts by the air forces of the three countries taking part. The mock attacks were to be staged by RAF Vulcan bombers and RAAF and RNZAF Canberra bombers, the defence being carried out by RAAF Mirages and RAF Lightnings.

Because of the volume of cargo and personnel arriving by air, we were kept busy right through the days preceding the exercise. During the actual operation we worked in teams rostered in round-the-clock shifts, kept on call at all times. We slept uneasily on the hangar floor in readiness for the next arrival or departure of aircraft, being awakened at ungodly hours and hurriedly driven off to the tarmac. Sometimes, there would be panic when an aircraft became unserviceable and we had to transfer the cargo.

Occasionally, I had to meet incoming aircraft from the participating foreign air forces. I had no problems with the RAF, but I was once refused access to an American C130, the captain claiming that it was 'classified'.

On the other end of the scale was the flamboyant flight lieutenant from an RAF cargo plane. Self-assured and wearing his cap at a jaunty angle, he caused some hilarity as he entered the office.

Having been given permission to send off a message to Far East Command and a string of cryptic acronyms, he signed the form as 'Captain Mushroom'.

'Kept in the dark and fed horseshit', he explained.

One day I had to meet a VIP aircraft in the early hours of the morning. When I saw a lady struggling down the steps, I took the suit case from her hand and handed it to the waiting driver.

'This case belongs to the lady in pink!' I said.

Browsing through the newspaper at breakfast, I noticed to my shock that the 'Lady in Pink' was in fact Bettina Gorton, the wife of our Prime Minister.

In August my promotion to Flight Lieutenant came through and I was offered a permanent commission. My career was thus secure, but whether I would make the fifteen years required for a pension still remained to be seen.

The promotion meant a transfer to other duties, warehousing and also stock control. My secondary duties, which included airmovement, fuel, welfare, cinema and messing, remained unchanged, keeping me busy at all times. As a sideline I volunteered to design the stage decorations for the annual RAAF Welfare Ball.

RAAF Townsville had been the home base of No 10 Squadron since March 1949. In 1970, most of the area formerly occupied by the military during the World War II period was now residential, but there were still some of the wartime installations, depots and warehouses in existence, in particular the large complex known as 'Det F'. Being responsible for warehousing, it fell upon me to organise the disposal of age-old and totally obsolete stock kept in the depot, something that should have been attended to years ago.

In a general sense, I learned a lot during my posting, because Squadron Leader Lennard, my SEQO, had the good sense to involve me in all facets of Equipment administration in order to give me a wider knowledge and experience. Every so often, he would throw a file onto my desk, saying:

'This is for your education, Frank. Read it and write a brief for me.'

Under his thoughtful tuition I even managed to pass all facets of the 'C' Exam in one week.

The highlight of the activities at Townsville during my time was the presentation of the standard to No 10 Squadron on 15 September 1969, by His Excellency the Governor General, Sir Paul Hasluck, PC, GCMG, KstJ. It was on that occasion I first met Air Commodore Spurgeon who later was COMRAAFV during my term in Vietnam.

As usual, the New Year brought expected and unexpected postings. Squadron Leader Lennard had been replaced earlier by Squadron Leader 'Jackson' Nielsen, an identity in the Air Force, who for several years had been in charge of parachute training at RAAF Williamtown.

On the morning of 17 February 1970, he called me into his office, and quite upset, informed me that I had been posted to Vietnam to undergo a twelve month tour with No 9 Squadron.

Chapter Thirteen

Uc Dai Loi in Vietnam

I doubt whether Australian or even American servicemen had an opportunity at the beginning of their tour to acquaint themselves with the history of Vietnam, although the latter were better prepared thanks to the practice of 'indoctrination', a term that was not yet known in our own forces. The only condensed and fairly general instructions that new arrivals received were printed on a quarto size sheet, handed out after landing at the Tan Son Nhut airport of Saigon. It contained a list of do's and don'ts, but there was not much time to study it, because as soon as we entered the Airmovement section we had to exchange the sheet for a lunch pack.

By 1970, the second Indo-Chinese War had already raged for sixteen years. As the conflict progressed, it became highly unpopular and divisive, stirring embittered passions not only in the US and Australia, but all over the world. Apart from ideological sentiments, the main reason for its unpopularity was the fact that, for the first time in history, warfare with all its horrors and bloodshed was brought right into the suburban homes via the television screen.

Personally, I think that the war was misrepresented in many ways. The reporting was often one-sided, concentrating on American bombing and civilian casualties, but disregarding the atrocities committed by the Viet Cong. Little was said about their practice of infiltrating villages during the night and murdering non-conforming citizens.

I saw proof of these executions myself. On several occasions, when we sped through the villages on the way to the stores depot at Long Bin in the early hours of the morning, we would pass the bodies of unfortunate victims laid out on the roadside, surrounded by squatting women mourning their dead.

The RAAF contribution to the war is well illustrated in the book *Mission Vietnam — Royal Australian Air Force Operations 1964–1972*. Four thousand, four hundred and forty three members took part in the conflict. Three squadrons — No 2 (Canberra bombers), No 9 (Iroquois helicopters) and No 35 (Caribou transport) — flew 315,189 operational sorties.

Base support was provided by No 1OSU (Operational Support Unit). No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron had built and improved many airfield and domestic facilities. The Hercules aircraft of No 36 and 37 Squadrons, based at Richmond, carried out many transport operations in support of our forces.

During the eight years in Vietnam the Australian Air Force lost ten aircraft to enemy action and twelve RAAF personnel died.

At Vung Tau, the RAAF contingent was concentrated in the self-contained Cantonment area, located about five kilometres from the city.

In 1970, the OC of the contingent was Group Captain R.J. McKimm, later to be succeeded by Group Captain R.H. Martin. The CO of No 9 Squadron, was Wing Commander Peter Coy whom I had met at Townsville. Squadron Leader Peter Kennedy (succeeded by Squadron Leader Greenwood) was in charge of No 1OSU and the CO of No 35 Squadron was Squadron Leader Stan Clark.

No 9 Squadron operated sixteen Bell UH-1H 'Iroquois' helicopters, engaged in insertions, extractions, medical evacuations ('Dust-offs'), gunship activities and the spraying of defoliants. In the role of gunship, the UH-1H were equipped with the XM 21 Armament System, which consisted of two rocket pods capable of firing seven 2.75 rockets each and two mini guns. In addition, the two side gunners operated twin M60 machine guns.

As Squadron Equipment officer I was to ensure the uninterrupted supply of technical spares. The supply of the vast array of non-technical equipment and consumable stores was the responsibility of No 1OSU.

The crew of my section initially consisted of Sergeant Bob McNeill, Corporal Graham Lucas, LACs John Manning, Max Hitchens and Joe Mosur. Because of the twelve month rotations, there were some personnel changes as time went by.

All my team members were experienced operators and, as a group, a good, hard-working bunch. I never had any problems that could not be sorted out on a friendly basis. In fact, I did not have to hear one charge during the whole twelve months period. But, as it had been pointed out to me at my commissioning interview, I found that it certainly was a different kind of discipline that motivated the Australian serviceman.

I learned much during that year. Having been appointed OIC Airmen's Club during the later part of my term, I became involved in many aspects of administration, service activities and human relations which I could not have encountered at any base at home.

Under the Military Assistance Agreement, we drew the bulk of our supply requirements from the US army for which the Australian government paid according to an agreed schedule. That support was generous in many ways. Thanks to excellent liaison (and often a good supply of cases of Australian beer), we were able to obtain urgently needed spares for situations classified as AOG (Aircraft Operationally Grounded) on a priority basis.

Had we been forced to take our place in the queue, we could not have achieved the serviceability rate of which we were so proud. We certainly could not have supported the operation from our own resources.

Whilst initially all supplies were drawn from local American sources, from June 1970 we had to rely on the huge depot at Long Binh near Saigon. The change was said to be due to the relocation of US resources following the venture into the Parrot Beak and Fishhook regions of Cambodia.

The new arrangement caused some problems, since we were now required to drive over 130 kilometres along Route 15 from Vung Tau to Saigon, traversing a large area that was practically in the hands of the *Viet Cong* at all times. As a precaution, these runs had to be conducted in convoys accompanied by a detail of heavily armed Airfield Defence Guards.

I arranged the trips with changing crews, the Sergeant and myself taking chargeon alternate trips. Sometimes, we had to do more then one run each week, many times we had to fly to the depots by helicopter to collect AOG spares. On a few occasions we had to draw non-technical supplies from Bear Cat, an American depot halfway between Vung Tau and Saigon.

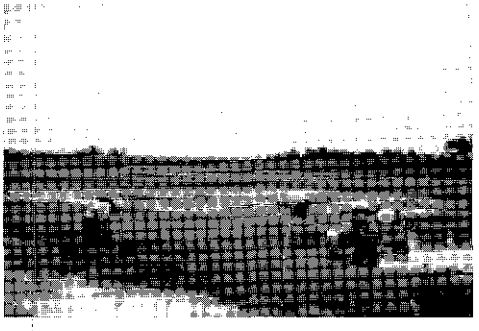
Clearance from the GLO Section had to be obtained for all these runs, but the situation likely to be encountered in enemy territory could of course not always be accurately predicted.

One late afternoon, after having been delayed at Long Binh, we had to drive fast in order to get home before curfew. As we approached Long Than, I suddenly noticed a big board on the side of the road. It said:

<<<< DETOUR

With my mind racing, I figured that this could not be genuine because a drive through the jungle to the left of the road was hardly feasible. Sensing that the board must be a fake, I shouted 'straight on!' The driver stepped on the accelerator and we raced through the village at high speed.

When I mentioned the incident at the next briefing session, the GLO confirmed my suspicion. They knew that an ambush had been set up by the Viet Cong outside Long Than.



Rice Field, Route 15, July 1970

Luck was again on our side.

The drive along Route 15 led through dense jungle, rice paddy fields and rubber plantations. It was an experience in itself and provided unique photo opportunities.

There were the peasants ploughing along with their buffaloes, and little women hidden under large mush-room hats planting rice in flooded

paddocks. We saw primitive settlements along the road, children milling about outside school buildings, Buddhist monks in their orange robes and Taoist monks draped in blue, military vehicles speeding along, local soldiers guarding bridges and Vietnamese platoons marching into or out of the jungle.

When I first arrived, Group Captain McKimm told me that he encouraged all his officers to go flying whenever opportunities arose. Following his advice, I visited Saigon, Nui Dat, the US Fire Base Mace near Xuan Loc, Long Binh, Bear Cat and many other interesting places.

Once I went on the so-called '05 Milk Run' conducted by No 35 Squadron which was also affectionately known as 'Wallaby Airlines'. The flight regularly took in such exotic places as Tan Son Nhut, Ham Tan, Phan Tiet, Song Mao, Phan Rang, Camh Ranh Bay, Nha Trang, Da Lat, Gia Nghia and Bao Loc.

These sorties gave me a view of the topography of the country, the Delta and the wild romantic landscape of the Annam mountain chain with its rugged peaks and the deep ravines in which torrential white water rivers take their course down to the plains. There were many memorable moments, some of them peaceful, some frightening. A particular breathtaking experience was landing at Ghia Nghia, the airfield having been levelled on the top of a mountain with the runway ending at a precipitous edge, leaving no margin for error.

The human cargo transported on the regular Caribou run included Australians, Americans and Vietnamese soldiers, plus the occasional authorised local civilians. One incident is still vivid in my mind. It happened on one of those stops high up in the mountains, where the whole village seemed to have gathered on the air strip to farewell a Catholic priest.

Just as we were about to close the rear door, a woman approached the aircraft and threw a baby to the man sitting nearest to the ramp. He caught the baby in his arms and instantly threw it back to the people standing outside.

I have often pondered over that visual association which I cannot forget. It seemed so unreal to see a human football flying through the air. What had motivated the woman is a matter of conjecture, but I suppose the baby was one of mixed blood, unwanted beings which were usually left at the doorsteps of orphanages. In the isolated mountain village setting that would have been impossible, disposing of a baby in an Australian aircraft may have been a desperate attempt to solve the problem.

In August, a selected group of our squadron went on a four-day trip to the USAF base at Phan Rang from where No 2 Squadron operated its Canberra bombers. Flying over the water along the coastline opened many new vistas.

The huge operational base in its spectacular mountain setting, the continuing flying activities and the many unusual installations gave us much to see.

One evening in the Mess, the CO of No 2 Squadron casually remarked that we had his blessing, if anyone would like to go on a mission. Foolishly, I expressed interest, thinking that it would never happen anyway.

I was in for a surprise. About 4 or 5am the next morning, someone shook me and, when I opened my eyes, said:

'You are on! Go to the airmen's dining room and have breakfast — we'll pick you up from there in half an hour!'

There it was! I quickly showered, put on my flying suit and proceeded to the Airmen's Mess. A light vehicle took me and two others to the operations room where I was handed a helmet, oxygen mask and my survival gear. In a very short lecture I was told how to use it.

The pilot, who introduced himself as Mike Herbert, said he was still waiting for the flight plan. When it arrived, he and his navigator, Bob Cuttress, took me to a wall map to show me the assigned target — a bunker position way down south in the Delta. We were then driven to the hangar, where the sinister looking and darkly painted Canberra bomber, armed with bombs, stood waiting. I felt a bit funny in the stomach by the sight.

'Have you ever flown in a Canberra?' asked Mike.

When I answered in the negative, he gave me a quick outline of emergency procedure and told me how to bail out.

'Have you got a sick bag?' he asked.

Well, I had actually taken that precaution — fortunately I did not need it. Strapped onto the rather uncomfortable jump seat, I followed the take-off procedures with accustomed interest. From then on, being absorbed in what I observed and savouring the sensation of flying at high altitude in a fast jet-powered bomber let me forget any fears I may have had.

Once we reached the target zone I had to change places with the navigator who came forward to operate the bombing run. Mike then told me to listen to the Vietnamese forward controller. After 'expending the ordnance' as the Americans would have said, Mike called out that he would do a circle so that I could see the impact point of our bombs.

Whilst I tried to get a glimpse through the small porthole, I became disorientated by the long forgotten experience of G-Forces exerting on my body. Bob quickly pushed me back to the jump seat and returned to his compartment, guiding the aircraft back to the base.

Relaxing after our sortie, we were driven to the beach for a swim. There, by some inexplicable turn of fate, Bob broke his ankle in a strange accident. He was shipped to the Field Hospital at Vung Tau for treatment and was replaced by Flying Officer R.C. Carver.

Much to my horror I learned that on 4 November Mike's aircraft had been reported missing in the Da Nang area. The fate of the aircraft has never been explained and to this day Mike and his new navigator Bob Carver are still listed as 'Missing in Action'. There is a plaque at the Vietnamese Memorial on Anzac Parade, Canberra, where I occasionally put a bunch of flowers.

When Wing Commander Coy heard of my exploits in the morning, he shook his head in disbelief. 'I thought I brought you here to have a rest from the war' he remarked.

Actually, we could never get away from it. A Viet Cong rocket fired from the surrounding mountains exploded while we were wandering about the squadron area. Fortunately, it did not cause any casualties. As the alarm was raised, we had to take shelter, but no more rockets came in.

Incoming rockets were a fact of daily life at Phan Rang.

Chapter Fourteen

A Year Older and a Year Wiser

At one of our regular fortnightly farewell functions in the Mess, a young pilot who was to fly home the next day, concluded his speech with the unusual statement that he was now 'a year older and a year wiser'. Since by that time I had already seen a lot of the country, I thought that the phrase perfectly summed up the rare recognition of a meaningful experience, demonstrating to me that the man had gone through his twelve months in Vietnam with his eyes open, observing and learning.

Unfortunately, not too many did.

Personally, I could not help feeling that those who never ventured outside the Cantonment had wasted a unique opportunity. As for myself, having been able to acquire a sketchy knowledge of the language, I did my best to gain a greater insight into the lives of the local population and their culture.

As I mentioned before, mindful of the unexpected kindness I had received in 1945 from an English corporal, when I was in the reverse situation, I gave soap, chocolate and other things to the girls who looked after our quarters. Although this was in breach of regulations, I thought that it was a single opportunity to repay my debt to humanity. In return, I was treated well and rewarded with friendship. Madame Oanh, the owner of Le Petit Chalet, our favourite restaurant, once told me that in town I was thought of as a Good GI.

Why GI one might ask. Well, since World War II, American soldiers, especially enlisted men, have been known as GI, which according to the dictionary definition means *Conforming to US Army regulations, of standard Government Issue.* Ironically, many Vietnamese also referred to Australians as GIs probably for the sake of simplicity. Otherwise, we were simply the *Uc dai loi* or, sometimes less flattering *Cheap Charlie.* The latter epithet was said to be due to the fact that Australian soldiers excelled in excessive bargaining, even in the most inappropriate situations.

My supposed reputation as 'good guy', seemed to be confirmed by a remarkable event that occurred one afternoon, right in the centre of Vung Tau. Standing in a square near the market I was suddenly surrounded by a mob of *Cao Boi* (cowboys), orphans who lived in the streets. These kids, waifs of the prolonged war, were known to be tough juvenile misfits, exploited by some local version of a Dickensian Fagan and organised to engage in minor crime.

The little blighters were all over me, touching me with their little hands and shouting 'Change MPC, Mister!'

When I finally managed to fight them off, I realised to my shock that the accessory lenses for my camera had been taken from their leather case. A Vietnamese policeman witnessed the incident but he made no attempt to interfere.

The boys had meanwhile disappeared. Suddenly, a well-dressed Vietnamese appeared on the scene and, to my astonishment, handed me the missing lenses. Bowing politely, he said 'We are sorry, Sir. A mistake has been made!'

It took me a long time to figure that one out.

Talking about money, payment to our troops was made in the form of American Military Payment Vouchers (MPCs) which could be used in service canteens, the Messes, ASCO and certain American PX stores to which we had access. MPCs could be exchanged at the paymaster's office into local Piastres at the official rate.

Although possession of MPC was illegal for the Vietnamese, not inconsiderable sums found their way into the local economy. In fact, there was great demand for the military currency, because it could be exchanged on the black market for Greenbacks at par. We were occasionally accosted in the streets with the proposal to exchange MPCs at 200 Pi, in contrast to the official rate of 118 at the paymaster's office.

In order to drain the market of illegally held money, the authorities would arrange an unannounced change of 'colour', that is replacing existing issues with notes of new design, making black holdings worthless overnight. Such an exchange occurred on 7 October 1970.

The operation was Top Secret and, as a precaution, a general curfew confined all personnel to barracks. Appointed MPC Officers (I was one of them) would collect all the money held by the troops, acquit the amounts on a list and return the bags with the collected MPC notes to the accounting officer for dispatch to *Saigon* where they would be destroyed. New notes were issued the next day and the exchange rate set at the more realistic level of 275 Piastres.

I should talk a bit about leave arrangements. Before leaving Australia we were told that we were entitled to two breaks, known as Rest & Recreation (R & R) and Rest-in-Country (R-in-C). The former of one week's duration was supposed to be taken after six months and one had the choice of Sydney, Hong Kong or Taipee. Logistically, R & R was organised by the US forces.

When I first heard about it, I thought that there was a unique opportunity to see an exotic location at government expense. Considering the options, Stella agreed that I should select Hong Kong. For her own benefit, we thought we might be able to find a suitable cruise that included the Pearl of the Orient on its itinerary and perhaps meet at that destination.

Browsing through various travel brochures we found that the *Marco Polo* fitted the bill. The only problem was timing — arranging my leave for such a date to coincide with the arrival of the ship. As befits a true Sagittarian, everything worked out well and in October 1970 we were able to spend a few happy days together, sightseeing, exploring, shopping and relaxing. The Americans had even organised a Halloween party at the glamorous Hotel Miramar in Kowloon. When our second honeymoon was over, Stella had to fly to Manila to catch her ship for the remainder of the cruise.

As far as R-in-C was concerned, the Army had to use the well equipped recreation centre at Vung Tau. Air Force personnel had the privilege of indulging in the luxury of a four-day break at the Malaysian island of Penang where the RAAF had a number of married quarters and also a service club for the men and women stationed at the airbase at Butterworth.

The justification for these jollies was based on the fact the Caribous had to fly regularly to Butterworth for special servicing. Rather than fly the aircraft empty, it was sensibly argued that they could be used to ferry personnel for the purpose of R-in-C.

The island of Penang with its capital Georgetown was of course an ideal spot for leisurely recreation. There was so much to see and, being a duty-free location, one could buy many valuable goods at bargain prices. I thoroughly enjoyed the exotic break, staying at the Runnymeade, a hotel which was then still maintained by the British Army with all the traditional pomp and an elaborate dining room protocol. I also caught up with several old friends stationed on the mainland.

At the end of the year, Sqaudron Leader Keith Taylor, our engineering officer, was replaced by Elliot McLeod 'Mac' Weller. Mac, who many years later became Air Officer Commanding Logistics Command, is one of the many friends with whom I am still in touch.

As my tour reached its end in April, I was informed that I was to proceed to Headquarters Operational Command at Glenbrook, NSW, to take the position of Senior Equipment Officer at HQOCU, the Headquarter's Unit.

The farewell from my Vietnamese friends was emotional. Our housegirls gave me an overwhelming range of personal gifts, more than I could have expected and tears flowed freely.

After having handed over my duties to Flight Lieutenant Dennis Phillips, I left Vung Tau on 15 April 1971, a year older and a year wiser myself.

The Second Vietnam War entered into its last phase on 3 March 1972 when PAVN troops — the Regular Army of North Vietnam — invaded South Vietnam territory. Together with the Viet Cong, the PAVN progressively occupied the country, and in April 1975 conquered Saigon.

The Australian disentanglement occurred more than two years earlier.

As in the US, the war had been politically divisive in Australia. Tragically, the men and women who had given a year of their lives in support of the military involvement were not welcomed as heroes like their ancestors who had fought in the two world wars, but conveniently forgotten, if not openly despised.

There was one, long since forgotten token recognition, when on ANZAC Day 1972 a contingent of still serving soldiers, returned from Vietnam, marched in full uniform through Sydney. The RAAF complement included personnel from HQOC and I was privileged to participate in the march.

Sadly, it would take fifteen years before the official 'Welcome Home March' was staged on 3 October 1987. The Governor of New South Wales, Air Marshal Sir James Rowland took the salute at the Sydney Town Hall.

Lacking moral support from many quarters, the adjustment process after a year in the wilderness of Vietnam was not easy for many of the returned veterans. Having often been the target of abuse in the intervening years, for many the recognition came too late. Many needed help, health problems continued some suffered nightmares, and a few commited suicide.

Once at a Mess function at RAAF Base Richmond, Sir Roden Cutler, the Governor of New South Wales, pointed at my medals and asked:

'How do you feel about this now?'

I thought for a moment and then replied: 'History will tell, Sir!'

Chapter Fifteen

A View from the Top

Once again, I had no idea what lay ahead of me. I knew of course that HQOC controlled the operational wings of the RAAF, but I did not know what my duties would be and how I would fit into the environment. In retrospect I can say that the many things I learned during my three years at Glenbrook prepared me well for my next appointment on an operational flying base.

At the time of my arrival, the Air Officer Commanding was Air Vice-Marshal William Edwin Townsend, succeeded by Air Vice-Marshal Brian Eaton and then by Air Vice-Marshal F.S. Robey. The Commanding Officer of HQOCU was Squadron Leader Burt Rainey, later to be replaced by Squadron Leader Bill Kendall, DFC, my ex-RAF friend from the days at OTS.

The responsibilities of an Equipment Officer of the Unit covered a wide spectrum of activities, similar to those carried out by a Base Squadron — covering all aspects of stock control, warehousing, catering, transport and the Barracks section. However, these activities were in some respects more difficult because of the wide range of unusual requirements arising in the headquarters environment.

Already in the first week I had a foretaste of what lay ahead of me. The Secretary of the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO) advised me over the phone that the Air Commodore wanted me to measure him for a jungle outfit. They had not taught us that on Equipment course, nor was I a tailor, but then again — had I not picked up a few tricks of the trade by observing the routine in Mother's boutique?

Equipped with a measuring tape and a proforma for 'Special Measurement Clothing' I fronted up to the Air Commodore who informed me that he had to go on a two-week jungle exercise with the Army. He needed 'jungle greens'. Could I arrange that?

Yes, Sir, I could.

Having taken the measurements with an assumed air of professionalism, I later phoned the clothing store of 2AD at Richmond which promptly delivered two sets of the required garments.

I was called back into SASO's office the next morning. Clad in jungle greens, the Air Commodore stood erect in front of his desk. With a stern look he said:

'Well, Flight Lieutenant! Don't you dare to tell me that I look smart?'

'I wouldn't say that you are exactly a picture of sartorial splendour, Sir;' I replied with my brain apparently in neutral, 'but does it matter in the jungle?'

Taking my irreverent remark with good grace, the Air Commodore burst out laughing, much to the consternation of the two wing commanders who were waiting outside. They gave me a puzzled look when I emerged from the office.

'What's going on?' they wondered, 'Nobody is supposed to have fun with SASO!'

In the two years to come I had more dealings with the many senior appointments established at Command. Fortunately, we usually managed to accommodate their sometimes sensitive requests. In particular, both AOC and SASO were always appreciative of our efforts.

I forget how many staff I controlled, but I think it was close to two hundred men and women. The transport section in particular was very large because of the extensive road transport requirements arising from the extended Command activities.

The Catering section also had a great number of personnel in order to meet the needs of the many social functions, including the fabulous annual garden party, which HQOC was committed to stage throughout the year.

At some of these functions I met Sir Roden Cutler, the Governor of New South Wales. When I was first introduced to him in my capacity as Messing Member, he was quick to respond with a bon mot:

'We shall say that for whatever we are about to receive from him we'll be truly thankful!'

And so life went on, filled with many and often unexpected daily occurrences, major equipment projects, frequent conferences in Sydney and Canberra, the turmoil of the introduction of the all-seasons uniform, a safe-hand trip to Singapore, a jolly to Papua-New Guinea, VIP visits and much exciting social life.

During the last year of my posting, Squadron Leader Bill Kendall, the Commanding Officer of the Unit, decided to revive the ancient tradition of officers serving Christmas dinner to airmen. Squadron Leader Kairns, and myself were detailed to perform that ritual in the Officer's Mess where twelve duty personnel had assembled.

I had read about the ancient custom in a British Army magazine in 1946, but I never thought that one day I would be participating in the ritual myself. I doubt that, like so many other meaningful traditions, the practice has survived.

Whilst at HQOC, it was advised to undertake the two year Officers Extension Tutorial Course (OETC), that superseded the old 'Q' Exam. Although I had practically no hopes of making Wing Commander and going to Staff College, due to the limited years of service I had left, it turned out to be a very productive suggestion. I managed to complete the studies at Distinction level and the certificate was accepted by Queensland University for the purpose of enrolling for a BA course.

Unexpectedly, in March 1974 I was posted to RAAF Base Richmond as Senior Barracks Officer, assuming the acting rank of Squadron Leader.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Chapter Sixteen

Per Ardua Ad Astra

RAAF Base Richmond was then one of the largest bases of the Royal Australian Air Force. Being the home of RAAF transport operations, it accommodated Nos 36 and 37 Squadrons flying Hercules C130 aircraft, Nos 35 and 38 Squadrons with Caribous, as well as No 2 Aircraft Depot (2 AD), No 3 RAAF Hospital, the Airmovement Training and Development Unit (AMTDU), the Air Transportable Telecommunication Unit (ATTU) and No 486 Maintenance Squadron.

Being SBKSO at an establishment of that size is no laughing matter, because with its own shops, clubs, recreational facilities, communal dining rooms, the extended network of roads, police and fire services, post office, sports ovals, cinema, chapels, kindergarten and perhaps even a school, such an infrastructure could well be compared with that of a self-contained township. All these facilities need constant maintenance, repairs, and from time to time improvements. I often thought that my responsibilities were in many ways similar to those of a Council Engineer.

As I mentioned earlier, I always felt that within the equipment empire barracks administration was a much neglected field. Equipment officers did not get any formal training and the AAP 1122 had been written some twenty years ago and was hopelessly out of date — particularly in relation to the increasingly complex estimates and budgeting procedures that determined the annual funds allocation within the Defence Budget. The situation was complicated by the fact that the available funds were actually controlled by the Department of Housing and Construction (DHC).

I was fortunate to have an understanding CO in the form of Group Captain Thorpe. Thanks to his initiative, we set out to review existing works procedures in cooperation with Leo Foley, the very responsive District Manager of DHC. The procedures that we progressively introduced were effective, ensuring that we knew at any given time the progress of a particular job and, most importantly, the state of the financial situation.

We actively promoted the improved system at staff visits and it eventually become standard procedure throughout the RAAF.

The episode gave a considerable boost to my standing. However, my big opportunity came unexpectedly, when I had to give an impromptu presentation on Works Procedures to a visiting 'high-powered' Defence Facilities Committee.

Unprepared for the occasion, I had butterflies in my stomach as I stood on the dais in the operations room. With my intuition being on the right track, I opened up by saying that I would present the subject in such a way as if I was addressing an audience who had no idea about it. Although it might have been a risky approach, my gambit succeeded and I was able to give a comprehensive demonstration of how the system worked and to point out its pitfalls.

Later in the Mess, Air Commodore John Lessels, who was the Director-General Accommodation and Works (DGAW-AF), took me aside. He told me that my presentation had been favourably received, in particular by the First Assistant Secretary of the Defence Facilities Division. He also asked questions about my background and experiences. Perhaps I did not grasp the significance of that encounter, but it was the beginning of a long professional and personal relationship that greatly facilitated my career development, extending into the years well beyond my retirement.

There never was a dull moment at Richmond. Amongst the military rituals was the traditional monthly OC parade. For most of us this meant brushing up on neglected ceremonial drill.

Luckily, we had the Operational Command Band at our disposal. As it happened, I became very friendly with the Bandmaster, Flight Lieutenant A.F. 'Archie' Burt, MBE. We often listened to tapes of military music that had been sent to me from Austria. Conscious of my background, Archie always made sure that they played the *Radetzky* march whenever I was on parade as flight commander.

Once, when Stella and I happened to be in Sydney, we noticed a procession of Freemasons in full regalia coming down George Street with the RAAF Operational Command Band leading.

It seems that Archie spotted me whilst I was standing at the corner of the intersection. He waved his baton, turned backwards and gave an order. The band struck up the *Radetzky* march and Archie threw me a smart salute as they went past the corner.

Wearing mufti, I responded by standing to attention and calling out loudly 'Thank you, Archie!', much to the astonishment of the bystanders.

To me it was one of those experiences one never forgets and which make good anecdotes in the years of retirement.

There were many others. One of them occurred on 15 July 1975, when the Administratoin Officer asked what I was going to do in the evening. I replied that I had not planned anything special.

'Good!' said the Wing Commander 'The OC wants you to represent him at a naturalisation ceremony in the Windsor Town Hall. You'll have to wear uniform, but it should be an easy task since you are not required to do anything!'

When I arrived at the scene, I was welcomed by the Mayor, Alderman Cecil Sullivan and the town clerk Ray Rawson, both of whom I had met previously. Ray took me aside and said:

'Frank, I want to show you the program for the evening. The Mayor will speak first, then we'll have the actual ceremony and then you come forward and deliver your speech!'

'My speech?' I gasped, 'I did not know I had to make a speech!'

'Haven't they told you?' Ray asked. 'I am sorry about that, but I am sure you will think of something.'

My training with Rostrum, where we had to give impromptu talks on unusual subjects, came to the rescue. As I always like to say, nothing learned in life is futile. It will always come in handy at the most improbable moments. Whilst the ceremonial part was in progress, I was mentally composing my verbal contribution.

The first thing that struck me was that most of the participants had English family names. Noticing a number of RAAF members, whom I knew came from the UK, it dawned on me that it was now an entirely new ball game since the Labor Government changed the rules. British subjects serving in the Australian forces were now obliged to become naturalised.

I thought I had the clue I needed and I began my speech by saying that way back in 1952 I had been subject to such a ceremony myself. The only difference was that then all the participants had foreign names. By contrast, that night practically everybody was of English, Scottish or Irish descent. One might say that this unique event could be seen as a symbol of the 'winds of change' that the new government had brought about!

Throwing in a commercial about the progressive Windsor/Richmond Council and stressing the good fortune of all those who are able to live in the lovely Hawkesbury region, I mentioned the importance of the RAAF to the local economy. Luckily, I had a few statistics in my head.

Finally, I referred to the good relationship that existed between the Air Force and the civilian population. The applause was enthusiastic. Later, over a glass of wine, the Town Clerk was amazed. 'Frank, did you say you had *not* prepared your speech?'

As 1976 approached, I felt that I was now firmly in the chair. I had received excellent cooperation at all levels, I knew the layout of the base and its infrastructure by heart, and was on top of all current problems. I even successfully managed the esoteric and cumbersome Design List as well as the intricate annual estimates procedures.

Air Commodore Geoffrey Michael had meanwhile assumed command of the base. Thanks to his experience as Director-General Operational Requirements at Air Force Office, he was extremely well versed in works procedures and the all-important budgeting aspects.

1976 brought yet another unique experience in my already colourful service career — I was appointed Liaison Officer to the Air Force Women's Association (AFWA). I am still mystified as to why I was chosen, but I took the appointment in good grace. As Barracks Officer I had a lot to do with the AFWA, assisting them when social functions and art exhibitions were to be organised.

At the end of the year, Group Captain Roy Collinson was replaced by Group Captain John Scotland.

Of all the important dates in my life I shall never forget 10 June 1977. About 10 o'clock in the morning the Group Captain, who was acting OC for the day, called me into his office. Wondering what had gone wrong this time, I walked across to Formation Headquarters with some apprehension.

After acknowledging my salute, the Group Captain took out an envelope from the safe behind his desk and extracted a piece of paper. He then read out something which did not quite sink in, but I understood that there were references to 'Outstanding Dedication' and 'Member of the Order of the British Empire'.

I must have stood dumbfounded whilst the CO shook my hand vigorously, and congratulated me on the prestigious award. The next day, after the official announcement, there was excitement all around, there were many phone calls and telegrams flowed in from the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, the Minister, Chief of the Air Staff and many others.

The investiture took place in September at Government House, Sydney, with the Governor Sir Roden Cutler representing the Sovereign. Thinking back, apart from meeting Her Majesty at a function in Canberra during the Royal Visit in 1992, it was definitely the highlight of my entire career.

The unusual award given to a former airman from the other side received wide attention in the press, even overseas. The BBC in London got into the act on 24 September, by conducting a pre-arranged telephone interview with Gordon Glubb.

'Tell me Squadron Leader,' he asked, 'what is a Senior Barracks Officer?'

The year brought about another surprise. I was granted a two year extension of service that would bring me closer to the fifteen years I needed to qualify for a pension.

Life at Richmond continued to be hectic, but I thoroughly enjoyed looking after what by now I considered as my 'own' Base.

There were extensive major new works projects in progress, keeping me busy with on-site conferences and progress monitoring. These included an extension to the fuel farm, a new fire station, an electroplating workshop, pollution control facilities, resealing of the runway and many others.

During that time there also was the absorbing and fascinating masterplanning exercise.

Once again, I had to learn many new concepts, familiarise myself with intricate procedures and pick up technical jargon.

In 1977, thanks to the persistence of our education officer, who obviously knew what was good for me, I was reluctantly talked into enrolling for a course with the University of Queensland. Although it was five years of hard work, the BA degree helped me considerably towards later progress in the Public Service. Stella conscientiously attended to the tedious task of proofreading my assignments, as she had done whilst I was studying for the OETC.

Air Commodore (later Air Vice-Marshal) J.D. Lessels OBE

When the time for my retirement approached, Air Commodore John Lessels kindly arranged four weeks 'Resettlement Training'. The attachment provided a tremendous contribution to my transition into civilian life. Having passed the so-called Third Division selection test, I was offered an appointment with DGAW.

There were many sad moments before I left the RAAF, amongst them my last appearance as flight commander on the OC's parade on 4 September. I had always liked military ceremony and I felt I would be missing the excitement of these occasions, let alone the nostalgic tune of the *Radetzky* march which by then seemed to have become my own *Leitmotif* (theme music).

Great things were in train when I joined Air Commodore Lessel's Branch. Earlier in 1978, Air Vice Marshal Neville McNamara had been appointed to conduct an inquiry into the possibility of changing the structure of the RAAF in line with modern requirements.

Air Commodore K.R. Janson was subsequently tasked with the progressive implementation of the agreed suggestions contained in what became known as the 'McNamara Report', carrying out his investigations under the title of Head of the Reorganisation Implementation Staff (HRIS).

Within the terms of reference, a team comprising senior appointments was formed in December 1979, to investigate the Air Force Works situation at base level. Much to my surprise, I was included with the objective of contributing to

the deliberations on account of my experience in the field. It was a most enlightening experience.

The Air Force Facilities category was subsequently established as a separate Branch and suitably qualified engineering officers were recruited. The introduction af the new category involved the organisation of training courses. Right from the beginning I became involved in syllabus determination, the drafting of instructions and, in the long run, much lecturing. Eventually, it fell upon me to draft a comprehensive Facilities Manual that would replace the dated AAP 1122.

I think that I was extremely lucky to be able to continue my working life in the Air Force Facilities Branch. Being conversant with the procedures at the coalface, I had few difficulties in adapting myself to the new environment. In the process, I was given many different tasks and did a good deal of travelling. As the crowning achievement, during my final two years I was appointed Acting Director Works Policy in substitution for the established post of Wing Commander.

I retired in 1987, having reached the age of sixty-five. At my farewell party, Air Commodore Gurevitch made a fine speech. I responded by stressing how fortunate I was, having had the opportunity to continue my career amongst friends and in an environment dear to my heart and concluded with a line to the effect that as far as our wives are concerned, retirement means 'twice as much husband on half the pay'.

I then proposed a toast to Stella and all the good wives who contribute so much to our success.

In fact, my working life did not end there. After a year of leisure, I was approached by DGF-N with the astonishing proposal that I write a Facilities Manual for the Navy and, together with the assistance of Graham Bonser from Australian Construction Services, organise training courses for its Facilities Officers.

The appointment lasted for three years. It was an exciting period with much movement, visiting RAN shore establishments, lecturing and making many new friends.

That episode was followed by another year on contract with the RAAF, updating their own Manual.

I was already seventy when I retired for the third time, this time for good.

Whilst writing down my memories, I was surprised to realise how much of my life was spent in the military environment.

I have fond memories of my time with the military. I can honestly say that during the years with the British Forces, the CMF, the RAAF and the Navy, I have always been accepted as a member of the team, treated as a friend by many, and rarely encountered any resentment on account of my unusual foreign background.

Would I like to change my life if I had the chance to go through it again? I don't think so. Whatever happened was probably all part of a pre-ordained learning curve, leading to eventual success in the country of my choice.

Looking back, it had been an eventful life filled with excitement, a few tragedies, but all in all it was a most fulfilling experience.

As I always like to say, I was just lucky!

What I have been able to say on these pages is, of course, not all that has happened to me. So much more remains to be told about historical background, happenings, interesting experiences, anecdotes, people and places. Yet even if I could put all the pieces together it would not be possible to present a complete picture.

In turbulent times, there will always be a thousand stories to be told by different persons, coloured by different circumstances.

This is only one of them.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Letters from Vietnam

Throughout the year in Vietnam I entertained an extensive correspondence. Fortunately, my wife Stella kept all the letters which, together, represent a kind of diary. Reading through the pages it occurred to me that edited excerpts may help to illustrate my experiences, impressions and feelings.

18 April 1970. As you see, my darling, I have arrived safely. Before departing Sydney I was appointed Senior RAAF Representative for the flight and given a seat in the VIP row of the chartered Boeing 707. All that this exalted title meant was that I had to carry the case containing the official documents. The flight to Saigon took a little more than two hours. We flew at about 20,000 feet straight across the Gulf of Siam surrounded by towering cloud banks, the steamy atmosphere down below conjuring up visions of a Turkish bath. The glimpses we caught of the river delta and the extended swamps gave many lasting impressions.

During World War II we used to say that a soldier waits half of his life in vain. Nothing has changed. On arrival we waited for hours and nobody seemed to know what we were supposed to do. Eventually, we were led into an air-conditioned crew room where I spotted Bob Smythe, accompanied by Air Commodore Spurgeon, Wing Commander Bloom (the Equipment Staff Officer at Saigon) and Flight Lieutenant Allan Spooner from No 10SU. The happiest person to see me was, of course, Bob who will return home next week when I have taken his chair.

At the Australian compound in Vung Tau I met many old friends and, at first sight, things did not look half as bad as people had predicted. The setting is quite comfortable, little Vietnamese house girls appear in the morning, make the bed, unpack the luggage, look after the laundry, polish the boots and arrange the room according to their liking. You find your clothes washed, ironed and neatly folded on the bed each evening. The meals are of acceptable standard as far as I am concerned and plentiful. Many Australians would not agree with me, since the bulk of our food supplies comes from American sources which influences the menu to some extent.

20 April 1970. Sunday morning I woke up to find that the weather had changed for the better. The sky is immaculately blue, the sun blazing and it was very warm. Bob expected three Americans to join us for a tour around town. Firstly, we drove up the hill to see the ruins of former French fortifications, then down to the beach. What a sight! Thousands of people on the strand, a milling crowd flocking around the beachside bars, dilapidated shacks interspersed with luxury villas built along the base of the surrounding hills. There are hundreds of Japanese scooters with nice little dolls dressed in bikinis or the traditional ao dai riding side-saddle behind the driver and a multitude of run-down conveyances interspersed with luxury cars belonging to the members of the wealthy Saigon society.

After a meal at a Chinese restaurant we proceeded on the winding road along the hills to take a look at the ostentatious Presidential villa and then continued to the fishing village. There, a large statue of 'The Virgin Blessing the Fleet' indicates that there is a strong Catholic element in the local population. With myriads of shrimps and thousands of fish laid out on boards for sun-drying, the smell was almost sickening. We were quickly surrounded by a mob of little urchins who danced around us happily, patting our behinds, laughing and yelling incomprehensible words. A particularly cheeky little brat assumed, what he probably thought was an authoritative pose, looked at me and called out: 'You Number Ten, Mister!', whereupon, overwhelmed by his audacity, he shook with laughter. You see, 'Number Ten' means bad — very bad, that is.

24 April 1970. The Americans have a large floating Technical Maintenance Facility anchored in the harbour, called the USNS *Corpus Christi Bay*. I was taken there by helicopter and given a conducted tour to see the incredible technical facilities. Certain pieces of our aircraft equipment are repaired in that facility and we thus have reason to visit the ship frequently.

The next morning I moved into my permanent abode. It is an upstairs room, about 11 x 9 feet in size, has a comfortable bed, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, shelves and a writing desk. I am sure life will be quite tolerable. Phan, the girl who looks after my room, admired the religious keepsake that your sister Berlie had given me. 'Jesus Number One!' she said.

29 April 1970. Sunday here is just as any other day, the shops are open and tradesmen are working. As I am not yet game enough to drive into the chaotic traffic by myself, I was glad to accept an invitation by Kev Thomas, our Service Police Officer, to join him and three others on a conducted tour through Vung Tau. Because of his job, Kev seems to know every back street and was therefore able to give us a running commentary. Generally, I got the impression that under French rule the city which, incidentally was then called Cap St. Jacques, must have been a first-class holiday resort. After twenty years of war and the huge influx of refugees from the north, it is now very much run down. What strikes one is the apparent total absence of sanitation. There is no regular garbage collection and refuse is just dumped in the gutters. Water is delivered to the houses and stored in 44-gallon drums and naked children are frequently hosed down by their mothers right on the footpath.

On Wednesday, I went on an overland trip to an American supply depot some 45 miles away. Highway 15, which leads through Long Than to Saigon, is in the process of being upgraded and the new completed sections are wide and sealed. The road, the villages and particularly the bridges are heavily guarded and there seem to be barbed wire and sand bags everywhere. For obvious reasons, no one likes to pull up on the roadside for a stop.

3 May 1970. This Sunday I had been invited by Major Graham, who is in charge of the US supply section of the 388th and our liaison officer, to a 'Splash-down' (a drinking session) held at their Senior NCO Club. A band made up of three sergeants played true Blue Grass music and entertained us with songs. Being a lover of country music, it was an experience for me to hear the real thing.

7 May 1970. Fred Adler, our Public Relations Officer, took me into town on Sunday for a leisurely stroll and photo opportunities. Walking along Front Beach, I understood why it is out-of-bounds. The water is absolutely filthy with sewerage floating about, but there are thousands of unconcerned people bathing in it. All kinds of shops and kiosks line the beach. I noticed a toothless old woman squatting on the ground and cooking strange things which she offered for sale. There are ice cream vendors, fruit drink stalls, souvenir shops and hundreds of deck chairs with people taking in the air.

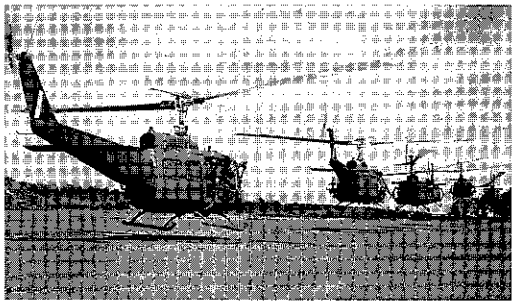
We then went to the Auberge au Petit Chalet, a well-run restaurant which seems to be favoured by our men. Oanh, the proprietor, who is French-educated, had arranged a table over which she presided, with two attractive hostesses placed between us. We were offered slim pastry rolls filled with chicken and pork and cooked in oil, salad consisting of lettuce, cucumber, mint and some strange leaves with a strong flavour and noodles. We also enjoyed a bottle of old Spanish wine. Madame Oanh wore a very attractive ao dai of white satin with black polka dots, her black pantaloons trimmed with lace. The ao dai is really a tight fitting blouse, closed around the neck and extending into two flaps that reach the floor. By the way, it is quite delightful to watch how gracefully Vietnamese women walk about in that spectacular dress, the flaps flowing in the breeze.

On Monday, I flew by helicopter to Long Binh, sixty miles away, in order to get some spares from the US supply depot. Cruising low over Saigon, we saw many boats and ships, houseboats built on stilts at the riverside, overcrowded shanty towns and an endless stream of traffic in the streets. The depot itself covers about twelve square miles — a lavish affair with an incredible array of logistics needed to support a modern army.

9 May 1970. Had another trip to Saigon on Friday, this time aboard a Caribou. By arrangement, I was taken on a conducted tour through the US Aviation Management Centre. An interesting experience, particularly with respect to the much advanced computerisation that the Americans use to manage their enormous supply system.

I stayed overnight at the BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) at Cholon, which is a somewhat dilapidated former French hotel. Returning from a meal in the rooftop restaurant of the nearby US Officers' Club, I went to my room in order to change. When I opened the heavy mirrored door of a huge antique style wardrobe, it fell out and the edge of the door hit me fair and square on the forehead. The heavy blow threw me backwards onto the bed. When I recovered, I looked into a mirror to assess the damage. My black eye caused much hilarity amongst the house girls at Vung Tan. 'You go Saigon? You see taxi girl? You no pay? She hit you?' they asked. I tried to explain what happened, but I doubt they believed me.

12 May 1970. In order to commemorate the completion of four years operations, the achievement of 4000 flying hours and to farewell the outgoing CO, Wing Commander Hibbin, it had been decided to stage a fly-past over the province. Much to my excitement, I managed to obtain permission to fly in the helicopter piloted by Group Captain McKimm, which would give me a unique opportunity to take photos. It was a grand sight to see the whole squadron lined up at the Kangaroo Pad at Nui Dat, rotors spinning and waiting for the signal to take off. They all rose simultaneously, gathering forward speed, gaining height and forming up. After completing a wide circle to the west, we approached the Australian Task Force HQ in perfect formation, trailing red, white and blue smoke. We then passed the Nui Dinh mountains, flew over the bay and approached Vung Tau in close formation, again trailing smoke. Hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers on the ground, watched and trained their cameras skywards, many giving the 'V' sign. We then continued towards the Australian Army Depot at Back Beach, performed a large cir-cle over the sea and lined up for the landing approach on our airfield.



No 9 Squadron Iroquois helicopters on the Kangaroo Pad

After the show was over, there was a boisterous party in the hangar, everybody being in a state of elation. There was a barbecue and plenty of drinks and speeches. Everybody was in the best of spirits and our only grudge was that the Australian public seems to know little about the outstanding morale of our troops who, sometimes under adverse conditions, not only battle on but show a highly commendable attitude.

On Sunday, my crew had been invited to attend a barbecue arranged by the US 259th which was due to relocate further west, necessitated by the recent American intrusion into the Parrot Peak region of Cambodia. In the true American tradition, we had huge, thick steaks, salad and beer. Displaying their well-known flair for colour, some black soldiers arrived in spectacular outfits, one of them wearing a tailored double-breasted cerise cotton suit, a silk shirt with a large collar, frilled front and cuffs. Looking something like Sammy Davies Jr., he was greeted with wolf whistles and had to pose for pictures. A while later, another soldier appeared in a similar rig, only his suit was grass green. He was followed by a different fellow wearing an Indian outfit and headband.

Inevitably, some horseplay takes place at these parties. Unfortunately, my corporal, who is otherwise an intelligent and conscientious fellow, got carried away, picked up a garden hose and doused the well-dressed Red Indian. It almost created an international incident. The man, who was in fact a full-blooded Apache, immediately approached the senior sergeant present and, with remarkable dignity, complained that he was gravely insulted. I suppose the fact that the offence had been committed by an Australian did not help either. It took me some fast talking to explain and apologise, restoring amicable relations. The rather subdued corporal received a friendly 'briefing' later on. I think he was scared when I suggested that the offended guy may be after his scalp!

24 May 1970. Last Sunday, shortly after lunch, Fred and I were offered a lift into the centre of town. From there, we proceeded on foot along the beach to a vantage point where we sat down at the table in front of a vendor's stall and, like good tourists, sipped a bottle of French beer, observing the view and life before us.

Whilst watching, I was fascinated to see the vendor preparing a strange looking green drink in a vitamiser. When we inquired about the drink, the man told us it was a mixture of chopped watercress, condensed milk and shaved ice. He poured the completed drink into a large glass and handed it to a boy who carried it across the street where he handed it to one of the sentries guarding the Presidential palace.

We then went to visit Fred's friends Joan and Mike Seiler, a young couple from Lincoln, Nebraska. Mike is a civil engineer, working on the upgrading of the main highway to Saigon. Having already been in Vietnam four years, they have a good grasp of the local scene. They seemed pleased to have visitors and, over a few glasses of gin and tonic, we discussed politics, the country and many other things. Lisa, the youngest of their three children, occupied me by talking about her favourite comic book characters, what they did and what they said. From that visit a friendship developed that lasted until the family returned to the States three months later.

20 June 1970. The rainy season has finally arrived and it usually pours down from heaven at about four in the morning. The rain is accompanied by terrific flashes of lightning, followed by roaring thunder. The countryside looks beautiful now, everything is green and flourishing. The peasants, under their mushroom hats, are tilling the fields with ploughs drawn by water buffaloes, like their forefathers did a thousand years ago. The women, partly submerged in the water, plant the young rice shoots. In stark contrast to that tranquil sight is the hectic activity on the road where tiny Vietnamese women, perched on top of the giant plant, bulldoze the soil, move huge earth masses about and lay the bitumen.

27 July 1970. Sunday morning. I got up early, did some homework and then attended the Requiem Mass for the late LAC Duncan McNeir who passed away last week in the hospital in Saigon. You probably read about the dreadful accident since the matter received some publicity back home.

In the afternoon, we went to the harbour to attend a reception aboard the *Jeparit*. This Australian merchant vessel, which takes her name from the Victorian birthplace of Sir Robert Menzies, is engaged in the supply run between Australia and Vietnam. In the wardroom, a large oil painting of the town of Jeparit hangs over the fireplace and there is also a signed photo of the former Prime Minister with dedication. We were welcomed by the First Officer, a Navy Lieutenant, appropriately dressed in a kilt. After we had a glass of Scotch we went up on the deck where a crowd of Navy, Army and RAAF personnel was milling about. A sumptuous barbecue was in progress. The view across the harbour, the jetty and the Rach Dun waterfront with its many bars and dives, illuminated by strings of coloured lights was spectacular.

2 August 1970. As Fred always says, kindness pays off. This morning, two mama-sans came into my room, beaming, and presented me with a plate of lychees and a bowl of fruit jelly that they had prepared. Although I'd had a full breakfast, they insisted that I ate, not to do so would have been offensive. The thought that their gesture was in return for the few things I regularly leave for them on my writing desk — the occasional orange or apple, some toilet soap (which they treasure) plus a few Piaster notes, made me feel quite humble. Recently, I had also left an envelope with incense sticks for one of the girls whom I knew to be a Buddhist. She told me that she had lit the incense in front of a Buddha statue and said a prayer for me.

Regrettably, not all of the Australian soldiers have much social contact with the population. Some might be too scared to venture outside the secure military compounds, others apparently do not want to learn about a culture which many consider inferior. Although the Uc Dai Loi, as we are called, are accepted as friendly troops, the Australian tendency to bargain excessively is not always appreciated. Since this attitude differs so much from that of his lavishly spending American comrades we have earned the rather unkind epithet 'Cheap Charlie'.

7 August 1970. Two days ago, I was invited to go on a trip with No 35 Squadron which operates a round trip to various places in the north. We took off at 7am, flew to Tan Son Nhut with passengers and mail and then continued eastwards to the coast where we landed at the small airfield of Phan Tiet. From there, we followed the coastline to Song Mao and further north to Phan Rang where No 2 Squadron operates its Canberra bombers. I was deeply impressed with the beauty of the tropical scenery which reminded me in many ways of Queensland. There is even an extensive coral reef. Later, we called at Cam Ranh Bay, another picturesque place on the coast.

As far as I am concerned, the most attractive place is definitely Nha Trang which is surrounded by high mountain ranges covered with luscious green vegetation. A huge Buddha statue on top of a hill towers over the city. I was told that during the colonial period Nha Trang was a favourite holiday resort for the French. After lunch at the US Officers' Club, we continued inland to Da Lat, our aircraft dodging the towering thermo-cumuli clouds and negotiating the 5000 feet high peaks of the central mountain range. As we approached to land, the voice of the controller from the tower came over the radio, asking what the weather was like at this time in Australia. He was about to go to Sydney on R&R!

The most impressive experience of the trip was the approach to the tiny airstrip at Gia Nghia. The 2000 feet long runway has been bulldozed on top of a mountain and coming in gives you the feeling that you are going to land on a red table top. The strip is just long enough to bring the aircraft to a halt close to the edge of an abyss. Flying between the mountains, we saw raging white water streams in the deep ravines, meticulously laid out orchards, tiny villages and dense, inaccessible jungle. We only had one more stop at Bao Loc before returning to Saigon.

14 August 1970. Great surprise! I received three large envelopes containing twenty-eight letters written by children from the Bentleigh State School where Berlie is teaching. I enjoyed reading these letters in which the children inquire about my well-being, talking about their teacher 'Mrs Lorimer' and describing their many pets. Doing a few quick sums, I established that the kids were proud owners of 35 birds, 58 fish, nine dogs, 15 cats, three tortoises, 24 fowls, three ducks, a rabbit and a mouse. How about that?

Some of the writers expressed quite amazing thoughts for nine-years-olds, like the girl who wondered 'whether I was enjoying myself up there'. Probably the best of the letters is short and to the point. It reads:

> Dear Sir, My name is Michael. I come from South Australia. I am going to Bentleigh State School. I hope you are still alive. I have to go now.

It was a marvellous idea of Berlie's to arrange the letter-writing session and I much appreciate the thought. Wing Commander Coy was intrigued when he read the pages and suggested that I should draft a suitable press release. (It was subsequently published in *RAAF News*, the Melbourne *Herald* and several other Australian papers.) I did of course reply to the kids, telling them about Vietnam, the country and its people. A few weeks later I received another big envelope, this time with drawings.

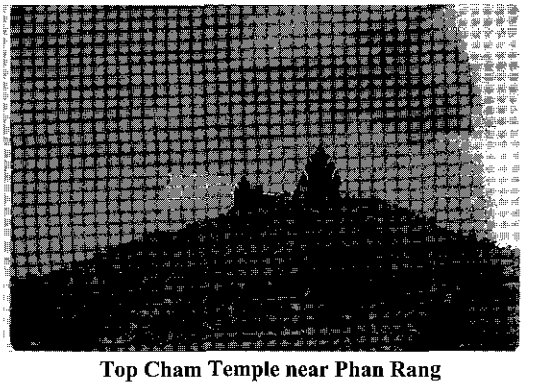
24 August 1970. Last week I was thrilled when the CO asked me to join a selected group to go on a trip to Phan Rang. We took off at 1pm on Friday, cruised along the coast, refuelled at Phan Thiet and continued from there to the North. The scenery looked even more beautiful from the low flying helicopter than from a Caribou. Phan Thiet is a large fishing village at the mouth of a river. Fishing boats are everywhere and on the shore we could see little people hauling in a large net from the sea.

The Base of Phan Rang which is operated by the USAF has been built in a large green valley between rugged mountains. Its design is quite beautiful, very functional and has all the amenities possible.

Lovely tropical shrubs are everywhere, the lawns are well trimmed, roads and buildings being in first class condition. In comparison with the Army Base at Vung Tau, it could almost be described as a country club. Close by we discovered a swimming pool and soon we were lazing in the warm sun, inhaling the fresh, clean mountain air.

Saturday morning, Col Miller and myself were taken care of by the squadron adjutant who suggested a *Tour 43*, that is to say a pre-planned drive around the base which would take exactly forty-three minutes. After lunch, we were taken on an excursion into the city. Although it is out-of-bounds, it seems that one can drive into it, provided it was done as an armed party. Taking our pistols and borrowing a submachine gun for good measure, we went through the gate, chaperoned by a senior officer.

Driving along the road, we had a spectacular view of the ruins of a *Top Cham* temple situated on the peak of a hill. The *Cham* culture apparently dominated that part of the country during the 13th Century. There are still some members of this fierce looking mountain tribe around. We actually happened to see a group of them in town, donning white shirts, baggy white trousers and white turbans. Around their hips they wear a red scarf.



Top Cham Temple near Phan Rang

The places in the North certainly look tidier and cleaner than those down South. There is far less smell and I did not see garbage strewn about, not even at the market. Much to our apprehension, our fearless leader led us right into the market area. In Vung Tau we would not dare to do this unless you left your wristwatch and other valuables at home! Two men of our party opted to stay with the car, whilst the rest of us ventured into the inner labyrinth of the many stalls separated by narrow lanes. Since the Vietnamese are short, the overhead canvasses are tied up rather low and we had to proceed in an almost crouching position.

It was obvious that Westerners were a rare sight here because we were looked at with a mixture of astonishment and noticeable reservation. Nevertheless, some waved at us, some gave the 'V' sign and all the girls giggled. Since it was the Siesta hour, there was practically no activity inside, the womenfolk sleeping in hammocks, on the tables, under the tables or perched on top of the merchandise.

27 August 1970. Last night, I had been invited by Joan and Mike for a farewell. Mike has given up his job with the construction company and they will soon be on their way home. Later at the Mess, there was a sendoff for Flight Lieutenant Doug Patterson, a pilot from the RNZAF. Doug is quite a character, perhaps one of the most sociable men we had round here. I shall miss him, although he sometimes was a bit of a nuisance, brewing tea in the middle of the night and dragging me and others out of bed to join him in his cubicle. Last night, he insisted that I kept him and two other Kiwi pilots company for tea and scotch.

7 September 1970. On Saturday, we had a 'Jade Night' in the Mess. 'Jade' is the code name of a US Unit operating as forward air controllers. Since there is a tactical working relationship, a strong bond exists between their unit and our squadron. The spirited speeches made on that occasion jokingly targeted the many Australian/American cultural differences and the many misunderstandings experienced because of 'language difficulties'. To illustrate the problem, one of our men interjected an American pilot amidst great hilarity by calling out:
'"What did you say? I can't read you!'

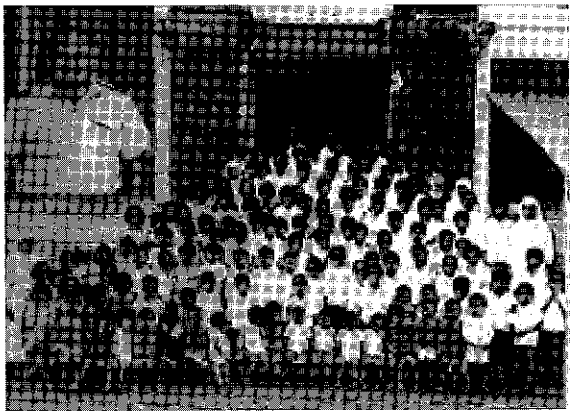
Sunday evening at the Petit Chalet, Oanh introduced me to Lotus seeds. I suppose the statement needs some explanation. I had of course read that the beautiful Lotus flowers which cover ponds and swamps everywhere, are a sacred symbol connected with the Buddhist faith, but I did not know that, apart from the roots of the plant being used in cooking, the seeds are also exploited commercially. The ponds are even divided into leases. Only recently, I had been wondering what was going on, when I saw women standing up to their chest in the ponds on the outskirts of the town, engaged in harvesting the stems which were then loaded onto carts and taken away. I also remembered the girls in the streets who were selling bundles of these stems with their seed pods that look like giant poppy capsules.

Well, under Oanh's guidance I learned to open the pods, extract the seeds from their small compartments and peel off the covering green skin with my fingernails. The exposed white fleshy kernels can then be chewed, reputedly said to produce a light euphoric feeling. Hence the 'Lotus-eaters' as described in Homer's Odyssey. I don't think I shall become addicted to this rather innocent 'social drug'.

2 January 1971. The year 1971 started on a bright note with a seafood and chicken party in the Mess on New Year's Eve, followed by a squadron barbecue on New Year's Day. Honestly, nobody should complain about the catering here! Looking at my Julian calendar, I noticed that on 5 January I shall join the 'One Hundred Club'; that is to say I shall have a mere hundred days to go before departing for good old Uc Da Loi.

1 February 1971. Last Sunday, I volunteered to go with our Padre Roger Boerth and a few other chaps to the local orphanage. Since the important festival of *Tet* was forthcoming it was decided to give the children a party, supplying mince meat, bread, cake, sweets and toys for the occasion. Roger and I would attend to the barbecuing of the many hamburgers needed to feed the hungry crowd.

The orphanage is a very old and neglected building in which 233 children aged between one day and fourteen years live, or rather exist. The building is soon to come down and the children will be transferred into a new complex that the RAAF is building near the beach as a Civil Aid project started by the previous chaplain, Father John Grennal. It is being constructed with voluntary unit labour and monetary donations from the troops, some of the funds raised by the proceeds from occasional game nights.



Father John Grennal and the old RC orphanage at Vung Tau

Although Roger had warned us beforehand that the children needed tender love more than food, meeting the children was still an upsetting experience. Fortunately, some of the chaps are fathers themselves and were very good in handling the situation. It was really heartbreaking to see the little waifs running towards us with open arms, expecting to be taken up and cuddled. They immediately burst into tears when they had to be put back down.

Particularly grim was the picture in the infant section where I saw about ten children only days old. We were told that most of these babies are abandoned by their mothers because they are of mixed blood, some of them physically or mentally handicapped. The death rate is said to be high. Fred Adler told me horrifying stories about his visit to a Buddhist orphanage where he saw rows of ammunition cases used as coffins. Two US Army doctors and our own MO, who is a specialist in tropical diseases, regularly visit the orphanage, having some success in keeping many babies alive.

22 February 1971. Last Saturday, I heard that 35 Squadron was sending a Caribou to Da Lat on a special trip. Somehow, we had heard that an American Caribou had crashed there and our technical personnel thought that the wreck could be 'cannibalised' to augment our spares requirements. Since I was interested in seeing more of that place, I asked Squadron Leader Clark, the CO, for permission to go on the flight with his 'famous airline' as I diplomatically put it. He readily agreed to my request.

We took off on Sunday morning, flew first into Cam Ranh Bay where we stayed for about half an hour before continuing into the mountains. Immediately after landing, our group of scavengers descended upon the wreck of the Caribou, attacking it with hacksaws, screw drivers and wrenches. I think they got what they wanted because they seemed happy with their loot.

Da Lat is about 4900 feet above sea level and one of the most picturesque holiday resorts in Vietnam that you could imagine. No wonder wealthy people from the South spend their holidays there because of the rarefied mountain air. The town features a university and a military college. I also heard that there was a nuclear reactor in the vicinity.

The city is famous for its flowers — roses, carnations, asters and orchids — as well as for its fruit and vegetables which grow profusely and in abundance because of the rich volcanic soil. The market place looks beautiful with its flower stands, loaded with colourful blooms, the vegetable vendors displayed large trays filled with oversized strawberries, enormous carrots and much more. I bought a bottle of strawberry liqueur, said to be a local speciality. Unfortunately, I discovered to my dismay that it is coloured with aniline dye (illegal in the West) that turns your urine red!

Wandering around the market place and through the four-storey building of a *supermarché*, where life was in full swing like anywhere else in Vietnam, we took in the many sights that offer themselves to the 'tourist'. Under a large spreading tree in front of the building we noticed a group of dark-skinned Montagnards, clad in rags. I would have liked to have taken a picture, but felt it might have been embarrassing since these people are said to be very sensitive.

2 March 1971. During the second half of my term, Flight Lieutenant Victor Rodda was posted in as the Squadron Administration Officer. Being of similar age and having common interests (Vic had served with the RAF during World War II), we became close friends and made many exploratory excursions to interesting places. One of these took us to Nui Dat to attend a farewell party for the New Zealand SAS contingent.

Taking place in the warlike situation of a forward base in the jungle, it was a party of a different kind. Nevertheless, it was a very enjoyable experience with good fun, a generous barbecue, drinks, music and sing-song provided by our Kiwi comrades. The occasion featured also the farewell for Brigadier Henderson, who made a speech standing on an ammunition box, holding a can of beer in his hand. The New Zealand Military Attaché in Saigon and his wife attended the party. I felt that it was an unusual sight to see a well-dressed lady in the rough and tough environment of a forward base in the jungle and could not resist taking a photo of her handbag and silk scarf lying on top of an ammunition box amongst the chaotic jungle growth.

Last Friday, Victor and I went to Saigon on some business, also expecting an opportunity to have a sightseeing tour. After all, I have been here for almost a year, yet never managed to take in the sights of that famous city. After calling at Free World Headquarters located in Cholon, we changed into inconspicuous 'tourist' gear and, armed with our cameras, set out on our excursion. What I remember most about the drive into the city is the fact that the air is strangely blue from the exhaust fumes of the thousands of two-stroke engines that power the motorbikes, the trishaws and the Hondas. Almost all the colour slides I took in Cholon have that bluish tinge.

Saigon has certainly preserved its French atmosphere. Wandering along Rue Tu Do gives the immediate impression of being on a Parisian Boulevard. Enjoying a glass of *33 Beer* on the terrace of the Hotel *Continental*, we took in the local scene that pulsated in front of our eyes. So many beautiful women in ao dais, Eurasian types in breath-taking minis, a bustling crowd carrying strange objects and the jungle green of the soldiers intermingling.

We took photos of the imposing monuments in front of the National Assembly building, captured unusual scenery on film, browsed through book stalls, did some window-shopping and finally arrived at the central market. The latter was an amazing experience. We saw wealthy ladies having a pedicure whilst squatting on tables amidst stalls selling smelly fish and bizarre creatures of the sea, an incredible range of souvenirs, oriental ornaments, and paintings. The almost overwhelming range of goods made our selection difficult.

In the midday heat the atmosphere in the giant market hall was oppressive. When we emerged in the street, soaked with perspiration, we decided to go to the *Continental* for lunch.

At the restaurant of the hotel, which bore the intriguing name of *La Dolce Vita*, a polished waiter, who spoke impeccable French, suggested the *plat du jour*. It turned out to be a generous piece of chicken with mushrooms and glazed carrots. A bottle of *33* and a cup of *café noir* concluded our stylish, yet reasonably priced meal.

We then strolled through the tree-lined streets to the cathedral, took more photos and eventually finished up at *The Brink*, an American Officers' Club, situated near the edge of the water. From there, we had a splendid view over the waterfront and the surrounding part of the city. Sooner than expected, the clock showed that it was 3 pm, the appointed time for us to be picked up for our return to Headquarters.

8 April 1971. With the day of my departure approaching fast, I seem to be going through a period of unrest. My feelings may perhaps be more emotional than rational, caused by a number of factors. Firstly, I have developed a genuine affection for the happy and friendly local people. Secondly, I am sad about the indifferent Australian attitude. It is such a pity that so many of our men missed the unique opportunity to learn something about a truly fascinating foreign culture.

Recently I came across a book titled *House of Love*, written by Susan Terry, a nursing sister who worked with an Australian surgical team in a hospital at Phu Quoc in the Delta region. It is a touching story. What impressed me most was her conclusion where she says:

> I hope my small insight into another civilization and another culture, into another mode of thought and another way of life will stay with me forever. I hope that the steadfast old truth of that country and her people on the Delta, in the mighty rivers and the strong brown canals and the tiny streams will be for me, if not timeless, at least lifelong ... In a single day in Vietnam one's emotions can run the full span of the human experience.

That lucid statement occupies my mind quite a lot. Thinking about it, I feel that as for myself, I seemed to have managed not to waste my time in that respect. I certainly learned a lot in 12 months.

My successor, Flight Lieutenant Dennis Phillips arrived yesterday and we are in the process of going through the handover/takeover procedure. All of a sudden, things are moving so fast that it almost seems to be unreal. On Saturday I shall get my clearance sheet and I'll be ready for my final takeoff from the Vung Tau airfield.

15 April 1971. It's Thursday morning and in about two hours I shall be off to Saigon and from there on my way home. The many farewells were a bit upsetting — one becomes rather attached to each other in the isolation of our position. As they say in French, *partir c 'est mourir un peu* — parting is to die a little. Well, my darling, there is not much more I can say at this point except that I am looking forward to our reunion.

Oh I almost forgot: I am enclosing an 'official' letter handed out to all men who are leaving the country. It's supposed to be funny, but there is a lot of food for thought in it. Having been exposed to the rigours of a strange environment, I am sure that many Vietnam Veterans will face a long and painful period of adjustment.

AUSTRALIAN FORCES VIETNAM

ISSUED IN SOLEMN WARNING

This 15th Day of April 1971.

Very soon your husband, son, uncle, lover, cousin, nephew, old friend, brother, having completed an arduous tour in Vietnam will once again be in your midst. You should appreciate that he is no longer the sweet, innocent boy who left Australia fired with patriotic fervour and lust for adventure. He is now de-Australianised, demoralised, older, wiser in the ways of the world and possibly short of temper. However, he is now ready once more to take his place as a member of normal society, to engage in life, liberty and the much delayed pursuit of happiness.

In making your joyous preparations to welcome him back into responsible society, you must make allowances for the crude environment in which he suffered for the past twelve months.

One of the earliest indications of the changes of character may be periodic hot and cold flushes, accompanied by shortness of breath and trembling of the knees. This could be either due to heat, the rigours of an Australian winter or to mini skirts which he has never seen. He will gaze in awe and fascination at blonde hair, blue eyes, clean white sheets, hotels, beer glasses, late model cars and tight sweaters. Remember that his only contact with white women has been through the pages of Playboy magazines and he will probably think that all women have staples in their navels, if you wish to disillusion him, do so gently.

Be careful not to say 'Let's go for a walk' or 'I wish it would rain' or 'You buy me Saigon Tea'. This is important, as he may react violently. Similarly, show no alarm if he prefers to squat on the ground rather than sit on a chair. He may slyly offer to sell cigarettes to the postman or the milkman when he thinks no one is watching. He will pick at his food suspiciously as though he thought someone was trying to poison him.

Don't be surprised if he answers all questions with 'I hate this place!', 'Number one', 'Number ten tou' or 'No sweat about that'. Please, be tolerant when he tries to buy everything under the stated price, accuses the grocer of being a thief and refuses to enter buildings that don't have steel-mesh screens over the doors and windows. When he walks on tiptoe across your freshly planted bulbs and crouches under the windows, humour him. He doesn't trust the path — it may be mined. Flushing toilets will be a constant wonder to him. Once he has overcome his initial fear of them, he will probably stay there for hours, pressing the button and listening to the unaccustomed sound. If he grabs a shovel and heads for the back garden, merely direct him to the nearest correct room and gently relieve him of the shovel.

If he is reluctant to arise at a suitable hour (we suggest noon), simply whisper 'Lights on the wire!' and watch him leap out of the bed with a strangled cry and grovel under the carpet. Never ask him if it rains in Vietnam, he may answer you in offensive language. If you ask him 'Are the women really flat?' he will either laugh or cry — neither is good for him. Encourage him to drink out of a glass. If you give him a can of beer, he will drink it, but he may fling it over his shoulder with a roar of 'Up the old red rooster!' and the furniture will suffer.

Force of habit may cause him to do some apparently odd things, sleep with his boots on, shower in public, swear fondly at his closest friends or grind his cigarette butts into the carpet. He will constantly look at trees, not because he is an ornithologist, but because he suspects a sniper. He will distrust bus-stops as they have an unpleasant association with grenades, and if a litter bug throws something from a passing car, he will scream loudly and dive for the gutter. This can be amusing and will endear him to passers by. Please explain to visitors that he is not used to Australian customs when they complain as he searches them before they enter his house. This is the normal procedure to prevent bombs being smuggled into buildings. If he happens to be driving along as a postman blows his whistle, hang on. You can expect a sudden stop. In Vietnam, the second blast of the whistle is followed by bullets.

You may have to make allowances or explain to visitors if he wanders about the house, wearing only a hat and a towel or just his underpants. Tell him that in Australia people normally wear clothes. If you are in a car with him driving, you will have to keep reminding him that we drive on the left side of the road or he will edge over to the right, all the time with his hand on the horn. You may also tell him that excessive horn blowing is illegal in Australia. When he wants a taxi, be kind and get one for him. He may stand on the edge of the road, waving as you would indicate goodbye, and may get abusive if they wave back at him. After getting him a cab, explain that the driver is not a cheat or 'Inky Dow' or even 'Number Welve' and he has to pay the price showing on the meter when the journey is finished.

If he has a slightly pained expression on his face and starts heading for the nearest fence or brick wall with an unusual, knees together, half run/half walk, keep him moving until you can direct him to the nearest public toilet. This is most likely to occur when he leaves the local hotel after lunch (usually between the hours of 4 pm and 6 pm).

If he goes to cross a road in heavy traffic or even light traffic, at any time or any place, inform him about pedestrian crossings and traffic lights. This may save his life or him from a nasty accident.

If you should arrange a meeting in a hotel lounge, don't be surprised if he drags you into the darkest corner and before he gets fresh will say to you 'Me buy you Saigon Tea'. If he complains of being thirsty and is looking for a five gallon plastic container, explain to him that the water from the tap is 'potable'. Never question him about such items as etherised eggs, American bacon, C Rations, ice cream, rubber trees, chlorinated water, swamps, chomper ants, snakes, mud or Ho Chi Min. If your family is fond of Ham and Lima beans, corn beef, sweet corn or Vienna sausages, serve them when he is not around.

Make no flattering remarks about exotic South-East Asia, avoid mention of the benefits of overseas duty, the fun-sound of monsoon rain on the roof and above all, ask permission before mentioning food delicacies of the East such as 'Flied Lice'. The mere reference to any of these subjects may trigger off an awesome display of violence.

For the first few months until he is house-broken, be specially watchful should he be placed in the company of a woman, particularly one who is young, beautiful and has round eyes. His first reaction may be to go into a state of catatonic shock.

Take advantage of this momentary hesitation and move the lady out of his reach. He should be a rational human being again in about a year or so. Keep in mind that beneath his tanned and tough rugged exterior there beats a heart of pure gold. Treasure this, for it is about the only thing of value he has left. Try to make him feel important and occasionally whisper to him 'Uc Dai Loi Number One!' to boost his morale.

Under no circumstances mention the word 'Cheap Charlie' as this can be dangerous. Explain to him that the rain is necessary at times, bar maids are not easily won in Australia and taxi drivers are not robbers. Point out to him when necessary that Vietnam is a long way away, everybody loves him and that mosquitoes won't hurt him. Treat him with kindness, tolerance, breakfast in bed, an occasional shot of good whisky and you will soon be able to rehabilitate this hollow shell of the man you once knew.

Above all, humour him. The environment of Vietnam and the Viet Cong could not shutter his composure, but civilisation just might. His rehabilitation is up to you, being his friend or family. Good luck!

Commander Australian Forces Vietnam.

The Ballad of Cheap Charlie

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie
He no buy me Saigon Tea.
Saigon Tea cost many, many Pi,
Uc Dai Loi, he Cheap Charlie.

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie.
He no part with MPC.
MPC worth many, many Pi,
Uc Dai Loi, he cheap Charlie.

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie,
He no go to bed with me.
For it costs many, many Pi.
Uc Dai Loi, he Cheap Charlie.

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie,
Make me give him one for free -
Mama-San go crook at me.
Uc Dai Loi, he cheap Charlie.

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie,
He gave Baby-San to me.
Baby-San cost many, many Pi.
Uc Dai Loi, he Cheap Charlie.

Uc Dai Loi, Cheap Charlie,
He go home across the sea - ,
Baby-San he leave with me.
Uc Dai Loi, he Cheap Charlie!

The History of the Air Force Facilities Branch

Historically, the works organisation of the RAAF had its origin in the Directorate of Works and Buildings (July 1925 to December 1970), subsequently the Controller of Works (January 1971 to January 1975) and later the Director-General of Accommodation and Works — Air Force (DGAW-AF). Until then, Works Officers comprised a qualified and experienced group of specialists who were capable of performing a variety of activities in a contingency situation or in an area of operations, independent from commercial and industrial involvement. Their activities included the construction and maintenance of facilities that form the basic infrastructure for air operations — runways, hard-standing, hangars and support facilities as well as the performance of essential operational engineering services. Works Officers were also capable of supervising the repairs to bomb-damaged aircraft pavement and the repair of battle damages to other facilities.

These officers had performed such tasks within Australia and overseas during World War II and the Vietnam conflict when three self-contained Airfield Construction Squadrons (ACS) operated. The Construction Squadrons have a proud record, their manifold achievements demonstrated by the construction of the first basic airfield at Tindal, hard-standing at RAAF Base Amberley and many other lasting constructions. Unfortunately, following the periodical re-assessment of Australia's strategic situation and the perceived absence of a major threat in the region, the Airfield Construction Squadrons were disbanded soon after the Whitlam Government took office following the Federal Election in 1972.

In retrospect, the demise of the ACS organisation with its proven capacity was regrettable. Not only was all the expensive heavy equipment irretrievably disposed of, but the experienced personnel disappeared into the wider world of commercial construction enterprises and could not be recalled should the need arise. I think it is worth mentioning that, mindful of contingency situations that could arise without much warning, the Air Force gave much thought in later years to the establishment of a core construction capability that could be enlarged in national emergencies. In the process I was involved in the drawing up of a basic document dealing with a 'shadow' establishment that could be activated at any time and enlarged as necessary.

Apart from the large-scale construction requirements in an operational context, there is also the need to construct and maintain the facilities required on each Base throughout the Air Force as an ongoing process. At Base level, the management of Facilities was always carried out by the Barracks Officer (Barracks Master in the Navy), but the physical side of the requirement was attended to by the 'Commonwealth Department of Works', 'Department of Housing and Construction' or whatever it was called at any particular point in time.

The Barracks Section also had a small team of qualified tradesmen comprising electricians, carpenters, plumbers, painters and mechanics. However, because of industrial constraints, these tradesmen could only be employed in the performance of minor tasks that did not infringe on the work scope of the operatives of the local DHC Depot personnel. Not infrequently, industrial disputes did arise at some RAAF establishments over seemingly insignificant demarcation issues, depending on local union attitudes. In many respects, this situation which for instance reduced a fully qualified electrician to exchanging burnt-out light bulbs, was a great waste of highly trained tradesmen.

It was only during 1979/1980 that after much lobbying and a chance representation by a Base Commander to the Secretary during an official visit, agreement was reached concerning the introduction of two new financial Sub-divisions, albeit with rather limited funds. Initially designated as Divisions 236 and 237, these gave the Base administration the right to arrange minor jobs under local contracts or by using Barracks tradesmen, although subject to liaison with the local DHC District Manager. A welcome new opportunity, it was in fact only a token concession.

Traditionally, Barracks Officer posts were filled by officers from the Equipment (later Supply) category. Incredibly, the Barracks Officer appointees assumed their duties without general or specialist training and thus had to rely heavily on the expertise and cooperation of the local Works Depot. During the early seventies it became increasingly evident that the reliance on the advice of the District Manager at Base level was not always in the best interest of the RAAF. As the Department of Works controlled the budgetary cash allocations, there was widespread doubt that the Air Force did obtain what was euphemistically referred to as 'Value for Money'. Furthermore, the Defence Works Budgeting and Programming procedures became more and more complex, requiring an in-depth knowledge which, as I knew only too well from my own experience, could not be expected from the average Equipment Officer.

Whilst tradition compelled us to carry on in the accustomed manner, an opportunity for change arose in 1978, when Air Vice-Marshal Neville McNamara was tasked to carry out a review of the structure of the RAAF, examining the possiblity of reorganisation in order to bring Australia's Air Force into line with modern requirements. Following the presentation and adoption of the report, a team was formed under the direction of Air Commodore K.R. Janson. The appointment was designated as HRIS, that is 'Head of the Re-organisation Implementation Staff'. The objective of the team was to consider the practicalities of the recommendations contained in the McNamara Report and suggest what measures should be adopted towards their implementation.

As far as I know, the voluminous report contained only one sentence with reference to the Works organisation, suggesting that 'there was room for improvement'. The terseness of the statement may be an indication of the degree of importance accorded to the matter. Judging by the traditional budgetary neglect Facilities requirements had to contend with in the past, it

should have been quite obvious that the top level was thinking in terms of aircraft, ignoring the home truth that without an adequate ground infrastructure — the 'platform' — these aircraft would never get into the air.

The reorganisation study seemed to provide a splendid opportunity to highlight the shortcomings of the present system and, most of all, lobby for the creation of a Facilities Officer category which would supply a core of dedicated Works Officers, independent of the Supply Branch. The wider aim of DGAW-AF was to eventually fill all Barracks Officers posts with engineering qualified personnel, making sure that the RAAF did manage its facilities in an efficient and most of all cost-effective manner. Considering the meagre funds traditionally made available for Facilities maintenance, the latter aspect was a very important consideration.

Quite unexpectedly, I became involved in the investigation and the subsequent organisational arrangements arising from the formation of a Facilities Branch. As it happened, in December 1979, Squadron Leader Zenon Cicikszа who was the Director Works Policy in the DGAW-AF Branch, suggested that I should be included in the proposed team that under the direction of HRIS was to carry out the field investigation. Unwittingly I thus took part in what was a in effect a high-powered evaluation of existing conditions in the Facilities area.

The team comprised Air Commodore K.R. Janson (HRIS), Air Commodore R.R. Candy (DG-Supply), Air Commodore J.D. Lessels (DGAW-AF), Wing Commanders A.A. Page and M.F. Linden (both HRIS Staff), Squadron Leader Zenon Cicikszа (A/DWPOL) and myself (designated WPROG4). Group Captain R.N. Gurevitch attended several sessions in his capacity as DFPP. The proposed itinerary for two separate tours included visits to both Command Headquarters as well as RAAF Bases Edinburgh, Point Cook, Amberley and Williamtown.

Mindful of the opportunity to utilise the experience gained during my five years at the 'coal face', I decided that I would actively participate in all the discussions and, by posing leading questions, induce the local appointments to talk about those contentious points that could sway the assessment of the HRIS team in our favour. As it turned out, this subtle guidance was most important because it became evident from the start that many base commanders seemed to have only a rather hazy idea about how things were done in the Facilities area and tended to resort to the popular cliches, many of them being without substance. Furthermore, many of the officers involved had not been adequately briefed about the purpose of the visits and did not contribute as much as they should have, perhaps because of a fear that they might 'rock the boat'.

The conferences at the bases we visited proceeded in a similar vein as those at Command Headquarters. Many unsubstantiated allegations were aired, but on the other side of the spectrum, I was very pleased to observe that professionalism did exist amidst the general ignorance. It was, for instance, good to hear the Senior Barracks Officer at Amberley give an excellent and informed presentation.

Predictably, there was DG-SUP opposition to a new category who obviously did not like the idea of losing a function carried out by the Equipment (Supply) Empire. There even was a bizarre suggestion that Works Officers should be integrated in the RAAF Engineering Branch. But in spite of all the pitfalls encountered during the investigation and a good deal of behind-the-scene lobbying against the proposal, the general picture that emerged must have convinced HIRS that there was definitely a need for change.

In the end, common sense prevailed and the proposed Facilities Officers category was established in 1982, yet it was not until 1986 that the title of DGAW-AF was to be changed to DGF-AF, that is Director General Facilities —Air Force. The Navy followed suit with DGF-N, but the Army stuck to DGAW-A. The anecdotal tradition within the Facilities Division has it that the then head of the branch, a Brigadier, had said he did not want to become known as DG of 'FA'.

The initial 'constrained establishment of the DGF-AF Branch was set at one Air Commodore, two Group Captains, eight Wing Commanders, eighteen Squadron Leaders, seventeen Flight Lieutenants and nine Flying Officers. Twenty-four positions of the branch were to be filled by civilian personnel of equivalent status to Service Officers.

In accordance with the perceived capability requirements, the peacetime role of the Facilities Officer was defined in a wide spectrum, embracing Unit Facilities Services, Works and Technical Services, Works Programming and Administration, Financial Management, New Works Proposals, Project Management, Master Planning, Heritage and Environment Management, Property Administration and Engineering Services. Surely, a tremendous field of individual disciplines that would require personnel with a suitable degree and in addition carefully planned training. Whilst academically qualified persons could be secured in part from the Undergraduate Scheme and through direct entry, it was accepted that additional internal training of all Facilities personnel was also required.

The organisation of the new requirements were within the scope of the responsibilities of the Director Works Policy Section. The first objective was of course the formulation of a training syllabus for Facilities Officers and the determination of 'Attainment Levels'. In due course, Squadron Leader Ted Hewby and myself were attached to the Training and Education Section at Support Command, Melbourne, to attend to these matters. There, under the guidance of Staff Officer Ground Training (SOGT), we went through the fascinating process of working out on a huge board the various subjects to be taught, their relative importance in the working context, the number of hours to be dedicated to each subject during the duration of the course and the 'Attainment Levels' to be achieved. It was an entirely new experience for me and I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity.

When all the documentation had been prepared and approved, No 1 Barracks Officer Course was held between 5–9 May 1980 at No 1 Stores Depot, RAAF Tottenham. Ted and myself were attached as guest lecturers and, looking at a copy of the course program, I find that I was allocated eleven periods in which to talk on the Works Organisation within the Department of Defence, Works Procedures and Barracks Officers responsibilities. The course was a full success and many others followed. On some courses we also had invited Navy representation which turned out to be extremely beneficial and unexpectedly would involve me as a consultant with the Navy after my retirement from the Public Service.

During the following years the training scheme was enlarged further to include courses on High Voltage Switching, Energy Conservation and other subjects. We even managed to get one of our Officers onto a specialist course in the UK about *Structural Blast Damage*.

The next step was the preparation of up-to-date instructions on all Facilities aspects. Since writing and publishing a manual is a lengthy process, we initially resorted to the use of Air Force Facilities Temporary Instructions (AFTIs) which could be issued at short notice and became effective almost immediately. After much ground work, the RAAF Facilities Manual emerged, its chapters being composed from the information contained in the respective AFTIs. As time went by, the Manual gained in volume, incorporating many aspects that were not planned originally, like information on the Defence Organisation and other Government departments involved in the Facilities process, the duties of Facilities appointments, Parliamentary Works Committee procedures, Financial Management, the Major New Works Process, Property Administration, Environment Protection, Engineering Services and even Fire Protection Engineering. The original drafts for the technical subjects were of course prepared by the respective experts within the Branch.

The Manual became a most important document and greatly assisted in the establishment of uniform and efficient Facilities administration throughout the Air Force. Its publication was all the more important because the Facilities Division never succeeded in completing their own FACMAN 1, although they drew heavily on the information contained in the Air Force Manual. It is worth mentioning that the Navy later 'borrowed' the RAAF Manual, requesting permission to use it for a start until an independent Navy Facilities Manual could be produced.

During the following years, the Air Force Facilities Branch became a formidable, self-sufficient organisation. Many major projects, such as the creation of the new base at Tindal are proof of the professionalism and the dedication with which the Facilities officers attended to their tasks.

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Living History 1935-1990

1935	Italy invades Abyssinia
1936	Civil War in Spain Olympic Games in Berlin Edward VIII abdicates, succeeded by George VI
1937	Coronation of George VI Japan launches attack on China
1938	Germany annexes the Republic of Austria (Österreich) The Munich Agreement - Germany occupies the Sudetenland Germany marches into Czechoslovakia (C.S.R.)
1939	End of the Spanish Civil War Italy and Germany sign 'Pact of Steel' Germany and Russia invade Poland: Beginning of World War II Britain, France and India declare war on Germany Australia at war
1940	Denmark and Norway occupied by Germany France defeated in German Blitzkrieg The Battle of Britain The Air Disaster at RAAF Station Canberra (Re-named RAAF Base Fairbairn in 1962)
1941	Yugoslavia and Greece fall to the German advance German paratroopers take Crete The North-African campaign Germany invades Russia
1942	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor: The US at war Japan advances into South-East Asia Singapore falls Darwin bombed The Battle of Stalingrad
1943	Allies land in Sicily Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet at Teheran Air war over Germany
1944	German troops move into Hungary D-Day: the Allies land in Normandy Paris liberated British land in Greece

	The German Ardennes offensive The V1 flying bomb attacks on London
1945	Allies cross the Rhine, US and Russian armies meet on the Elbe The Battle of Berlin, Adolf Hitler dead: Germany defeated US drops A-Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Japan surrenders End of World War II The Yalta Conference: Agreement on the Four-Power occupation of Germany and Austria, the Nuremberg Trials and the United Nations President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Curtin die
1946	Inauguration of the United Nations The Iron Curtain divides Europe: beginning of the Cold War France recognises the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam
1947	Partition of India: the State of Pakistan created The State of Israel proclaimed
1948	Olympic Games in London The Berlin Airlift
1949	Agreement on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reached Germany divided: the East-German Democratic Republic declared
1950	Viet Minh forces attack the French in Indo-China North Korea attacks the South: beginning of the Korean War
1951	The H-bomb successfully tested
1952	Olympic Games in Helsinki King George VI dies
1953	Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II Stalin dies End of the Korean War The Battle of Dien Bien Phu
1954	Sino-French Pact ends First Indo-China War Vietnam divided at the 17th Parallel
1955	Warshaw Pact signed State Treaty ends occupation of Austria West Germany becomes sovereign State

1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne
The Hungarian Uprising
The Suez Canal Crisis
Israel attacks Egypt

1957 Treaty of Rome creates European Common Market
Malaya (later renamed Malaysia) gains independence

1958 Algeria rebels
Anti-British riots in Cyprus

1959 China invades Tibet
Castro's Guerillas take over Cuba

1960 Olympic Games in Rome
The 'Sharpville Massacre' in South Africa
The U-2 spy plane incident

1961 Soviet Union puts first man into space
The Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba
The Berlin Wall divides the City

1962 Australia sends military advisers to Vietnam
Algeria gains independence
The Cuban Missile Crisis
The Red Sales aerobatic team tragedy: six RAAF pilots die in crash

1963 President J.F. Kennedy assasinated

1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo
The Malayan Emergency
US steps up action against the Communist regime of Vietnam

1965 Sir Winston Churchill dies
US sends Marines into Vietnam
Australia joins action in South Vietnam

1966 The Batttle of Long Tan
The 'Cultural Revolution' in China

1967 Israel's Six Day War against the Arabs
The Anglo-French Concorde, the world's first super-sonic airline unveiled
Prime Minister Harold Holt drawns in the surf at Portsea

1968 Olympic Games in Mexico
Tet Offensive
Apollo 8 orbits moon

1969	The first man on the moon President Ho Chi Minh dies Presentation of the Standard to No 10 Squadron Exercise 'Town House' at Darwin
1970	Charles de Gaulle dies Cyclone 'Ada' hits Townsville No 9 Squadron presented with the Duke of Gloucester's Cup Captain Cook Bicentenary celebrations
1971	Australia withdraws troops from Vietnam India defeats Pakistan in two week war Golden Jubilee of the RAAF
1972	Olympic Games in Munich Labor wins Government after 23 years in opposition Major changes in the Defence organisation 21st Birthday of the WRAAF
1973	Vietnam cease-fire declared at Paris Peace Conference Israel launches Yom Kippur offensive against Egypt
1974	Cyclone 'Tracy' flattens Darwin
1975	Saigon falls to the North Vietnamese Forces End of the Second Indo-ChinaWar Civil War in Timor The Whitlam Government dismissed by the Governor-General Liberal/Country Party coalition wins election, Malcom Fraser Prime Minister General Franco dies, Monarchy returns in Spain
1976	Olympic Games in Montreal Chairman Mao Tse-tung dies
1977	Queen Elizabeth II celebrates Silver Jubilee First arrival of 'Boat People' from Vietnam
1978	Sir Robert Menzies dies
1979	Cambodia falls to the Vietnamese invaders The Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran after 14 years in exile The Teheran Hostage Crisis USSR invades Afghanistan
1980	Olympic Games in Moscow Rhodesia becomes independent Zimbabwe Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams KBE,CB,CBE,OBE,DSO dies

1981	Iran releases US Embassy hostages Political unrest in Poland Freedom of the City of Canberra for RAAF Base Fairbairn Diamond Jubilee of the RAAF
1982	The Falkland War The French-built Exocet missile emerges as a decisive weapon
1983	US invades Grenada
1984	Olympic Games in Los Angeles Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, KBE,CB,DSO,AFC dies
1985	Mikhail Gorbachev the new Soviet leader The 'Rainbow Warrior' Incident
1986	US launches air strike against Libya The Chernobyl nuclear disaster
1987	'Perestroika' (reconstruction) and 'Glasnost' (openness) in the USSR 'Welcome Home' Parade for Australia's Vietnam Veterans in Sydney
1988	Olympic Games in Seoul The Australian Bicentenary
1989	The Berlin Wall comes down Germany reunited Break-up of the Soviet Empire, end of the Cold War The Tiananmen Square Incident
1990	The Gulf War — Operation Desert Storm RAAF Base Fairbairn's 50th Anniversary

Ex-Luftwaffe MBE

Bibliography

Bowman John, S. (ed.), *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War*, Bison Books Corporation, USA, 1985.

Department of Air, *The Golden Years: The RAAF 1921–1971*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1971.

Dowes, Alan, *Crime Chemist*, John Long, London, 1965.

Dupuy, Trevor Nevitt, *Chronological Military History of World War II*, Franklin Watts, New York, 1965.

Grenville, Kenneth, Grunfeld, Frederic V., *The Saving of South Vietnam*, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1972.

Kiehl Heinz, *Kampfgeschwader 'Legion Condor' 53,* Motorbuchverlag, Stuttgart, 1996.

Lax, Mark, Wing Commander (ed.), *Always Ready, A History of RAAF East Sale,* RAAF Publications Unit, Melbourne, 1993.

Odgers, George, *Mission Vietnam*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974.

Pemberton, George (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, Lansdowne, Sydney, 1993.

Salomon, Ernst von, *Die Kadetten,* Rowohlt, Reinbeck bei Hamburg.

Taylor, A.J.P., *The Origins of the Second World War,* Penguin Books Harmondsworth, 1964.

Young, Peter, Brigadier (Ed.), *Atlas of the Second World War,* G.P.Putnam's Sons, New York, 1974.

Glossary

AAP	Australian Air Publication — prefix followed by an identifying number allocated to the manuals issued in the RAAF
Abwehr Service	*German.* The German Counter Intelligence
AFWA	Air Force Womens Association, a fund-raising organisation in aid of the education of children of deceased RAAF members
Alien Pass	The identifying document formerly issued by the Department of Immigration to migrants arriving in Australia
Allied Control Commission	The military government of post-war occupied Germany
AMDTU	Air Movement and Development Training Unit
Anschluss	*German.* The annexation of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938
Anschlussgesetz	*German.* The law that formalised the Annexation; *see ANSCHLUSS*
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AOG	Aircraft Operational Grounded, in urgent need of spare parts
ASCO	Australian Services Canteen Organisation
Assisted Passage Scheme	The assisted Australian post-war migration programme
ATTU	Air Transportable Telecommunication Unit
AVRN	The regular army of the Republic of South Vietnam

BAFSV	British Armed Forces Special Vouchers (Military currency issued in occupied territories for the exclusive use of military personnel)
Billet-doux	*French.* Love letter
Blindflugschule	*German.* Blind Flying School, a training school for instrument flying
Bluthund	*German, informal.* Bloodhound, a sadistic instructor
Bordfunker	*German.* Aircrew wireless operator
Bordfunkerschein	*German.* Licence to operate radio equipment in aircraft
Braun, Eva	Female companion of Adolf Hitler. Her existence was not generally known in Germany. Committed suicide at the same time as Hitler
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff, now Chief of Air Force
Cheap Charlie	Derogatory term used by the Vietnamese, referring to stingy soldiers
CMF	Citizens Military Forces
CSF	Central Flying School
Czardas	*Hungarian.* Energetic Hungarian national dance
Dämmereffekt	*see* Heaviside Layer Effect
Deutsches Kreuz in Gold	*German.* German Cross in Gold, a decoration awarded for valour, ranking below the Knight's Cross; *see RITTERKREUZ*
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DGAW-AF	Director General Accomodation Works - Air Force at Department of Defence; later changed to Director General Facilities – Air Force
DGF-AF	Director General Facilities-Air Force (formerly known as Durector General Accommodation Works – Air Force)
DHC	Department of Housing and Construction

Dust-off	Medical evacuation from the field, usually by helicopter; *see MEDIVAC*
EDP	(*Australian usage*) Electronic Data Processing
EDP	(*US usage*) Equipment deadlined for parts (*see AOG*)
Eintänzer	*German.* A hired male dancer at a 'Ladies Only' nightclub
Eisernes Kreuz	*German.* Iron Cross, decoration for valour, awarded in two classes
ENIGMA	*German.* A secret cryptographic device used by the German forces during World War II
Ersatz	*German.* A substitute for the real item (eg coffee, beer, butter); the term is often used in a demeaning sense.
Ersatzheer	*German.* Strategic forces kept in reserve; *see ERSATZ*
Femme d'un certain age	*French.* A woman of a certain age — a middle-aged lady
Fähnrich	*German.* Junior Ensign, Cadet
Feldwebel	*German.* NCO of Sergeant rank
Flieger Hitlerjugend	*German.* A branch of the Hitlerjugend interested in aviation, particularly in gliding; *see HITLERJUGEND*
Flugnachrichtenschule	*German.* Air Communications Training School
Four-in-a-jeep	The legendary patrol vehicle jointly manned by Military Police personnel of the four Allied powers which occupied the city of Vienna during the postwar period, portrayed in the 1949 Carol Reed film 'The Third Man'.
Fräulein	*German.* 'Miss', a young unmarried lady
Freyagerät	*German.* An earlier German RADAR device

Führer	*German.* The Leader. The assumed official title of Adolf Hitler
Führerhauptquartier	*German.* The Headquarters of Adolf Hitler as C-in-C of the German armed forces; *see WEHRMACHT*
G-Forces	The gravitational forces impacting on the body during flight manoeuvres
Gefreiter	*German.* Junior NCO, Lance Corporal
GI	An enlisted soldier in the US Army; also meaning 'conforming to US Army regulations; of standard government issue'
GLO	Ground Liaison Officer
Glühwein	*German.* Hot mulled wine
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
Goebbels, Paul Joseph	1897-1945. German Minister for Propaganda under Hitler. Committed suicide.
Göring, Hermann, Wilhelm	1893-1946. German Field Marshal, Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe. Committed suicide.
Gruppe	*German.* A Luftwaffe Wing organisation, identified by Roman numerals
Habsburg Monarchie	*German.* The Imperial/Royal house of the Hapsburgs that ruled Austria and Hungary until 1918
Hauptbahnhof	*German.* Central Railway Station
Hauptfeldwebel	*German.* Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer Disciplinary (WOD) in the RAAF
Hauptmann	*German.* Captain
Heaviside Layer Effect	Disturbances in the ionized gaseous layer in the upper atmosphere, affecting radio transmissions at dawn and dusk

'Heil Hitler!'	*German.* (Hail Hitler!), official greeting encouraged during the Nazi period in deference to the Führer
Himmler, Heinrich	1900-1945. Head of the German SS and the Gestapo. Committed suicide
Hitler, Adolf	1989-1945. German dictator, born in Austria. The 'Führer of the nation'; *see THIRD REICH.* Committed suicide
Hitlerjugend (HJ)	*German.* The National-Socialist (NS) Youth organization
Hitlerjunge	*German.* A male member of the above organization
HQOCU	Headquarters Operational Command Unit (the support unit at Command HQ)
HRIS	Head of the Re-organisation Implementation Staff
Hundertschaft	*German.* A group of a hundred men
Insertion	The airborne insertion of combat troops in enemy territory, usually by helicopter
'Ivan'	German collective term applied to Russian soldiers
'J'attendrai'	*French.* 'I'll wait for you!' Popular French nostalgic song, expressing sorrow about the POWs still away from home
J.B.Were & Son	The oldest Australian stockbroking firm based in the city of Melbourne
Joan of Arc	Legendary French heroine who defeated the English at Orléans on 8th May 1429. Patron Saint of France
Kampfgeschwader (KG)	*German.* Bomber squadron
Kommandantur	The local Defence Headquarters
K Ration	A small package containing emergency rations used by US forces in the field. (From the initial of Ancel Keys, an American psychologist who instigated it).

Krupp Steel	Superior steel produced by the Krupp Works
K & K	*German.* 'Kaiserlich & Königlich'(Imperial & Royal), official designation of the Austrian Dual Monarchy (Austria/Hungary) until 1918.
Kunsthonig	*German.* A sugary substance, wartime substitute for honey; *see ERSATZ*
Landsturm	*German.* The conscripted militia during World War II. 'Dad's Army'
Landsturmmann	A member of the above unit
Legion Condor	The title of the German contingent operating during the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939; later awarded to KG 53; *see RADITIONSGESCHWADER*
Leitmotif	A recurring short melodic theme to suggest a character or thing, *esp.* in Wagnerian music
Link Trainer	A ground-training device for training pilots and aircrew in the use of instruments, an earlier type of simulator
Luftwaffe	*German.* The German Air Force
Luftwaffenhelferin	*German.* Female member of the Luftwaffe, mainly employed in communication duties
Luftwaffensammelstelle	*German.* Aircrew Reserve Unit
Magdeburger Börde	*German.* A region to the West of the Elbe river near Magdeburg, claimed by the Russians after the cease-fire in defiance of the Yalta agreement
Maquis	*French.* An undergound organization within the French Résistance Movement; *see RÉSISTANCE*
Maquisard	*French.* A member of the Maquis
MBE	Member of the Order of the British Empire
Medivac	Medical evacuation from the field, usually by helicopter. *See also DUST OFF*
MO	Medical Officer

MP	Military Police
MPC	Military Payment Certificate. US Army currency issued in occupied territory for the exclusive use of military personnel
MYO	German signal code signifying 'Enemy aircraft in the region'
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutions; the British Canteen Service.
Nazi	A member of the National Socialist Workers' Party. anyone who thinks or acts like a Nazi; characteristic of, or relating to the Nazis; *see NSDAP*
Nazi salute	Saluting with the outstretched right arm
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NS	National-Socialist
NSDAP	*German.* National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (National Socialist German Workers' Party); the official party under the Hitler regime, also known as 'Nazi-party'
NSFK	*German.* National-Sozialistisches Flieger Korps. The civilian National Socialist Flying Corps
NS Frauenschaft	*German.* The National Socialist Womens' Organisation
Nui Dat	The Australian Army Forward Base in Vietnam
1OSU	No 1 Operational Support Unit
OBE	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
Oberfähnrich	*German.* Senior Ensign
Oberfeldwebel	*German.* NCO of Flight Sergeant rank
Obergefreiter	*German.* Junior NCO, Corporal

OETC	Officers Extension Tutorial Course (a two-year correspondence course undertaken to qualify for Staff College admittance)
OPS Order	Operational Procedures Order
Ostmärker	*German.* A term (*often in a derogatory sense*) applied to the inhabitants of the Republic of Austria annexed to the Reich; *see ANSCHLUSS*
OTS	Officers Training School
Parademarsch	*German.* March-past, ceremonial goose-stepping
Partisans	Members of an armed resistance group within occupied territory
PAVN	The regular army of North Vietnam
Peenemünde/Karlshagen	German research station on the Baltic coast engaged in missile production (*see VERGELTUNGSWAFFEN*)
PCLU	Pioneer and Civilian Labour Unit, an Army organisation controlling civilian personnel employed by the British Forces
Pelican	Name of a bordello in Orléans, reserved for officers
Phan Rang	USAF Air Base in Vietnam, home of No 2 Squadron
POW	Prisoner of War
PP 207	The annual confidential report on Airmen
PP 29	The annual confidential report on Officers
Puff	Brothel, Bordello
PX	Post Exchange (The US Canteen Service)
PZ	Posting Order to a RAAF unit
QGH	International signal code for an assisted instrument landing manoeuvre, now obsolete

Quartiermacher	*German.* An officer or NCO detailed to requisition accommodation for the troops
Radetzky March	The Austrian 'signature' march, composed by Johann Strauss the Elder in honour of Fieldmarshal Radetzky (1766-1858)
RAF	*abbrev.* Royal Air Force
R & R	*abbrev.* Rest and Recreation. Special leave granted during the Vietnam War to be taken outside the theatre of operations
Reich	*German.* The German State, ie the ancient Holy Roman Empire (First Reich), the Hohenzollern Empire 1871-1919 (Second Reich), and the Nazi state 1933-1945 (Third Reich)
Reichsmarschall	*German.* Marshal of the Reich. Official title of Hermann Göring, Commander of the Luftwaffe
Reichsprotektorat	*German.* The German official title given to the occupied Republic of Czechoslovakia (CSR)
Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD)	*German.* National Labour Service, an organization formed; to conduct one year's compulsory work on major projects of national importance before military service. Suspended during the progress of the war.
Reichstag	*German.* Also called 'Diet'. The sovereign assembly of the German Republic; the building in Berlin in which the assembly met
Rein Schiff	*German.* Scrubbing the deck
R-in-C	Rest in Country. Special leave granted during the Vietnam War to be taken within the theatre of operations
Résistance	*French.* Collective title of the French resistance movement during World War II
Ritterkreuz	*German.* The Knight's Cross
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
Rostrum	An English speaking debating society

RSL	Returned Services League
RTO	Railway Transport Officer
SAN	School of Air Navigation
Sani	*German.* Medical Orderly
Sanierung	*German.* Prophylactic treatment to prevent VD infection; *see VD*
Sanität	*German.* The German Medical Corps
Sanitäter	*German.* Medical Orderly
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer (at Command HQ)
S-Bahn	*German.* The light city rail system of Berlin
SBKSO	Senior Barracks Officer at a RAAF unit
Schleifen	*German.* Grinding, intense drill on the barracks square; often intended as physical punishment
Schwanzparade	*German, informal.* Routine VD inspection; *see VD*
SEQO	Senior Equipment Officer at a unit
Servus!	Traditional friendly Austrian greeting meaning Hello! Hi there! Goodbye! Ciao!
SESO	Senior Equipment Staff Officer (at Command HQ)
Sippenhaftung	*German.* The assumed liability of the clan in respect of criminal actions by one of its members
Skoda Works	One of Europe's greatest industrial complexes known for its arms production during both World Wars, situated near Plzen (Pilsen) in Bohemia
SNOSH	Senior Naval Officer Schleswig Holstein. The British Naval Officer Commanding the region in Northern Germany after World War II.
Soldatenheim	*German.* Soldiers Club
Sportpalast	*German.* The Palace of Sports. A sporting arena in Berlin, venue of political mass meetings

SS	*German.* Schutz Staffel (Protective Echalon), the black-uniformed elite corps of the Nazi party, founded by Adolf Hitler in 1925 originally as a small personal bodyguard.Under Heinrich Himmler, the SS eventually became a state within a state.
Staatsvertrag	*German.* The State Treaty signed in 1955 that restored Austria's independence and signified the end of the Allied occupation
Staffel	*German.* Flight unit
Staffelkapitän	*German.* Flight Commander
Stuka	*German.* Sturzkampfflieger (Dive bomber)
Third Reich	The German State 1933-1945 under the Hitler regime. *See REICH*
Tan Son Nhut	The international airport at Saigon
Tommy	German collective term referring to British soldiers
Traditionsgeschwader	*German.* A Luftwaffe squadron awarded the title of a historical squadron; *see LEGION CONDOR*
Uc da loi	*Vietnamese.* Australia, an Australian
Unteroffizier	*German.* NCO of Sergeant rank
USAF	United States Air Force
USSR	The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Soviet Russia.
Ustashi	*Serbo-Croatian.* A terrorist organisation of right-wing exiles dedicated to the overthrow of Communism in their homeland
V1	Also known as Fieseler 103, the flying bomb. *See VERGELTUNGSWAFFEN*
V2	A medium-range missile. *See VERGELTUNGSWAFFEN*
VD	Venereal disease

Vergeltungswaffen	*German.* Retaliation Weapons, ie the V1 and V2 flying bombs
VERY light	Coloured flare fired from a special pistol
Vietcong	The Communist guerilla forces of North Vietnam
Vung Tau	The Australian main base in the Phuoc Tui province, home of No 9, and 35 Sqns, 1OSU and the Army Field Hospital. Also a Recreation Centre for the Army.
Waffen SS	*German.* The elite armed combat divisions of the SS, wearing field-grey uniforms
Wehrmacht	*German.* The German Defence Forces
Würzburggerät	*German.* An earlier German RADAR device
Yalta Conference	4–11 February 1945. Attended by the three Allied leaders (Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin), planning the final defeat and the postwar occupation of Germany

Sources: Collins English Dictionary, Collins German Dictionary, Collins Robert French Dictionary, The Encyclopaedia Britannica

EX-LUFTWAFFE MBE

Squadron Leader Frank Korbl (Retd) was born in Vienna, Austria. His colourful career included wartime service with the German Air Force and post-war employment with the British NAAFI in Germany and Austria. He migrated to Australia in 1956 and joined the RAAF in 1956, being commissioned into the Equipment Branch. He served at a number of RAAF units including No 9 (Helicopter) Squadron in Vietnam. He was awarded the MBE in 1977 for his services as Senior Barracks Officer at RAAF Richmond NSW.

In his book 'Ex-Luftwaffe MBE', the author traces his training as aircrew wireless operator and rear gunner, the trials and tribulations of four years war service, the defeat of Germany in 1945 and his short spell as a Prisoner-of-War.

The story of his service with the RAAF contrasts with that of his involvement in World War II, providing an interesting insight into the different culture of two military organisations, by giving examples of training, procedures and life in general.

It is not only a remarkable story from a military point of view but also an inspiring account of the migrant experience in the Australian environment.

AEROSPACE CENTRE