HERITAGE SERIES

THE JOYS AND DANGERS OF AN AVIATION PILOT

LEIGH 'LADDIE' HINDLEY

WINNER OF THE 2012 RAAF HERITAGE AWARD

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Cover Image: Laddie Hindley, Richmond, 1945 (Hindley family).

Back Cover Image: Laddie placing the cross on Saint Mathew's Anglican Church, Windsor, NSW, 1963 (Hindley family).

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Editor's Note

The Joys and Dangers of an Aviation Pilot is a personal account of Leigh Oxley Hindley's experiences as a RAAF and commercial pilot. Every effort has been made to ensure the correct spelling of names and placenames, as well as the accuracy of times, dates, measurements and figures; however, given the time passed since many of these events occurred, and the sourcing of information from personal recollection, it has not been possible to completely guarantee the accuracy of every statement contained herein.

All images obtained from external sources are properly acknowledged in the caption. All uncredited images presented in this book are the property of the Hindley family and full permission has been given for their reproduction here. This book has been written from the personal records and recollections of Leigh Hindley, and any information obtained from external sources is referenced following Appendix 4.

For the sake of brevity, the islands now generally referenced to as Papua New Guinea, will be referred to as such throughout the book, acknowledging that much of the content takes place before 1973, when the self-governed eastern New Guinea was renamed Papua New Guinea, and the western side named West Irian Jaya, known commonly today as the Indonesian province of West Papua.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

BMR	Bureau of Mineral Resources
CAC	Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation
CRA	Conzinc Riotinto of Australia
DAID	Delayed Action Indendiary Device
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
NCO	Non-comissioned Officer
NST	National Service Training
POW	Prisoner(s) of War
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force (United Kingdom)
RSL	Returned and Services League
SAS	Special Air Service
SOS	A wireless code signal, usually identified with distress
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USN	United States Navy
VHF	Very high frequency (radio)
VIP	Very important person(s)
VVAA	Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia
WAAAF	Women's Auxillary Australian Air Force

Foreword

Two men have been the main driving force behind the compilation of this book. Derrick Rolland, a RAAF navigator during World War II and post-war Victorian Forestry Officer. He pressured me to write a restricted history as one of 16 aviators writing short stories for his publication, *Airmen I Have Met: Their Stories.*[1]

Douglas Hurst, an ex-group captain and navigator who wrote a book based on my complete flying experiences in the RAAF, and commercial flying in helicopters titled *Hostage to Fortune.* My sincere thanks to both of these men, as without their drive and insistence, this book would never have been written.

I would also like to thank Jodi Parvey for the rigorous and tireless work she has carried out in editing the manuscript for submission.

Finally, I would like to thank the Office of Air Force History and Air Power Development Centre in Canberra for their efforts in the editing, layout and publishing of this book as part of the Heritage Awards.

Laddie Hindley, 2012

1 Derrick Rolland, *Airmen I Have Met: Their Stories,* self published, Victoria, 1999.

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Chapter 1

Childhood and World War II Enlistment

No matter what our current age, providing our mental state is sufficiently developed, we can often vividly remember incidents that happened when we were three or four years-of-age. My first memory was seeing my youngest sister snuggled against my mother's bosom on the morning that she was born. I was four years and two months old. I still have clear memories of my life as it progressed day-by-day. My first day at school was not a happy one. I commenced crying from the moment that my nine-year-old sister left me with the school teacher that I was to have for that year. Fortunately my courage improved the following day, and my education from that day on could be considered ordinary. There are a lot of incidents or events that I remember, such as the day that I learnt to swim and ride a pushbike, both at 10 years-of-age.

The first big trauma of my life came when I was 12. Friends from school that were a year or two older told me that my mother and father did the same thing as the horses and cattle when they wanted to have babies. As a country boy, I was well aware of the sexual activities of animals and birds, but it took many weeks to accept that my parents would do the same. My sexual awareness evolved as I turned 14. My voice changed from soprano to baritone, and I was shaving my face daily. My sexual urge was very strong from that time onwards but success with girls was non-existent due mainly to shyness, and a lack of confidence.

I grew up in Goulburn, New South Wales, and houses on the outskirts had large grounds with paddocks and orchards separating our neighbours. The one closest to our home housed a large family of eight children, one of whom was a girl of 16 years-of-age and very voluptuous. She was very different to any other girl that I had ever known, in that she spoke of sex with no restraints. She urged that I should have sex with her and learn how to touch and caress girls. I somehow resisted for some months, but finally succumbed. The sexual union was addictive, but at the time, I went through mental torture, thinking that she would become pregnant which would result in my mother killing me. Evidently, there was no need to worry, as the girl had many sexual partners, married at 22 years-of-age and had children after marriage.

Between the ages of 10 and 17, I enjoyed myself with school friends playing most sports, but in particular, cricket and rugby. Our home was within a few hundred yards of the Wollondilly River. In those days, the attractions or

opportunities of the post-war period had not arrived yet, but the river gave us many opportunities to enjoy ourselves, which included fishing. The river had carp-fish and eels that we were able to catch with handheld string or cotton and a bent pin. No one had the luxury of a standard fishing rod with a barbed hook. On the banks of the Wollondilly there was a large, two-level abandoned skin tannery. It had apparently gone bankrupt during the depression and was since vandalised over the years. It wasn't fully demolished until the end of World War II. Several World War I veterans used the tannery as their home and lived a very spartan life, living and sleeping in the one set of clothes, with a single blanket to cover them during the cold winter months that Goulburn was well known for.

There was one of these veterans that I remember vividly. His surname was Morton, but we nicknamed him 'Blücher' because he was a big man. He was a magnificent physical specimen at six-feet, four-inches tall, with broad shoulders, slim hips and a military bearing. A German shell had taken off part of his skull, which was replaced by a metal plate the size of a small saucer. As expected, the ordeal had resulted in brain damage. I am unaware of what aid the Government was giving to these men, if any. We would tease the veterans, calling them names so that they would chase us, and of course, no boys were ever caught due to our pursuers having disabilities such as 'trench feet'—the result of time spent in the frozen trenches of France. At the ages of nine, 10 and 11, children don't have the knowledge, understanding or sympathy of the world around them, and these taunts and pranks would play on my conscience many years later in adult life. Our family home was a large and impressive looking building that attracted these men who would ask my mother whether they could do some work in the garden or cut some firewood in exchange for a meal—thankfully, I can say that no-one was turned away.

I was given my first homing pigeon by one of my school friends when I was 10. This was the beginning of a lifelong interest, or even love, for these birds. That one pigeon spent three cramped days in a parrot cage whilst I built a pigeon loft that was the equivalent of a kid's cubby house. I procured a few more pigeons and from then on improved the accommodation and quality of the birds. By the time that I was 14, I had joined a pigeon racing club in Goulburn and was completely hooked on the sport. Over the years, pre-war and post-war, I kept roughly six breeding pairs and 30 racing birds. Our shortest race was about 45 air-miles, and our longest, 430 air-miles. On the long distance races, tenacity and fitness were paramount, and there was a degree of luck as to whether your birds would be caught by the peregrine falcon, the arch enemy of the dove and pigeon families. When I re-enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) in

1951, I had to sell my pigeons, which hurt, but I was still able to enjoy an interest. Later in life, I was considered to be an authority on the subject of pigeons and was asked to judge the quality of homing pigeons at many agricultural shows throughout Australia.

I grew up in a religious family, attending Church and Sunday School every weekend. I was always given threepence to place on the plate that was passed around during the Church service. I had a strong temptation to retain the three pence and buy a chocolate or ice cream but never rustled up enough courage, as I believed God would strike me down, in his wrath At the age of 12, I taught Sunday School for two years and then progressed to be a member of the church choir from 14 to 16 years-of-age. I was 16 when war was declared in 1939. My first reaction was deep disappointment, as I believed that the war would be over before I would be 18 years-of-age and eligible to join the Army.

It was about this time that my religious views were crumbling. I always had a very strong interest in the breeding of animals and birds, with the aim of improving the standard by careful selection and mating. I could see that evolution could be accelerated or varied, and had this view fortified in reading books by Darwin, Wallace and Huxley. I could not then, and still cannot see now, how man can be seen as anything different to a horse, cow or dog. I can see just as much difference in birds and animals as I can see in humans, not only physical difference, but also in personality. There has to be something on top of the ladder, but it is only a result of physical or mental superiority. If man were eliminated tomorrow, the chimpanzee would be on top of the ladder, and with millions of years of evolution, would reach something similar to man of today. However, I accept that religion has its place in human society, as many people receive security, love and comforting belief in the hereafter.

I celebrated my 18th birthday on 28 February 1941, and advised my parents that I wanted to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force. This request was opposed, but I continued applying daily pressure until finally, after three months, I was told by my parents that they would sign the enlistment papers if I agreed to join the RAAF. My mother's argument was that I would mix with nicer boys in the Air Force than I would in the Army—there was also a strong possibility that I could acquire a safe position in the administrative section. At precisely the time of my parents' decision, 6 June 1941, a train carrying an Air Force recruiting team pulled into a siding at the Goulburn railway station. The team was recruiting aircrew only, and had specialists in medical, education, sociology and coordination on hand.

The tests were very thorough, and of the 13 applicants being tested that day, I was kept back for further testing of my eyes. I was asked what I saw when shown pages in a book that had coloured dots, and coloured lights were flashed on and off while they asked me what colour I could see. I had never heard of colour blindness and couldn't see why there may be a problem, as I could see the difference between a red and a green light. I evidently passed the colour test, which may have been due to the doctor who examined me being a Goulburn man who was very friendly with one of my older sisters. The colour blindness was something that I never thought too much about, but was to surface again in later years after rejoining the RAAF and when applying for a commercial flying licence.

I thought that completing those tests at the Goulburn railway station would see me in uniform at an RAAF training camp within a week. Apparently, there were heavy enlistments at that particular period, so I was placed on a reserve list along with those that were successful at the Goulburn tests. The reserve period was to last for nine months, during which we received instruction from school teachers at the Goulburn High School. As well as mathematics and physics, which we were familiar with, we were introduced to navigation, meteorology, engineering, morse code, aircraft recognition and airmanship. This instruction was held at night for two-hour periods, twice a week. On 20 April 1942, I received advice that I was accepted into the RAAF and was to report to the Initial Training School at Somers, Victoria. The intake on that day was roughly 500 aircrew trainees, half going to Somers and half to Bradfield Park, New South Wales.

I had a steady girlfriend at home in Goulburn so I was keen to use the odd weekend in her company. Victoria was a long way from Goulburn, but at 18 years-of-age, nothing is insurmountable. There were, however, problems and difficulties, one of which was the lack of money for train fares—but that could be solved by not paying. On Friday afternoons, those trainees that wanted to go into Melbourne travelled by RAAF transport to Spencer and Flinders railway stations. There were always servicemen planning to board the interstate trains without paying the fares, and it was a 'cat and mouse' game requiring athleticism and perfect timing. As the signal was given for the train to move, I would scale the seven-foot fence in seconds and board the train as it reached a slow running pace. Changing trains at Albury demanded guile and care, but was much easier than the starting base at Spencer. All seats had been booked and occupied so I had to be alert all night, moving to the toilets when the guard periodically patrolled through the carriages. Reaching my destination of Goulburn, I quickly left the train and moved to the platform toilets where I waited until the train

Two 'Sprogs' (trainees) on leave with a gleam in their eyes. 'Laddie' Hindley and Johnny Hodgson, Melbourne, 1942

continued on and the ticket collector had left the exit turnstile. On the return trips, leaving Goulburn late on Sunday night was quite simple, even when travelling as a single individual. Sometimes one could be lucky. On two or three occasions there were large contingents of RAAF technical personnel travelling on one group ticket under the control of an officer or senior Non-commissioned Officer (NCO). I would remove the white aircrew strip from the front of my cap and blend in with the technical group. At Spencer, I would march through the platform gate and into the railway refreshment rooms for a free breakfast. As we marched from the railway station to the waiting RAAF transport vehicles,

I would pick my opportunity to break from the squad and make my way to the training camp at Somers.

The weather at Somers that time of the year was pleasant, but the accommodation was a bit of a shock, particularly for those from wealthy families living on the north shore of Sydney. A canvas tent housing three trainees was our home for the next three months. For beds, we had a fold-up stretcher and a straw palliasse as a mattress—as a country boy I felt some advantage. On school holidays, I would ride a pushbike for 20 miles with a haversack on my back containing all the daily necessities, including a rifle complete with a telescopic sight. During a period of 10 days, I would live on rabbits, fish and eels.

At the conclusion of two months training at Somers we were categorised for further training as pilots, navigators or wireless/air gunners. The majority of the navigators and wireless/air gunners departed Somers for further training in Canada. The remaining trainees remained at Somers for the third and final month, having been categorised for future training as pilots. We were examined on all the ground subjects that we had been studying during those first two months, and no doubt the results played a big part in category selection. I had no particular preference on what further aircrew training I would receive, but expected to be chosen for wireless/air gunner training as I topped the course in morse code sending and receiving. I felt no elation at being selected for pilot training, but am convinced that my coordination test must have been a deciding factor, as I always did well at any type of sport.

Up to this time, I had never been close enough to touch an aircraft, nor had I even driven a car. In fact, I could count on my fingers the number of times that I was passenger in a car. Those selected for training as pilots were posted to Elementary Flying Schools, of which there were several in Australia. I went to Temora in New South Wales and was very happy to do so, as it was a pleasant and friendly little town and the weather and terrain were excellent for flying. Each working day we alternated spending half the day in the classroom and the other half at the airfield. The airfield was large and allowed take-off and landing in any direction depending on the prevailing winds. The aircraft were de Havilland Tiger Moths, which to me, were mechanical monsters. My thoughts at the time were that I never wanted to be a pilot and would be much happier carrying a rifle in the Army.

My first flight was familiarisation, which reinforced my lack of enthusiasm about training to be a pilot. Five minutes after take-off I was violently sick and remained so for the full period of the flight. I was well aware that I would have motion sickness, as I could never venture 50 yards off the shore when fishing without being sick. I must have had the most understanding instructor in the

Air Force at that time. He explained that if I could get through the first six or seven hours and reach solo stage, I might overcome the sickness problem—his prediction was correct and I did my first solo flight after 10 ½ hours of instruction. Generally speaking, the cut-off time to going solo was 11 hours, after which one was scrubbed as a pilot trainee.

Wirraway formation training at Uranquinty, 1943

Although not aware at the time, I later came to realise what a gentle aircraft the Tiger Moth was. There were quite a few accidents during this elementary training but I can't recall anyone being killed. An example of the Tiger Moth's forgiveness was when a trainee pilot stalled the aircraft at 100 feet above terrain, hitting the ground in a nose-down vertical attitude. The aircraft wasn't badly damaged and the pilot only received a broken nose.

We spent as much time in the classrooms as we did at the airfield, and completed the course with a flying test and examinations on all our ground subjects. Hours flown were between 60 and 65 in total. The scrub rate at these elementary training schools was high, about 50 per cent, but most of those who didn't make it were given the opportunity to remain in aircrew and train as navigators or wireless/air gunners. The successful trainees were selected for further training as potential fighter or bomber pilots. The fighter groups were posted to either Uranquinty or Deniliquin—both excellent locations due to good weather and flat terrain. Uranquinty, where I was posted to, had natural

navigation aids such as the Murrumbidgee River and an isolated hill at a village named 'The Rock', which was very close to Uranquinty.

The course at Uranquinty started with 94 trainees, and I guess that Deniliquin would have had about the same. The aircraft was the A20 Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) Wirraway, which was a big step up from the Tiger Moth. It was much bigger, with a more powerful engine and had many vices not experienced in the Tiger Moth.

Again we alternated with half-day classroom lessons and half-day training at the airfield. The airfield had no sealed runways, so take-offs and landings were made into the prevailing winds. There was no trouble in reaching the solo stage, but the more advanced training such as instruments, night flying, dive-bombing, strafing, dogfighting and aerobatics resulted in only 40 of the 94 trainees successfully completing the course. Again, I assume that it would have been a similar result at Deniliquin.

From left to right: 'Laddie', Roy Jinks, Cliffy Smith, Greg Horton, Sammon and Bentley enjoying the Murrumbidgee River, Wagga Wagga, 1943

We always had free time on Saturdays and Sundays, which allowed us to visit our home town if it was within a reasonable distance. If we remained at base on weekends, we could socialise in the nearby town of Wagga. There was always a dance where we could meet the local girls or enjoy a film at the picture theatre.

It was summer time during the period that I was at Uranquinty and there were always RAAF trucks available to take the trainees to the Murrumbidgee River where it passed through Wagga Wagga so we could spend the full day swimming and sunbaking. The kitchen staff would supply us with steaks and sausages, which we would barbecue on bushfires. On return to the base, most of the trainees would spend two or three hours studying the ground subjects in which we had to be proficient and capable of success in the final examinations.

On three or four occasions, our camp received invitations to have an athletics competition against the sportsmen of the country towns in the area. One of those towns was Henty, situated on the highway between Wagga Wagga and Albury. It was an enjoyable day and on the travel back from Henty, four of us asked the driver of our bus to drop us off at The Rock hotel. Our intention was to have a few beers and then walk back to Uranquinty base. In those days of the early 1940s, the hotels, by law, closed at 6.00 pm. We arrived only seven minutes before closing time, realising that we would not be served after closing. Instead of just ordering one each, we ordered four each, and settled down to what we thought was going to be a pleasant half hour. Right on the dot of six, as expected, the barman advised all and sundry that time was up and no further drinks would be served.

We were congratulating ourselves on how smart we were in ordering the extra drinks when suddenly each of us was grabbed from behind in a half-nelson hold and bundled towards the doorway. The four of us reacted in a way that we shouldn't have, and it resulted in a 'donnybrook' (a punch up). The one police officer in the town, a sergeant, arrived at the scene and asked us to come to the police station with him. There was a jail cell attached to his house that was only 50 yards from the hotel. Entering the house, he took us to his lounge room and sat us down in his lounge chairs. His wife soon joined us, and with warm water and a cloth, cleaned up our wounds and offered us a cup of tea with some biscuits. The police sergeant had three ribbons on his uniform and would have been the age we were when he went to fight during World War I. He must have been thinking of those days in 1915-1916, when he told us to be 'good boys' and go home to our camp.

The pilot training course at Uranquinty was held over a four-month period, at the end of which we had earned our wings and were promoted to the commissioned rank of pilot officer, or the NCO rank of sergeant. The usual outcome was that five per cent would receive the commissioned rank and 95 per cent the NCO rank. I was in the group promoted to the rank of sergeant. The passing out parade was an impressive ceremony, and I believe that this was the moment when I was most pleased and proud of becoming a qualified RAAF

pilot. Of the 40 successful trainees at Uranquinty, only 11 went on to further fighter training at the Operational Training Unit, at Mildura. We were joined by a similar number from Deniliquin, plus several pilots that had been instructors at the two fighter schools, or staff pilots from bombing and gunnery schools. The total number on the course at Mildura was 30; 20 of which were to be trained on Curtiss P40 Kittyhawks, six on Vickers Supermarine Spitfires and four on CAC CA-12 Boomerangs.

Once again, we alternated with half-day classroom lessons and half-day training at the airfield. In the classrooms, we concentrated more on meteorology, aerodynamics, navigation, gun-sights and the laying-off of deflection. The flying was a big advance on what we were doing previously. The flying instructors were in the top bracket, having achieved 'Ace' ratings in Europe and the Middle East.

Presentation of Pilot's Wings, Uranquinty, 1943

I enjoyed the three months at Mildura more than any other period of my training for several reasons. The town of Mildura was excellent in many respects and the citizens went out of their way to make us welcome. Due to the type of training we were receiving at Mildura, there was a lot of danger, which resulted in five pilots losing their lives in the three-month period of the course. This was from a total of roughly 90 trainees and 10 instructors operating at any one time.

The first month of the course was completed in Wirraways, with a lot of similarities to the last month at Uranquinty. We did a lot of dive-bombing, strafing, aerobatics and dogfighting, the latter commencing with the two aircraft approaching each other head-on, and once passing, would attempt to get on the

other aircraft's tail in the 'kill' position. When reaching the stage in the second month when certain proficiency was reached, we were ready to move on to the Kittyhawks, Spitfires and Boomerangs. None of these aircraft had a dual cockpit, so our first flight was without any air instructions. We did, however, receive plenty of verbal detail, plus flight manuals to study, and only received clearance when we were able to touch every control and instrument while blindfolded.

After starting the engine and commencing to taxi, the most daunting feature was the restricted forward vision due to the long, inline engine. We had been alerted to this problem, which was overcome by a 20 degree swing of the aircraft to the left and right. The take-off was simple enough and it was at this point that I realised what a great training aircraft the Wirraway was. On raising the undercarriage and climbing to a height of 3000 feet, I did gentle turns, dives and climbs. After 20 minutes, I joined the circuit, lowered the undercarriage and flap, and finished with a landing that I was more than happy with. In the one-seat Kittyhawk, I completed all the sequences that I had received instructions on while flying the Wirraway, and was now ready to join an operational squadron.

The departure from Mildura was a day to remember. For every pilot at the railway station there were at least 20 girls—civilians as well as members of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). We knew a few of them from our regular Saturday nights at the dance hall. During the half hour waiting for the train to depart, we kissed and cuddled every girl at the station. I had no doubt that every course leaving Mildura received the same farewell. The successful Kittyhawk pilots were all posted into No 80 Squadron; a brand new squadron, which was to form up at Townsville. An additional number were to join from other various locations, and amongst these were the Commanding Officer and two flight commanders. All the pilots from Mildura were inexperienced, having a total flying time of 235 hours each.

It was a long and tiring train trip from Mildura to Townsville with only one overnight stop at Brisbane. We were accommodated for the night in a large dormitory of a hotel in the centre of the city, on beds that were very primitive. The journey became more interesting as we progressed northwards. As we passed through the pineapple fields on the outskirts of Rockhampton, the train driver slowed down to a walking pace, allowing many of us to grab a ripe pineapple and get back on the train. We arrived at Townsville in the daylight hours and were taken by trucks to an area where tents were erected under trees loaded with ripe mangoes. With the mangoes and the shade of the trees, it was the type of location that one would like to spend the rest of the war living in. No one expected the experience of that first night, when soon after darkness the large flying foxes arrived in droves. During the whole of that night, the

flying foxes quarrelled and fought over the mangoes, making sleep for those underneath all but impossible. The following morning, bleary-eyed, we moved to Aitkenvale, a small village on the outskirts of Townsville. We pitched our tents on the side of the sealed airstrip, three to a tent, and settled in waiting for our 24 Kittyhawks to arrive.

His 'nibs' and mates, outside of Townsville

Aitkenvale was situated by the Ross River and this gave us a lot of relief from the constant dry heat at that time of the year. It was expected that we would have our 24 aircraft within two months, maybe less, but it turned out to be exactly five months in the end. This was due to heavy losses sustained in the American Kittyhawk squadrons at the time, and naturally they received priority in receiving replacements. Apart from learning to fly aircraft and be proficient in all the ground subjects associated with aviation, we were expected to be competent in the handling of small arms weapons. This included 12-gauge shotguns, high powered rifles, machine guns and revolvers.

To fill in time and enjoy ourselves, two or three of us would depart the camp with a rifle and machine gun, intending to shoot at anything that moved. As I grew older and more responsible, I experienced guilt at my actions as I am a lover and protector of wild animals and birds. Although there was a certain amount of frustration in our squadron, there was also a good side. Apart from the local girls in Townsville, there was a very large contingent of service girls,

and each Saturday night, an appropriate number was invited out to the Officers Mess for drinks and dinner. The Officers Mess was unusual in that it not only had officers as members but also the NCO pilots. This situation had advantages as it provided closer cooperation in the pilot mustering.

We had our share of sickness during the five months at Aitkenvale. Most of us had diarrhoea and dysentery, plus what we believed was Dengue Fever. Many years later, I discovered that what we thought was Dengue Fever was probably Ross River Fever. Apart from reading books, there was not a lot to do to fill in the time. Those of us that liked to remain physically fit did a variety of exercises once the sun had set. A squadron truck would take any of the pilots into Townsville at 5.00 pm in the afternoon and depart from a prearranged location at 11.00 pm for the return to Aitkenvale. Most of us would have arranged to meet a girl, usually a WAAAF or Australian Women's Army Service member, and take her to dinner, followed by a few hours of kisses and cuddles. On more than one occasion, I would miss the truck and had to walk the three miles back to our camp. In the relative cool of the night and the fitness acquired from the daily exercises, the walk home was quite pleasant.

Gradually, our Kittyhawk aircraft started to arrive and limited training commenced. It was only after four months at Aitkenvale that we received our 24th aircraft and full training as a squadron took place. The fifth month was the most valuable, and when ready to depart for the South-West Pacific, we were finely tuned as a fighter squadron, ready and willing to join the Pacific Theatre.

Chapter 2

Kittyhawk Operations in the South-West Pacific

In early February 1944, we pulled down the camp at Aitkenvale and the squadron moved to Cairns to work with the Army for a period of 10 days. It was more realistic training for us and also for the Army. On 20 February 1944, our 24 Kittyhawks departed Cairns for Horn Island. Our ground staff and the six excess pilots travelled by Douglas C-47 Dakota aircraft. The intention was to re-fuel at Horn Island and proceed on to Port Moresby that same day. Unfortunately, tragedy struck in the process of departing Horn Island. One of our pilots, and a good friend of mine, Flight Sergeant Thomas Griffiths, tried to reach his position in the formation too quickly. He flick-stalled in the climbing turn and plunged into the ground, wrecking the aircraft and killing him instantly. Those that were airborne at the time landed back at Horn Island and our Commanding Officer arranged burial details at Thursday Island. Just three days after the crash,we had received a new pilot and aircraft into the squadron.

During my operational tour in Papua New Guinea, I experienced the loss of close friends, but thinking back to that period of the crash, I was affected more by the death of Tom Griffiths than others. This was no doubt due to our close friendship. We were the same age, trained together, and shared the same tent during our five months at Townsville. To have a friend die before even making it to the war, and then to have a replacement pilot and aircraft arrive within a matter of days really brought home the reality of our situation. In war, the enemy is not the only cause of death, and regular operations must continue as soon as possible, regardless of the loss experienced personally or by the squadron.

It was mid-afternoon when we successfully departed Horn Island, landing at Port Moresby with plenty of daylight to spare. We spent that first night in tents on the side of the airstrip, somewhat subdued as a result of the loss we suffered that morning. The next day we had an early breakfast and were soon on our way to our first operational base at Nadzab, situated beside the Markham River, 20 miles inland from the town of Lae. The early morning weather was excellent, allowing us to see that part of Papua New Guinea at its picturesque best. We passed over the Owen Stanley Range at a level of 15 000 feet, which gave us a clearance over Mount Victoria of 1000 feet. On the eastern side of Mount Victoria is the Kokoda gap at 9000 feet, which in any aviation era, has

been the marginal means of flying between the north and south coasts in that particular section of the Owen Stanley Range.

The Markham Valley was very wide and flat, making Nadzab an ideal place for an airfield. Very rarely did the cloud base come down to the ground level. Heavy rain was frequent, but presented no great problem to our operations. Our first sortie from Nadzab was the day after our arrival and was a familiarisation flight flown at 15 000 feet. The next two days were similar, by which time we felt confident of finding our way about that area of Papua New Guinea. We had our standard aeronautical map plus a white silk scarf imprinted with the coastal outline of the Papua New Guinea islands and only the main coastal towns shown.

Our plan for the fourth day was a dive-bombing and strafing strike on the strong Japanese base at Madang on the northern coast with 12 Kittyhawks. Unfortunately, the weather was bad, with full cloud cover down to 1000 feet base. If the weather had been clear, we'd have climbed over the Finisterre Range at 15 000 feet—as it was, we needed to find another way. We departed Nadzab, free of bombs, and proceeded north-westwards along the Markham Valley until reaching a low saddle in the mountain range that allowed us to squeeze through with a clearance of 200 feet and arrive over the top of Madang. Due to the weather and the lack of engine noise, the Japanese were caught by surprise and were slow to get their small arms weapons operating. For us, it was a very successful attack, and we departed Madang as soon as our ammunition had been expended. Soon after getting into the Markham Valley, one of our pilots, Ron Wallace, reported that he was losing fuel at an alarming rate and would have to carry out a 'wheels-up' landing, which he successfully accomplished. By 'wing-waggling'[1] he was directed to walk to a native village, which he did. He was returned to Nadzab by the United States Army three days later. On inspection of the wreckage, it was evident that Wallace's aircraft had received damage to the fuel system. We received a replacement aircraft three days later.

On 14 March 1944, the squadron moved to Cape Gloucester on the western end of New Britain. Adding to the squadron's recent misfortune since the tragedy on Horn Island and the crash following the raid on Markham, we had another aircraft loss during our arrival at Cape Gloucester. Eric Faine, one of our senior and most experienced pilots, turned into his final approach for landing too tight, flick-stalled and hit the ground in a level attitude. The aircraft exploded into flames and it was beyond belief when Faine was seen running out of the

1 Wing-waggling was a form of communication used between pilots, achieved by 'waggling' the wings of an aircraft to an ally in order to relay a pre-determined message.

fiery wreckage. He received bad burns and a deep gash on his forehead, but he did recover and continued to fly with the squadron.

At Cape Gloucester, we were joined by Nos 75 and 78 Squadron, and from then on operated as No 78 Wing; a formidable force of 90 pilots and 72 aircraft. As a result of their exploits at Port Moresby and Milne Bay, 75 Squadron had an outstanding operational reputation, while 78 Squadron was a new squadron—much like our own No 80 Squadron. Prior to joining the newly formed 78 Wing, 78 Squadron spent two or three months based at Goodenough Island and Kiriwina. The wing leader was 25 years-of-age with total flying hours of about 800. He held the rank of wing commander. The three squadron commanders were 23 or 24 years-of-age with a combined total flying time of about 700 hours. They each held the rank of squadron leader. Each squadron had two flight commanders of flight lieutenant rank and flying experience similar to the squadron commanders. All of these officers had served on Kittyhawks or Spitfires in Great Britain or the Middle East.

Cape Gloucester was popular with pilots and ground crews. The weather was excellent and there was relief from the tropical heat with fast flowing, rippling streams coming down from the mountains nearby, which also happened to be an active volcano. The beach had black sand, which no doubt came from the volcanic activity, but the sea water was perfectly clear. The Japanese were far more active in New Britain than anything we had experienced up to that time in Papua New Guinea. We attacked targets all along the north coast of New Britain and Garove Island, situated 70 miles north east of Cape Gloucester. None of our aircraft were shot down during our stay at Cape Gloucester but many aircraft received bullet holes in the fuselage and wings. We had one more fatality whilst at Cape Gloucester. In order to maintain the standard of our 'dogfighting' ability, we occasionally paired off for a mock dogfight. In the same way that we had practiced at Mildura, we would approach head on and then turn into the attack, each one trying to get onto the other's tail. Once firmly in position for the 'kill', the attack was called off and we would start again from scratch.

I was paired with Pilot Officer Lyn Regan and we approached each other head on at 5000 feet altitude. After a lot of savage, tight turns, near flick-stalls and a loss of 3000 feet, I was on Regan's tail in the 'kill' position and advised him so on the VHF radio. I received no reply but saw the aircraft go into a flick-stall, followed by a spin, ending up in the sea half a mile from Cape Gloucester. I remained over the area until an oil slick came to the surface and I then directed a PT boat (an American built mobile torpedo-armed attack craft) to the area. A wheel was the only thing other than the oil slick that came to the surface. The 2000 feet that Regan had between the start of the spin and

hitting the sea should have been enough to recover. I can only assume that he froze on the controls believing that he was much closer to the sea than he was. The alternative is that he experienced some mechanical failure.

Hindley (middle) and Ron Wallace on the Liberty Ship bound for the assault on Tadji, 1944

We were at Cape Gloucester for 45 days, and our next move was to Tadji, on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. It was my turn to be one of the six surplus pilots to travel by Dakota, however, on this occasion we travelled with the assault force on the American 'Liberty Ships', which were a large, mass-produced marine transport craft of which there were about 40, protected by several destroyers and a cruiser. On reaching the Tadji area, the destroyers and cruiser bombarded the area for several hours, supported by squadrons of American B-24 Liberators and B-25 Mitchell bombers. When satisfied with the softening process, the Liberty ships moved onto the beach, allowing army troops to move through the trees and engage the enemy. Very little resistance was encountered as almost all Japanese survivors were either injured or shell-shocked from the relentless naval bombardment prior to the ground assault. On that same day, air force personnel erected tents on the side of the strip and dug air raid trenches close by. That night we endured an air raid, and this would occur for every night of our stay at Tadji.

The army engineers worked in shifts, day and night, due to the urgency of bringing the air strip up to the standard required. After four days, the authorities at Cape Gloucester were given the all clear to move the Kittyhawk squadrons to Tadji. First to arrive was 78 Squadron, as the 'guinea pig', and in hindsight, it would have been smarter to send only two or three aircraft as opposed to the entire squadron.

A Kittyhawk from No 80 Squadron, Tadji, 1944

The lead aircraft made a soft touchdown, ran 20 yards and nosed over onto its back. With several others, I ran to the crippled aircraft and pulled the pilot clear. Fortunately, there was no indication of fire. The pilot was unconscious, but after hospitalisation, he returned to 78 Squadron for full flying duties. Once the wreckage had been pulled from the strip, the second aircraft approached for landing. The result was a replica of the lead aircraft's attempt, and those of us on the side of the strip went through the previous rescue procedure all over again. This pilot was also unconscious and it was evident that he received serious injuries. He did recover, but never flew as a pilot again. The engineers spent 20 minutes inspecting the strip and pegged white bed sheets at a particular spot before advising the pilots above to make a smooth touchdown on the sheets, or abort and try again. Of the 24 aircraft, 21 were completely successful—the 22nd 'nosed' over, slightly damaging the tips of the propeller blades. Under the circumstances, this could be considered a success when compared with what

could have been. Had the engineers not found a solid area on the strip, the 24 aircraft would have been on their backs at the strip or on their bellies along the beach nearby. The safe alternative of returning to Cape Gloucester or Nadzab didn't exist due to limited fuel reserves.

It was five or six days before the strip at Tadji was covered with metal marsden matting, allowing 75 and 80 Squadron to move from Cape Gloucester to Tadji, with 78 Squadron beginning operations against the enemy. The Tadji strip was, without a doubt, the worst I experienced in the South-West Pacific. Also, the general location was wet and swampy, infested with all sorts of bugs and insects, ensuring that we were all infected with Malaria.

We flew a lot of air patrols between Tadji and Hollandia in anticipation of air contact with the Japanese. Hollandia was attacked by a huge American force at the same time as Tadji was assaulted. The results at Hollandia were dramatic. Hundreds of Japanese aircraft were destroyed on the ground, not only from the surprise of the assault, but also because of a shortage of aviation fuel available to the Japanese. The Tadji/Hollandia operation virtually broke the back of the Japanese in the South-West Pacific. Rabaul, at the eastern end of New Britain, remained a very strong Japanese base, but the Allies, in their wisdom, decided not to risk too many lives trying to take it.

Whilst at Tadji, I was one of four pilots undertaking a barge sweep along the north coast of Dutch New Guinea (now known as West Papua). The Japanese barge was a small, open boat that transported roughly 50 troops in reasonable comfort. There was a fixed-position machine gun of 0.3 calibre and each troop would carry his personal weapons. It was late afternoon and the weather was deteriorating rapidly. On returning to the Tadji area, it was obvious that we had no hope of landing, let alone finding the strip. The weather looked a bit better to the west, but we knew that Hollandia strips had not been secured nor brought to operational readiness. The four of us, after discussion over the radio, decided that darkness could be with us in 40 minutes but we could get to Hollandia and make belly landings, hopefully in an Allied held area.

The two bomber strips were a real mess, but the fighter strip—although pockmarked with bomb craters—looked as if, with skill and a lot of luck, we might get away with a normal 'wheels-down' landing. It was worth a go. The four of us did get down successfully, missing bomb craters by inches and only minutes before darkness. The United States Army troops met us open mouthed, advising us that they were still fighting the Japanese not far from the strip. They gave us food and hot coffee and suggested that the most comfortable place to spend the night was sitting in our individual aircraft. We dozed, on and off,

swatting mosquitoes and listening to the Japanese in the nearby jungle yelling their weird war cries.

At daybreak, we agreed that if we could land on the strip, we should be able to take off from it. We were low on fuel, which was an advantage as the lighter weight factor would give us a shorter and safer take-off. Our technique on reaching the best starting take-off position was to lower 20 per cent of flap, stand on the brakes, open the throttle fully and release the brakes. This allowed us to get the tail up quickly, giving improved forward vision so that we could zigzag past the bomb craters. All take-offs were successful and we returned to Tadji in beautiful early morning weather. Wewak was a strong Japanese base, situated on the north coast, 70 miles east of Tadji. Four of our aircraft were on a dive-bombing/strafing strike of Wewak, led by one of our senior pilots, Squadron Leader Dick McKenny. At 4000 feet his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and burst into flames. Dick was seen to bail out, but unfortunately his clothing was alight and when the chute opened, the fire spread quickly, burning through it. Dick was killed on hitting the water.

There were Beaufort aircraft from No 100 Squadron at Tadji, and we in the Kittyhawks worked with them during attacks on Wewak. Whilst the Beauforts were strafing, we would give high-level support cover against any Japanese fighter attacks that may occur. There was an occasion when eight Beauforts were strafing Wewak and one was hit by ground fire and ditched into the sea just 200 yards from the shore. We were a flight of eight Kittyhawks, so four of us came down to ground level and commenced strafing the tree line just back from the beach. The pilot and wireless/air gunner of the Beaufort had managed to vacate the aircraft before it sank and were floating in their life jackets. They evidently didn't have time to inflate the dinghy, but this could have been a blessing, as the dinghy would have been a much more visible target for the Japanese than two heads, bobbing in the water. Despite this, it was clear that the Japanese behind the tree line could see the Beaufort crew as there was the occasional splash of water as bullets hit in close vicinity to their heads. Tadji had been contacted by radio and advised to send another four Kittyhawks to take our place as we returned to Tadji. It was late afternoon and with only a 20 minute flight from Wewak to Tadji, the Japanese didn't have much time to organise a water craft and capture the two Beaufort airmen.

During the next eight days, we continued attacking the Japanese at Wewak and looking for any signs that the Beaufort crew in the water had survived. On the eighth day we sighted an SOS on the beach several miles west of Wewak. A PT boat was contacted and directed us to the SOS position. There was one survivor, and from memory his name was Ray Graetz. Back at Tadji that same

night, I and two other Kittyhawk pilots visited Ray in the medical marquee. Although very thin, he was in a good frame of mind and was happy to talk of his experiences. The pilot of the Beaufort, Flying Officer McLaren, and the navigator, Flying Officer Anderson, were killed by the rifle fire. Ray, the wireless/air gunner, received a bullet wound that took away the lower portion of his right ear.

Ray came from the Barossa Valley region in South Australia and was of German extraction with a strong chance of being tall, having blond hair and blue eyes. He was completely the opposite, which no doubt saved his life. During the eight days walking westwards towards Tadji, he had wrapped a piece of dirty cloth around his head covering one eye, and had torn his shorts to look more like a loin cloth. As well as having dark hair, he was olive skinned. He made a very desperate and dangerous decision on the seventh day. To avoid loss of energy and possible death from malnutrition, he joined the Japanese food lines to receive a quota of boiled rice. Back at Tadji, he was able to give our intelligence section a host of very valuable information and as a result was awarded the Military Cross, an unusual award for an air force member. The night conversation at the Tadji hospital was the only time that I had seen or spoken to Ray. It was many years later in 1990 while attending a large annual social function for Legacy in Port Macquarie that I sat at a table facing a man of my age with a name tag that rang a bell in my memory. I then noticed that he was of nuggetty build, had dark hair and complexion and brown eyes. I looked at his right ear and saw that the bottom lobe was missing. My first words to him were: 'Did you walk out of Wewak?' The simple one word answer was: 'yes'.

There was another unusual sortie when operating in the Tadji/Wewak area. Four of us in Kittyhawks departed Tadji for a strafing attack on Wewak, and within 10 minutes of our destination I reported a 'Bogie' at our level of 2000 feet heading inland, which was 90 degrees to the direction that we were travelling. Reporting the lone aircraft as a Bogie meant that I could not identify it as friend or foe. If I believed that it was an enemy aircraft I would have referred to it as a 'Bandit'. Allied fighter squadrons always operated in sections of four, eight, 12 or 24, so a single aircraft strongly suggested that this was an enemy fighter. All Japanese aircraft that we had seen or expected to see had radial engines—the Bogie had an inline engine. Our section leader told us to check that our guns were cocked and we began the chase. After several minutes on maximum safe power, we found that we were not gaining, and reluctantly diverted to our scheduled plans. Back at Tadji, we talked with the intelligence section, suggesting that the lone aircraft may have been a Kawasaki Ki-61 Hien aircraft, nicknamed 'Tony' by the Allies due to reports that the aircraft was Italian by design. This

was the only Japanese fighter aircraft with an inline engine. Some had been shot down earlier in the war, but none had been reported as seen during the last six months.

Years later in 1973, I was flying commercially for a helicopter company in the Wewak area when I sighted a glint in the tall kunai grass near the village of Nuku, situated 70 miles west, south-west of Wewak. I landed beside what turned out to be a Japanese 'Tony' aircraft, and found it to be in excellent condition, free of any signs of bullet or shrapnel damage. The 'Tony' had belly-landed due to fuel starvation or engine problems. I'm not aware whether or not I was the first to sight the 'Tony', but it became a major discussion item amongst Europeans in the Wewak area. A wealthy Wewak businessman named Roy Worcester was an avid war relic enthusiast, having several Japanese aircraft in this backyard museum. He offered me a small fortune to bring the 'Tony' to his museum. By removal of the engine, I could have accomplished the task in two sorties. I was aware of the historical importance of the find, and so I had to decline his invitation for obvious reasons. I made contact with the appropriate authorities in Canberra, who replied that they would love to claim the aircraft but advised me to contact the Papua New Guinea authorities, which I did.

It was three or four months before I received any reply from the Papua New Guinea Government. When they did eventually reply, I was told that they would take further action. It was in 1979 when landing a helicopter at the Wewak airport that I noticed a fighter type aircraft in sections, positioned beside large packing crates. I took the trouble to walk across the runway to inspect and was delighted to see that it was the same 'Tony'. In the roughly six-year gap between my finding of the 'Tony' and its move to Port Moresby and then Australia, there had been some vandalism and trophy hunting, such as instrument removal from the cockpit; however, I'm sure that in the hands of Precision Aerospace Productions at Wangaratta, Victoria, the 'Tony' will be restored to its former glory and become an outstanding exhibit. Unfortunately, on completion of the restoration of the 'Tony', it will leave Australia to be displayed at the Port Moresby Museum.

On 10 May 1944 we moved from Tadji to Hollandia. The loss of the Hollandia base was significant to the Japanese and they did their best to make us uncomfortable with an air raid almost every night. There were never more than three or four bombers on any night so we felt reasonably safe in our slit trenches. There were three bomber strips and one fighter strip at Hollandia, so we on the fighter strip were quite crowded with three Australian Kittyhawk squadrons, a United States Army Air Force (USAAF) Kittyhawk squadron and one USAAF P39 Thunderbolt squadron.

A Japanese 'Oscar' aircraft captured in Hollandia, 1944

There was a very daring attack by a single Japanese bomber. The alarm sirens had been going for 10 minutes before we first heard the approaching aircraft. All lights at our base were out, and I was huddled with three others in a slit trench. There was not a sound on the ground, not a shot fired and not a searchlight turned on. The incoming aircraft was down to about 1000 feet and had its navigation lights on. It moved into the downwind leg of the fighter strip and commenced descent as it turned towards base and then final approach. At this point, the landing lights were turned on for a few seconds, and then off again followed by navigation lights off and throttles moved to full power. The aircraft released 11-second-delay bombs along a line of P-38 Lightning fighters, positioned along the side of the strip. Every Allied gun and searchlight went into action in the most spectacular display of firepower that I have ever witnessed. The sky was filled with tracer rounds but the bird had flown. I have often wondered if that Japanese pilot survived the war—probably not. We had two more pilots killed by anti-aircraft fire, Pilot Officer Peter Parkinson and Flying Officer Leith Mudge. On the credit side we had a lot of success with barge sweeps, due to a lot of Japanese still moving in an attempt to reach their secure bases further west.

The pilots of the three Kittyhawk squadrons were always keen to go on strikes or barge sweeps, rather than high altitude patrols. A schedule was worked

out by the wing leader and squadron commanders where the three squadrons alternated in turn through the three types of operations. On 3 June 1944, 75 Squadron was scheduled for barge sweep, 80 Squadron was scheduled for dive-bombing and strafing of Biak Island and 78 Squadron for high altitude patrol over Biak Island. A Japanese force of 12 aircraft—eight Aichi D3As (nicknamed 'Val' by the Allies) and four Nakajima Ki-43s (nicknamed 'Oscar')—were intercepted by 78 Squadron over Biak Island, and in the battle that followed, the Kittyhawks shot down the eight 'Vals' and one 'Oscar' for the loss of one Kittyhawk. This was probably the last time that the Japanese sent out a multiple number of aircraft during daylight hours in the South-West Pacific.

Just three days after this successful engagement, 78 Squadron was again on high altitude patrol in the Biak area and intercepted a lone Japanese Mitsubishi Ki-46 (nicknamed 'Dinah' by the Allies) reconnaissance aircraft. While later Dinah aircraft were modified to function as interceptor/night fighter aircraft, this particular model did not have any offensive weapons onboard, making it an easy target for the Australian Kittyhawks.

Amongst the many Japanese aircraft that were destroyed or put out of action at Hollandia, there were a few that had only received minor damage. One of these, an Oscar fighter, was recovered by 80 Squadron, and in the hands of our engine and airframe fitters it was brought to flying serviceability. The Commanding Officer and the two flight commanders were naturally the first three to fly the 'Oscar', the rest of us having our names drawn out of a hat for position in the queue. I drew number nine but only those who drew one, two and three flew the aircraft. The American authorities banned any further flights of the Oscar. Its history from that time on is unknown.

On 13 June 1944, 80 Squadron was on a barge sweep and 78 Squadron was on high-level patrol. I heard the Mayday call from a 78 Squadron aircraft and assumed that there had been an engine failure or midair collision. The pilot who had put out the Mayday call was Flying Officer Colin Raymond Harvey, and his survival story was exceptional. He was on a climb to 15 000 feet when, with three others, he entered cloud at 8000 feet and almost immediately lost control of the aircraft. He decided to bail out and was fortunate enough to crash through the jungle trees without any serious injury. In the parachute descent, he saw where his aircraft had crashed and was still burning. He realised that circling Kittyhawks would see the wreckage and smoke and know roughly where he was if he had survived.

After a restless and uncomfortable night, he followed a small stream until finding a low scrub patch clearing where he laid out his chute. It was 9.30 am on 14 June when an American pilot flying a single-engined

Stilson L–5 Sentinel aircraft spotted Harvey. From then on the American kept in touch daily, dropping food, supplies, medicines and messages for the 21 days it took until Harvey was rescued. The rescue was carried out on the waters of Lake Krau, approximately 40 miles inland from Hollandia Base. A dinghy had been dropped to Harvey when he reached the lake and he rowed out to the A2 Supermarine Seagull V (Walrus) rescue aircraft, a single-engined amphibious biplane. Harvey kept a comprehensive diary with details of his 21 days in the jungle. He had some close calls, slipping past Japanese camps and patrols, but said that his greatest dangers were eluding the many saltwater crocodiles that frequented the many streams and rivers through which he walked or swam. After three days of convalescence and interrogation, Harvey was back with his squadron on normal squadron operations.

We moved from Hollandia to Biak Island on 1 July 1944. The Japanese suffered crippling losses at Biak due mainly to the 'softening up' process delivered by the United States Navy (USN) and Air Force prior to the landing and assault by the Army. Throughout hostilities in the South-West Pacific, the Americans used a sledge hammer when a tack hammer would suffice. This policy no doubt saved a lot of Allied lives. Due to the success of 78 Squadron operations whilst based at Hollandia, all pilots of 78 Wing were now keen to do the high altitude patrols, but Japanese aircraft were few and far between. We continued to get the night attacks, but only one or two aircraft at a time, dropping bombs at altitude with little success.

An unfortunate ground incident occurred at Biak. Four of our squadron ground staff went sightseeing to the limestone caves situated on higher ground not far from the airstrip. On entering the mouth of the cave, they were met by a burst of gunfire—three of them were killed and the fourth injured in the forearm. The injured survivor returned to base and raised the alarm. An attempt was made to retrieve the Australian bodies without success and another airman was injured in the attempt. The Americans decided to use their Navy in a bombardment of the caves, and we in the Kittyhawks attempted to skip 11-second delay bombs into the caves. It was determined that even after all of this action, that the Japanese were still active inside. The American explosive experts then placed explosives close to the cave entrance and sealed the surviving Japanese inside.

Most of the Japanese forces that weren't killed at Hollandia were moving west by foot along the coast or on barges. The barge movements were at night, remaining reasonably well hidden under the overhanging jungle trees at the water's edge. First light departures from Biak followed by very low travel over the water would result in some success. The officer or NCO in charge of the barge

would evidently try to get that extra bit of mileage along the coast and not have a secure hiding place at the time of our arrival.

We moved from Biak to Noemfoor Island, on 22 July 1944. Noemfoor was a paradise compared to the previous locations. The airstrip, made of crushed coral, ran parallel to the coast and was long and wide. Additional to our wing of 72 Kittyhawks, there was an Australian Beaufighter squadron, American Kittyhawk, Thunderbolt and Northrop P-61 'Black Widow' squadrons. Our diet improved considerably overnight. The native gardens produced ripe pawpaws, bananas and tomatoes. We had two methods of fishing: one was to drop a 500-pound bomb from a Kittyhawk just off the edge of the coral reef that surrounded the island, and the other was to drop hand grenades from the edge of the reef at low tide. Almost all our spare time, of which there was plenty, was spent sunbaking on the sandy beach or swimming in the crystal clear water over the reef at high tide.

From Noemfoor, we were close enough to attack the many Japanese bases such as Ransiki, Fakfak on the southern coast and Sorong at the western tip of Dutch New Guinea. Four of us departed Noemfoor at first light on a planned barge sweep. Halfway between Noemfoor and Manokwari, we spotted a Japanese barge in the open sea. It was packed with Japanese who no doubt had eluded the American forces on Noemfoor and had hoped to reach Manokwari before daybreak. There could be many reasons why they were well short of their destination, such as engine failure, adverse sea currents, or slower than expected speed due to the heavy load. In any case, they were caught with no chance of escape. The barge carried a single machine gun of .300 calibre, which was standard armament. It was no contest. The Kittyhawks strafed the barge, raining .500 calibre bullets into the luckless Japanese. The engine section exploded on the first attack and some Japanese abandoned ship, jumping into the sea. An American PT boat operating in the area saw the engagement and requested that we cease the attack so that they could pick up some survivors for interrogation. Of the 74 Japanese onboard the barge, there were 15 survivors, and it turned out to be a real prize. Amongst the survivors were high ranking officers and key personnel of all the Japanese military services based on Noemfoor Island. They were also accompanied by three Geisha girls.

Babo was a strong Japanese base only a few miles east of the Vogelhal ('bird's neck') inland from the coast. The importance of Babo was due to its potential as an oil producing area at some time in the future. The 'Ack-Ack'[2] was always heavy and accurate. On 25 August 1944, Pilot Officer Donald Wallace commenced a

2 'Ack-Ack' was a slang term used to describe anti-aircraft fire.

dive-bombing run from 12 000 feet. At 8000 feet, his aircraft received a direct hit and exploded in a ball of flame. In the same area, Flying Officer George Downing, after receiving damage to the fuel system, belly landed on a low tide sand bar in the Vogelhal. He was rescued by a Catalina the same day.

Manokwari was another hot spot where we received our share of troubles. Frank Watts was hit at 8000 feet over the top of Manokwari, which resulted in complete loss of engine power. He glided out to sea until reaching 1200 feet, vacated the Kittyhawk with the chute opening just in time for a soft descent into the sea. We watched overhead whilst he inflated his dinghy and climbed in. We then covered him until he was picked up by the American rescue Catalina.

I was one of four pilots scheduled for a dive-bombing and strafing strike on Manokwari. There was a lot of 'Ack-Ack' during the dive-bombing run, but none of us reported being hit. There were a lot of good targets at Manokwari, such as trucks, tractors and huts, plus many partly damaged aircraft. The Japanese gunners must have been told to hold their fire when we began strafing and no doubt we became over confident and eventually easy prey. I was number four in the order of attacks and should have fared worst, but was the only one to get out unscathed.

The strike leader, Max Johnson, had his undercarriage shot away and limped back to base, finishing with a belly landing. George Downing in number two position also had his under carriage shot away plus a lot of fuselage damage and finished with a belly landing back at base. Lyle Holtkamp flying in the number three position received the worst damage, so I stayed with him for the run to Noemfoor. Holtkamp's aircraft was riddled with bullets and there was an oil slick along the length of the aircraft. It was amazing that he had not received physical damage, and it said a lot for the quality and placement of the armour plating. Several components and accessories had been damaged or put out of action, the worst being the destruction of the cables from the rudder to the rudder pedals. This meant that he could experience extreme difficulties in keeping the aircraft straight during the final approach and landing. His radio had been shot out so I was unable to communicate with him other than by hand signals. He did not know whether his undercarriage had been damaged or his tires punctured. From hand signals, he was asking whether I thought he should bail out over the base or try for a normal landing. It is difficult in a life or death situation to suggest a course of action when all the facts are unknown. I did feel that bailing out over the base had no complications and negligible risk, so I finally advised him to take that course. No doubt Holtkamp thought a lot about it but finally made the decision to try for a wheels-down landing. He did get down, losing control near

the end of his landing run before finishing with a badly damaged aircraft but completely free of any physical injuries.

The 78 Wing intelligence section received information that a Japanese transport type sea vessel was positioned at the large Japanese base of Sorong, situated at the western tip of Dutch New Guinea. Whilst based at Noemfoor Island, we had attacked Sorong on a number of occasions and had always experienced strong resistance. At the pilot briefing, it was disclosed that Japanese aircrews had managed to reach Sorong and were going to be moved by vessel to a safer area, before finally returning to Japan. There were many Japanese aircrews still alive in the South-West Pacific, but negligible aircraft to fly.

My squadron (80 Squadron) was selected to carry out the task of destroying the Japanese vessel. It was decided that three Kittyhawks flown by experienced senior officers would make a low-level attack along the tree tops, giving minimum notice to the Japanese anti-aircraft gunners. They were to attack individually; dropping 11-second delay bombs weighing 500 pounds each. As a back-up, another three Kittyhawks departing Noemfoor at the same time would climb to 10 000 feet and carry out a dive-bombing attack on the target if the low-level sortie was unsuccessful. The climb time would ensure that the three high-level aircraft would be far enough behind so as not to alert the enemy. I was chosen as one of those three. It was after midday when we departed, but the weather was excellent.

On my arrival over the target area, it was evident that no direct hits had been accomplished by the low-level trio of Kittyhawks. By the time the high-level aircraft were to commence their attack, the Japanese anti-aircraft gunners had set up a formidable blanket of shells exploding at 8000 feet. They were aware that we would be diving at close to vertical and they had placed their exploding shells perfectly. I was the last one to attack and felt certain that I had no chance of survival. I heard the sound as shrapnel hit my aircraft and I immediately released my bomb but was relieved to find that I still had complete control of the aircraft. At de-brief back at Noemfoor, it was agreed that we had been completely unsuccessful in our mission. I can only assume that the Americans on the following day would have conducted saturation bombing of the target with Mitchell and Liberator bombers.

Another bad spot was the Kai Islands, a group of many small, scattered islands situated between the south coast of Dutch New Guinea and Darwin. During a dive-bombing sortie, Flight Lieutenant Arthur Nelson was hit by 'Ack-Ack', which put his engine out of action. He wasn't able to glide very far out to sea, but he got far enough to perform a successful ditching. He made it into his dinghy but the odds were stacked against him. It was late afternoon and our

most distant target from our base at Noemfoor, so the time available to cover him was limited. Messages were sent out to the American Catalinas but either the messages weren't being received or darkness came too soon.

We departed the area at the last possible minute. From official records, Nelson was able to get to land and elude the Japanese for three days, before being captured on 16 October 1944. Alongside Nelson in captivity was a Dutch pilot named Engelsman, and the two of them were murdered on 8 November 1944. Lieutenant Colonel Hideo Kondo ordered that Nelson and Engelsman be secured to a post, back-to-back. Lieutenant Yoshimo Iwasaki then threw cyanide canisters at the feet of the captives who collapsed and were then killed with bayonets. The Japanese use of poison gas and the atrocities committed in the Manchuria campaign are probably known to most Australians. What would not be known is that experiments with poison gas were carried out on Australian airmen during World War II. In 2004, Japanese Professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi from Chuo University visited Australia to advertise his findings on poison gas warfare and the Japanese military forces.[3] He found that only perfunctory details are recorded about the Australian case in the National Archives and RAAF records. Military tribunal papers discovered by Professor Yoshimi, while researching in Canberra, record that the two Japanese officers involved in the killing of Nelson and Engelsman were convicted of war crimes in Hong Kong in July 1948 and were subsequently hanged.

There were another three pilots from 80 Squadron who were captured by the Japanese and beheaded. A fourth pilot, who was in the same section as the three previously mentioned, was not accounted for. It is small consolation for relatives of those pilots beheaded, but the Japanese officers responsible were found guilty by the War Crimes Tribunal and received the death penalty.

Since my retirement from aviation, I have often thought back to the day of our arrival at Port Moresby in February 1944. We, the pilots, received a comprehensive briefing on survival, native attitudes, and customs, including Papua New Guinea weather and terrain. Last, but not least, was the treatment that we could expect if captured by the Japanese. The intelligence officer made it very clear that we as aircrew would be beheaded. At completion of the briefing, we discussed amongst ourselves the subject of beheadings. Every pilot, when flying, carried a large machete knife strapped to the calf of the left leg and a Smith and Western revolver in a holster at his waist. It was agreed by all at the discussions that if opportunity allowed, we would use every bullet but one

3 Yoshiaki Yoshimi and Seiya Matsuno, *Dokugasusen Kankei Shiryō II* (Materials on poison gas Warfare), Kaisetsu, Hōkan 2, Jūgonen sensô gokuhi shiryōshū, Funi Shuppankan, 1997.

against the enemy and keep the last bullet to put through our own head. None of those 80 Squadron members carried out that resolve.

Australian fighter pilots in the South-West Pacific Area were posted into squadrons for an operational tour of nine months. I completed my tour on 16 November 1944, and was posted to RAAF Base, Point Cook in Victoria where I was to undergo a flying instructor course.

Chapter 3

Test and Ferry – Australia and the South-West Pacific Area

On my return to Australia in November of 1944, I had four weeks leave to take before commencing the instructor course at Point Cook, Victoria. During the leave period, I was walking in the central city area of Sydney when I experienced shivers without being cold. This condition lasted for 20 minutes before triggering a spike in body temperature and loss of leg strength, forcing me to sit down in the gutter of the footpath for a period of two hours. At the time, I was not aware that it was a Malaria attack, and felt extreme embarrassment as I believed that the hundreds of people walking past me would think that I was very intoxicated. During operational tours in the South-West Pacific, we religiously swallowed our Atebrin tablets daily, and none of the pilots reported an attack of Malaria until our return to Australia. The No 80 Squadron medical section told us to continue taking Atebrin daily for a period of three months after our return home. Very few of us, including myself, had obeyed that instruction.

I had a request from a squadron member to be best man at his wedding at the town of Adaminaby in the snow country of New South Wales. I was living at Goulburn at the time and was pleased and honoured to accept. The wedding ceremony was to commence at 3.00 pm, so it was a comfortable morning drive to his home where his parents had a large sheep property on the outskirts of Adaminaby. We had lunch and were just about to depart for the church when I went into the shiver stage of a Malaria attack. The timing could not have been worse as I knew for certain that I would switch to the high temperature stage during the crucial period of the ceremony.

I suggested that one of our friends could take my place in the proceedings but this plan was countered by the argument that I only had to pass the wedding ring over when requested. I was also promised that the minister would be told of the situation and would shorten the service. We were RAAF officers in uniform, which was colourful and unusual in a small country town so there was no way that the minister was going to shorten the service. I unwisely took my place with the groom and within minutes of the ceremony beginning, I switched to the high temperature stage. As I grew weaker, I lost track of what the minister was saying but clearly remember the request for the wedding ring. I did manage to take the ring out of my pocket just before I collapsed and fell, watching the ring rolling

across the floor and then past the minister's shoes. I regained consciousness whilst being carried out of the church with thoughts that the congregation would be thinking how terrible these air force boys are with their heavy drinking habits.

At the conclusion of my leave period, I reported to Point Cook and commenced the instructor course. Three days later I had a particularly severe attack of Malaria and was admitted to Heidelberg Hospital, where I underwent three weeks of treatment. The full extent of the treatment was swallowing a third of a glass of liquid quinine daily.

On my return to Point Cook, I was advised that I had lost too much time and that I would not be rejoining this course, which turned out to be the last one during the war years. An appointment was made for me to be interviewed by the Postings Department of the RAAF and it was decided that I would be posted to Test and Ferry Flight, based at Richmond, New South Wales. Richmond was a beautiful base with permanent brick buildings, well-kept gardens, lawns and waterways frequented by wild water fowl.

Brand new P51 Mustangs at RAAF Richmond, ready for ferrying to Australian squadrons in Borneo

Test and Ferry Flight was very active at that time, even though it was evident that the war was nearing its conclusion. The pilots in the flight were specialists in single- or multi-engined aircraft, so initially I was confined to ferrying Tiger Moths, Wirraways and Kittyhawks. One of the most interesting and enjoyable ferry flights that I made was flying a Tiger Moth from Richmond to Charters Towers, which entailed a lot of overnight stops in towns and RAAF bases along the eastern coast. That trip was completed without as much as a minor unserviceability.

I was at Richmond for only two or three weeks when the P51 Mustangs began to arrive from America on merchant navy transport ships. I did some of the early testing and then ferrying of the Mustangs to the Australian squadrons at Horn Island, Halmahera and Borneo. Even though my first love was for the Kittyhawk, I knew that the Mustang was a better aircraft. It was a joy to fly and was designed for cockpit comfort. Strange though, that in an aircraft of such quality, it could have an undercarriage selector lever made of an alloy that could be snapped off at the base on being pushed or pulled into the selected position. This happened on two occasions during the short time that I was with Test and Ferry. The fault was remedied within a very short time.

After we ferried Mustangs to squadrons in the South-West Pacific, it would be a two-way ferry with Kittyhawks being brought back to Australia. This was something of a tragedy in that several young men, who had lived through an operational tour, lost their lives in the ferrying of the Kittyhawks. These aircraft had usually been sitting in the open in a hot and moist environment without regular maintenance. Under the lend-lease agreement between Australia and the United States, the Kittyhawks had to be returned to Australia for destruction. A thorough job must have been done, as only one Kittyhawk is on static display at the National War Memorial in Canberra. A second one, dug up from a dam wall in Canada, was brought to Australia by Col Pay, of Scone, and restored to airworthiness condition. After an accident due to engine failure, it was repaired and sold to overseas interests. Several other restoration projects are currently being undertaken.

The only other aircraft I flew at Test and Ferry was the Spitfire, and they were short trips from Richmond to RAAF Base, Parkes. I think that any pilot was conditioned to be impressed by the Spitfire and rightfully so, but I could not say that it was the fighter aircraft that I enjoyed the most. It did not have the pilot comfort of the Kittyhawk or Mustang, but it did have the most beautiful sound of the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine.

I had a regular girlfriend from the latter period of school days. She was one year younger and one class behind me. She was the daughter of Swedish parents and very attractive. However, I think the main factor that brought us together was our mutual interest in competitive sport. We both represented the school in a number of team sports. We married whilst I was based at Richmond.

'Laddie', Richmond, 1945

Chapter 4

Fighter Affiliation at Tocumwal

In mid-July 1945, I received a posting to Fighter Affiliation Flight at RAAF Base, Tocumwal on the New South Wales banks of the Murray River. Tocumwal was a typical Riverina town and area, with flat open plains and a cluster of trees along the line of the river. I was disappointed leaving Richmond as I enjoyed the type of flying in the various aircraft types, and every ferry flight was a navigation exercise. When I arrived at Tocumwal, I had no idea that the base was such a huge complex. It was like finding one's way around a small town. The hangars were of metal structure but the rest of the buildings, including the administration and Officers Mess, were all of pre-fabricated material.

Tocumwal was an Operational Training Unit for the training of bomber crews using quad-engined Liberators. There were several single-engined Vultee Vengeance dive-bombers that were used as drogue towers for gunnery practice by the Liberator air gunners. The Fighter Affiliation Flight was formed for the purpose of showing bomber crews the types of attacks to be expected from enemy fighter aircraft. The planned strength of the Fighter Affiliation Flight was to be eight pilots, eight Kittyhawks, eight Spitfires, and the standard ground support staff. The ground support staff was at full strength; however, pilot strength stabilised at five and aircraft at five Kittyhawks. This situation was no doubt due to the Allied victory being a foregone conclusion at the time. Had this affiliation flight been formed two or three years earlier, it would have been invaluable.

In the short time that we were at Tocumwal, The five fighter pilots, in conjunction with the Liberator instructors, pilots and air gunners, discussed types of attacks that we would carry out and reached a final agreement. At each planned sortie, a detailed pre-briefing would be carried out by the Liberator captain and the Kittyhawk pilot. We had a prearranged height and area, plus a very high frequency (VHF) radio for use between the two aircraft.

The types of attack practice was as follows:

- **Head on.** This attack was an advantage to the fighter when one-on-one and was disconcerting to say the least for the Liberator pilots and nose air gunner. The Kittyhawk pilot chose his moment to break-off the attack violently to the right and down at very high speed.

- **Over head on.** This attack required a lot of skill and judgement on the part of the fighter pilot. He would position his aircraft approximately 1500 feet above the bomber proceeding in the same direction. When sufficiently far enough ahead of the bomber, he would roll onto his back, pull through and meet the bomber head on at the same height. If executed correctly, it would allow two or three seconds of gunnery from the fighter who would break violently to the right and down. At debriefings, Liberator pilots and nose gunners always expressed concern and sometimes fear at this type of attack.
- **Rear attack.** One-on-one, the odds were usually about even, but I do believe that the fighter pilot had the advantage in firepower, and knowing exactly when and how he was going to make the attack. The break-off was the same as the head on and over head on attacks, with a sharp drive to the right and down.
- **Front and rear quarter attacks.** Depending on the angle of attack, deflection lay-off was necessary and this applied both ways. Success depended on the skill of the fighter pilot and the bomber gunners. Break-off by the fighter was always to the right and down.

The Kittyhawk section was commanded by a pilot of flight lieutenant rank who had been a Spitfire pilot in Britain. He was a flamboyant type, who realised the war was nearly over and decided that in the time remaining he would run our flight like a Country Club. He decided that the five of us in turn could fly a Kittyhawk to our home town, spend a night and return the following day. The commander completed his trip away, expressing the opinion that this was a lovely war.

The second pilot was just as flamboyant as our leader, and his destination was Adelaide. He decided that he did not need a map as all he had to do was follow the Murray River. He knew the Adelaide area like the back of his hand. On the return flight he must have lost concentration, or at the junction, the Murrumbidgee River must have looked bigger than the Murray. He followed the Murrumbidgee a lot further than was needed to find Tocumwal on the Murray. Without a map, he was completely confused and carried out a wheels-down landing on a large, flat and treeless field. He had landed an easy walking distance to a farmhouse, found out where he was and relayed the information to RAAF Base, Tocumwal requesting fuel. Naturally, this ended the 'back to home' Kittyhawk trips.

Whilst in Tocumwal, I was offered a Vultee-Vengeance as something else to fly. Unlike previous conversions to single pilot aircraft, I was simply told, 'there's the aircraft—take it away'. I spent 20 minutes sitting in the cockpit, making sure of the instrumentation, flap and undercarriage levers before starting the engine. I flew the aircraft for only 40 minutes and could not say that I enjoyed it. The climb was very sluggish and it had less forward visibility than I ever had in any other aircraft. I had intended to do all the aerobatic manoeuvres but only completed a stall turn and slow roll.

Life in the Officers Mess at Tocumwal was far more boisterous than I had experienced in any other mess. We were drinking more than normal and this often progressed to a game of rugby or something similar on the floor of the mess lounge room. On 18 September 1945, I flew my last Kittyhawk flight and was asked if I would like to do a conversion to Liberators for the purpose of acting as co-pilot for the return of Australian Prisoners of War (POW) from Singapore, Manila and Tokyo. I carried out two trips: one from Manila and one from Singapore. The POWs were flown to RAAF Base Laverton, and either placed in hospital or taken to their respective homes.

I was discharged from the RAAF with the rank of flying officer and returned to civilian life on 15 November 1945. Prior to my departure, I was interviewed about my future. I had three options: I could stay in the RAAF, pursue a University course or be trained in a trade. I made a firm decision to leave the RAAF. Attending University, I would be paid a weekly wage of seven pounds and five shillings for a maximum of five years. By taking the trade training, I would receive 17 pounds and 15 shillings per week, which was the wage of a licensed electrician. Any award rate rises over the five-year period of training would apply. Hoping to purchase a home and having recently married, I elected to do the five-year electrical course.

It was late 1950, and I had just received my electrical trades certificate. Almost to the day, there were full page advertisements appearing in the prominent daily papers throughout Australia offering 30 permanent commissions to wartime pilots and navigators to rejoin the RAAF. With a wife and two small children, the decision to apply was made with very mixed feelings.

Chapter 5

de Havilland Mosquito at Kimberley

Upon deciding to rejoin the RAAF, I went through the interviews, aptitude, coordination and medical tests in Sydney and received a very lengthy telegram on New Year's Eve, 1951, advising me that I was one of the successful aircrew. Three days later, I received notice that a fault had been discovered in my eye tests and that an appointment had been made for me to be tested by a Macquarie Street specialist by name of Dr William Deane-Butcher. The period of the test was mainly taken up reminiscing about old times in the Kittyhawk squadrons. He was the Chief Medical Officer of the wing that I was a member. The reason for the eye test was colour blindness, and it was only then that I realised why much more time was spent on me than other aircrew recruits when enlisting in the RAAF in 1941. Dr Deane-Butcher assessed me as colour defective but safe, and I re-entered the RAAF on 28 February 1951. I was posted into headquarters section at RAAF Base, Richmond, and was pleased to see that it had not changed in any way since my time there with Test and Ferry Flight in 1945.

In early April 1951 I received a posting to RAAF Base East Sale, where I commenced a three-month refresher course flying Tiger Moths and Wirraways. Apart from normal circuit flying, we did cross-country navigation flights, night flying, instrument flying and a full range of aerobatics and mock dogfighting. At conclusion of the refresher course, I received word that my daughter had been admitted to hospital with pneumonia and I asked for a temporary posting to Canberra so I could get to Goulburn where my family was living. I was posted to No 87 Photo Reconnaissance Squadron, which was equipped with de Havilland Mosquitoes. I did not expect to start a conversion to the Mosquito, believing that once my daughter was out of danger, I would go to Korea on Mustangs. This did not happen, and I spent the next two years flying the Mosquitoes.

My total flying time at that stage was 700 hours, and with a five-year gap, the Mosquito aircraft presented quite a challenge. Everyone who flew the Mosquito spoke well of it—in fact, it could be considered as one of the more pleasant aircraft to fly. Having said that, there was also a negative side. The Mosquito had a very substantial undercarriage, and its time from 'up' selection to fully retract was approximately 47 seconds. An engine failure during most of that 47 seconds spelt disaster unless one was fortunate enough to have flat, wide open spaces ahead to conduct a belly landing.

Mosquitoes departing Fairbairn, Canberra, for Townsville, 1952

Soon after completing my conversion, I was programmed to do photographic work for the compilation of maps over the north-west corner of New South Wales at 25 000 feet. The six-inch camera was fitted to the belly of the aircraft and when activated from the cockpit by the navigator, continued taking photographs at regular time intervals, with each photo having a 30 per cent overlap. Each run covered 90 nautical miles and was designed to have a 10 per cent overlap. After three months, I was selected to do a photographic officer's course at RAAF Base, East Sale. It was a four-month course and did not include any air work. My return to Fairbairn coincided with a temporary move of the squadron to Western Australia, setting up our base of operations at RAAF Base, Pearce.

The area to be photographed extended eastward to Kalgoorlie and northward to Geraldton. On completion of this project we moved to Port Hedland. This was a decline in living conditions, moving from the luxury of the Officers Mess at Pearce to tents and stretcher beds on the open airfield of Port Hedland. In those days, 1952, the town was a sleepy little hollow with one dilapidated weatherboard hotel. A big plus was the fishing, which had to be seen to be believed.

Mosquito—Hindley and Coleman, 1952

The Commanding Officer had a 12-foot boat with outboard motor that allowed us to travel at least eight knots-per-hour. We also had first class fishing gear. Only three of us were interested in fishing, so we had exclusive use of this fishing equipment and certainly made the most of it. At Port Hedland, the squadron was never short of fish as we could bring in enough to feed the whole camp on a daily basis. The main fish types were bream, salmon and barramundi. There were a lot of grey nurse sharks in the area also; several at a time would swim close behind our boat hoping to get an easy meal on the end of our hooks, or wait on us to throw out any undersized fish. A feature of the Port Hedland area was the massive tides, which required us to be alert as the water movement could be greater than our eight-knot maximum in our 12-foot boat.

The aerial photography carried out at Port Hedland was highly successful, all of our aims being accomplished. The large iron ore deposits in the Kimberley region were unknown to us at the time. If our destination was a long way east, we would on occasion remain low-level for the first 20 or 30 miles, hoping to see the wild donkeys and camels. During this low-level travel we would experience fluctuations in our compass, which no doubt was due to the high levels of iron ore in the ground below.

I experienced an engine failure in the Noonkanbah area, a distance of 400 statute miles north-east of Port Hedland. I was practicing 'one-engine' failures

when doing my conversion. These were done in a variety of situations and heights and this was easy as I could get. I was in sight of the Noonkanbah airstrip and at 25 000 feet, so I had plenty of time to plan my procedures. For a strip in the middle of nowhere, it was exceptionally good, with a solid surface and plenty of length.

The landing was successful and I spent seven very pleasant days at the homestead waiting for a replacement engine. During that time, I spent most days walking a mile or two with a .22 rifle, shooting wild pigeons and turkeys. What I could carry back to the homestead was a nice change from the mutton that we were constantly having for two or three meals a day. On these walks through the bush, I was intrigued by the way the local Aborigines could seemingly 'melt away' into the scrub without being seen. I would often come across their fires, red embers still glowing—the bones scattered around the location were those of kangaroos.

On return to our home base at Fairbairn, my navigator and I were advised of an exchange posting to a Royal Air Force (RAF) Mosquito squadron at Seletar in Singapore. It was a one-year posting, and as was standard in the RAAF at that period, 1951, families accompanying was not an option. This situation no doubt contributed to many marriage break-downs, followed by divorce.

Chapter 6

Royal Air Force Butterworth Exchange

Seletar was a big base, and a pleasant one. We were made very welcome by all squadron personnel. Most of our work was low-level; photographing coastal areas of Malaya and the scattered islands off Singapore. After only one month at Seletar, the Commanding Officer said that I was to take over a detachment at RAF Butterworth on the north-western coast of Malaya. There would be three Mosquitoes, supported by 34 personnel, of which six would be aircrew. Everything about Butterworth was excellent. The buildings were suited to the local environment, constructed in such a way to capture any cool breeze. The weather was generally much better than in Singapore, due in part to its extra distance away from the equator. The days were perfect for flying, with rain falling only at night.

The air work within the Malayan borders was to get photographic evidence of communist rebel camps. Beyond the border, the bulk of our work was taking photographic runs with print overlap at 25 000 feet along the Burma/Thailand border. As a rule, one of our three aircraft would depart Butterworth each day at a time to allow best photographic results through the middle of the day and then land at Bangkok to stay overnight at a hotel. Leaving Bangkok the following day, photography would again be done on the Burma/Thailand border before landing back at Butterworth. On landing at Bangkok we were always met by two senior NCOs who serviced our aircraft and looked after our road transport requirements. They were members of the British Embassy.

The Thailand Air Force had a fighter squadron based at the commercial airfield. The pilots were of royal blood, or sons of politicians or wealthy businessmen, but there was no question about their flying ability. Every take-off was followed by a slow roll whilst the undercarriage was being retracted only 30 metres from the ground. There was an occasion when I departed Bangkok in a very dense fog, expecting to break into the clear at 1000 to 2000 feet. To my surprise, I climbed to 25 000 feet without breaking clear. Up to this point, there had been no turbulence, although I was aware that it was the period of the inter-tropic fronts, and could expect some rough weather eventually. When the rough weather that I expected hit, it was beyond my wildest dreams. The artificial horizon and the directional gyro had both toppled, leaving me with an airspeed indicator, a vertical speed indicator and a turn and balance instrument. Going through my mind throughout the ordeal was the knowledge

that this aircraft was of wooden and fabric construction and could disintegrate at any moment.

After what seemed like an eternity, I got back to smoother conditions and was able to get the artificial horizon and directional gyro to function normally. Approximately one hour from Butterworth, I broke out of cloud and landed at Butterworth in beautiful clear weather. After landing, I found that a lot of paint had been stripped from the aircraft, particularly from around the engine cowls. I had a long conversation with the base engineering officer and requested that a very thorough inspection be carried out for signs of structural stress.

Four days later, I was advised that the aircraft was ready for a test flight. I climbed to 7000 feet and applied four gs of force in steep turns and pulling out of dives. The aircraft was signed up as fully serviceable and was scheduled for the Bangkok run the following day. The crew of that flight left Butterworth at the normal morning time in good weather conditions. The pilot reported back to Butterworth control that he had reached 25 000 feet and would report again in 30 minutes time. Just five or six minutes later, a short garbled message was received by control with only recognisable word being 'Mayday'. Nothing more has ever been seen or heard of the crew or aircraft. There was an inquiry and it was deduced that even in the very unlikely event of the two engines failing simultaneously, the pilot would have had plenty of time to fully report the situation. The only conclusion was that the aircraft disintegrated.

Operating from Butterworth at this period was a de Havilland Hornet squadron. The Hornet is a little brother of the Mosquito and was of similar appearance and construction. Unlike the Mosquito, the Hornet's two Rolls-Royce Merlin engines were contra-rotating, which eliminated torque forces when increasing power for take-off. Also, the Hornet was single-seat pilot only. A directive came through from RAAF Headquarters in Singapore for me to carry out test flights on the Hornet for assessment of its suitability in the same photographic roll as the Mosquito. I carried out the tests and submitted an adverse report on the basis that the sole pilot could not get the accuracy of the two member Mosquito crew. For pure flying pleasure, I would rate the Hornet as the finest fixed-wing aircraft that I have ever flown.

The Mosquito and the Hornet were both suspect in tropical conditions due to the effect that heat and humidity had on the glue used on the airframes. It was on a Sunday morning that I sat on the beach at Butterworth and watched a British pilot enjoying himself while putting a Hornet through a masterful display of aerobatics. I noticed vapour trails coming from the wing tips as he pulled a lot of g force throughout his display. It was then that the Hornet began to disintegrate at a height of about 3000 feet. The pilot evidently expected that he

had a reasonable chance of getting the Hornet onto Butterworth runway but this was not to be. It was in the circuit area at about 1000 feet that he had no other choice but to jump. The parachute never fully opened, and the pilot hit the water at a descent speed that I knew he would be lucky to survive. The base rescue boat brought him to the beach where I was standing. He was badly injured and it was disclosed later that day that he had lost an eye and had multiple bones fractures—but he did survive.

On conclusion of my exchange posting with the RAF, I and Mike Wood, my navigator, returned to No 87 Squadron, which was still operating in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The squadron did its last photographic sortie on 26 August 1953, and returned to Fairbairn in Canberra three days later. The flying time from Port Hedland to Fairbairn was eight hours: four during the daytime and four at night. We had one stop at Alice Springs to re-fuel. Following our arrival at Fairbairn, there was immediate disbandment of the squadron and I was appointed as Commanding Officer for the wind-down. It was mainly a recording of equipment and transfer to storage or other units. In addition to myself and Mike Wood there was one other crew. Over a period of two weeks, we ferried all the squadron Mosquitoes to Tocumwal for long-term storage. Due to their construction they were housed in the hangars, whilst the brand new Mustangs were exposed to the elements.

I received a phone call from a senior officer requesting information on serviceability and availability of the Mosquito aircraft at Fairbairn. On the basis of my reply, he said that he would arrive in Canberra the following day and that I was to plan a flight to Manus Island, and that he would operate as navigator, he being qualified in that mustering.

We went via Port Moresby, where we refuelled to and from our destination. The reason for the trip was unknown to me, but was quite evident when I saw a volcano erupting out of the sea only a short distance from Manus Island. It was not a large eruption, as the visible area was only 400 yards diameter and 500 feet high. It was the colour of the evolving island that interested me most. It was a mixture of black, brown and yellow. Sometime in the 1970s, when operating helicopters commercially in the Manus area, I was disappointed to see that the volcanic island was only three feet above sea level with a sparse covering of grass.

The movement of the last Mosquito to Tocumwal coincided with my posting to RAAF Base, East Sale, where I was to undertake a flying instructor course.

Chapter 7

Flying Instructor – Ab Initio

The Flying Instructor course was scheduled to run for five and a half months. There were 22 pilots on course, consisting of 19 officers and three NCOs. We were a mixed bunch, coming from bombers, transports, photo reconnaissance, marine and fighters. The majority were from fighters after completing a tour of duty in Korea. The Central Flying School instructors were all experienced officers of World War II vintage, and they also did most of the classroom instruction. There were two exceptions: the education officer and the lecturer on meteorology, who was a civilian.

The first two or three weeks were all classroom lectures with an accent on lecturing technique, learning how to compile a lecture from the main headings, through sub-headings, finishing with a conclusion. This was all done with the use of a blackboard. Very few of us had any past experience in lecturing or performing a speech, but I found over the years that all nervousness could be eliminated if one thoroughly knew the subject. Our first time up in front of the rest of the class was a 10 minute talk on any subject of our choosing, so naturally it was something that each student knew a lot about. Over the full period of the course, the lectures that we gave grew longer, progressively more complicated and of an aeronautical content.

The flying part of the course was initially on Tiger Moths and Wirraways. We learnt parrot-type patter for every sequence of instruction from pre-brief, aircraft inspection, start-up, taxiing, take-off and so on right through to complicated sequences such as aerobatics. Some 'ad lib' was acceptable. We were all able to improve our instruments flying, which was part of the course. East Sale had more foggy days than any place I have ever experienced in Australia, so we had plenty of actual instrument time. I always felt confident with instrument flying as a result of the 'survival of the fittest' experience during World War II in Papua New Guinea. Later on, when instructing on Wirraways, I would take a trainee into full cloud and demonstrate that all the aerobatic sequences and spins could be safely done using the turn and balance instrument.

The course concluded with examinations on ability to impart flying knowledge, plus all ground subjects and classroom lecturing. Postings were to either Uranquinty or Point Cook. I was posted to the former.

During the war, I had trained at Uranquinty and always had a liking for the weather of that area. Nearby Wagga also had the advantages of a large country

town without the crime of the major cities. The Officers Mess at Uranquinty had a marvellous atmosphere, and the social activities were excellent. This could have been due to a combination of pilot compatibility plus the isolation. Very few officers made the effort to travel to Sydney or Melbourne for a weekend.

Up until this time, my wife and three children had been living in Goulburn. So far in my air force career, I had not had the opportunity to have my family accompany me on any posting, so my wife and I were delighted when we were offered a house on the base. I decided to take the gamble that I would receive accommodation on future postings and immediately sold my house in Goulburn. An air force bus took my children to school in Wagga and brought them home again in the afternoon. Most of my spare time was spent in the garden planting and nourishing the flowers and vegetables that I grew throughout the summer months.

As well as my prime duty as one of the two flight commanders, I had the supernumerary position of rugby officer. Our RAAF team was accepted into the Wagga competition and acquitted itself quite well, having as many wins as it had losses. It was interesting to occasionally have a trainee pilot on course that was a sportsman of a very high standard.

The trainee pilots coming through at this time were educated, intelligent, physically fit and coordinated. The course numbers averaged at about 30, of which a quarter were from the Navy. The initial training was on Tiger Moths, and later courses on Winjeels. From Tigers or Winjeels they progressed to Wirraways. Only half of the Wirraway course was done at Uranquinty, the second half at Point Cook, where, if successful, trainees were awarded their pilots wings. The 'scrub' rate throughout was not nearly as severe as during the war years. This could be due to a combination of a more even standard of trainees, plus the lack of time urgency that existed during the war.

It was the middle of 1956 when I received a posting from Uranquinty to No 5 National Service Training (NST) unit at RAAF Base, Laverton as Officer-in-Charge of aircrew training in Victoria. This was a new concept with the NST organisation, so I had to develop the course from scratch. We had good classroom facilities at Laverton and I was able to acquire two ground instructors to aid me on the normal aircrew subjects.

A big percentage of the intake applied for the aircrew training. My hope was to have 12 trainees successfully complete the course of 120 hours on Tiger Moth, de Havilland Chipmunk and Auster AOP aircraft. From the interviews and records of their education, I selected 15. The flying training was financed by the RAAF through the Moorabbin Flying School, where we used their aircraft and flying instructors. I did some flying instruction but generally restricted myself

to tests and final private pilot examinations. The Department of Civil Aviation examined me in the air and the classroom, awarding me the title of 'Examiner of Airmen'. This gave me the authority to examine and award private pilot licences to successful students.

Whilst at Laverton, I was directed by the Department of Air to periodically proceed to RAAF Base, Tocumwal, where I carried out flight tests on any aircraft that were of a serviceable flying category. Tocumwal, at that time, was a graveyard of aircraft in varying degrees of serviceability. An engineering officer was the only RAAF member on the base. I was not qualified to fly most of the multi-engined aircraft, so I was restricted to Mosquitoes, Dakotas, Mustangs, Wirraways and Tiger Moths. The engineering officer rarely pressed for any particular type, so I spent most of my time testing the Mustangs. There were rows of Mustangs, all in beautiful condition and with negligible flying time in their log books. There was not a single Kittyhawk on the base, so I assumed that they must have been destroyed.

It was in the middle of 1957 that aircrew training for national servicemen was discontinued. Quite a few of the boys who received aircrew training through the NST scheme continued in aviation and went on to full-time careers in the three services, plus commercial flying with the airlines.

My next posting was to No 36 Squadron, based at Fairbairn, Canberra, as Chief Flying Instructor, operating Dakota aircraft.

Chapter 8

Flying Instructor – DC-3 Dakota

The Dakota was a lovely aircraft to fly. It had no vices and the cockpit seating was very comfortable. The crew composition was captain, co-pilot, navigator and signaller. In addition to my task as instructor, I was appointed flight commander and was responsible for most of the day-to-day running of No 36 Squadron. Pilots joining the squadron were mainly the young brigade, just fresh from gaining their wings, but on occasion there would be an older pilot of wartime vintage experienced in fighter or bomber operations. New pilots would spend the first few days studying the operations manuals, rules and regulations, before being examined on knowledge absorbed.

Generally speaking, the conversion to the Dakota presented no great problems due to its docility, however, some pilots did take longer than they should have in mastering asymmetry. Sometimes it was due to the brain not functioning quickly enough, or the rare occasion when an individual lacked the leg strength to counter the yaw[1] forces caused by the engine failure during periods of 'critical' and 'safety' speeds just after take-off. On completion of conversion, the new pilots would operate as co-pilot until deemed ready for a captaincy and after successful tests and checks.

The Dakota transport squadrons operated throughout Australia, to and from not only RAAF bases, but also civilian airfields, including small country towns with dirt or grass strips. This was an indication of the versatility of the Dakota. I would aim to make conversion training more interesting by completing a full coastal circuit of Australia. This ensured a wide variety of experience through landing at small grass strips at small country towns and busy airfields in the major cities. Additional to the landings at new locations, there were the procedures required to enter control zones at such places as Tullamarine and Mascot.

There was a detailed itinerary of all airfields that we would visit and those we would stay at overnight, and we made hotel/motel bookings well in advance to ensure accommodation requirements. Five airmen from the technical trades equipped with spare parts travelled with us as part of the crew. We had four pilots doing conversion training, so we would carry out at least four approaches

1 Torque effect is the force which causes the airplane to have a tendency to swerve (yaw) to the left, and is created by the clockwise rotation of the engine and the propeller.

and landings at each airfield. On one of these around Australia trips, we departed Darwin en route to Normanton, a small town 30 miles south-east of the south-east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

At Normanton we were given the royal treatment, being met at the airport by the Mayor and the Chief of Police. We were advised that a party had been arranged at one of the hotels, which happened to be a different one to that at which we were staying overnight. I asked the taxi driver to pick the 13 of us up at a certain time using his one taxi on shuttle, or to arrange for another two taxis. Only one taxi arrived and his first four passengers were at their destination 30 seconds later—the party hotel was on the opposite side of the street. It turned out to be an enjoyable night, with plenty of female company, music and dancing, plus a marvellous supper. It was interesting to see most of the RAAF personnel conversing with crocodile shooters and cattle ringers.

Having operated as a fighter pilot in the South-West Pacific Area during World War II, I considered that our crews should experience the bigger challenge of operating in Papua New Guinea, with its difficult weather and terrain. I drew up a training syllabus and presented it to the Commanding Officer for consideration. It was approved at squadron level and passed on to higher authority, where it was again approved.

Ten-day training periods were allotted every two months using two Dakotas; one each of all the trade musterings, four of each aircrew mustering and a limited amount of engine and airframe spare parts. The Papua New Guinea training proved most popular, and no doubt improved the efficiency and confidence of all concerned. However, it was not without cost. It was during one of the Papua New Guinea exercises that I did not involve myself, apart from the pre-briefing prior to departure. I selected a very experienced pilot to be in charge of the exercise and I gave a very comprehensive briefing, with particular emphasis on the more dangerous strips such as Tapini and Wau. There are a lot of airstrips in Papua New Guinea where once on final approach, one is committed to landing and under no circumstances must an abort with overshoot be attempted. Wau was one of those strips.

At debrief it was ascertained that initial touchdown at Wau resulted in a high bounce, and both pilots in the split second for decision, pushed both throttles forward believing that they could clear the airstrip. The Dakota crashed to the side of the airstrip and was badly damaged. Fortunately none of the crew was killed and injuries were not serious.

On 10 October 1957, I was advised that an aircraft and crew were required for a special operation with the code name of *Antler*. Technicians would install equipment required for the planned task. I decided to captain the aircraft and

that same day was introduced to a government scientist who was to monitor the technical equipment. The task was to follow and plot the cloud movement from an atomic blast at Woomera that same day. It was late afternoon when we first made contact with the cloud and had no trouble in keeping a safe distance. The general height that we were flying was 10 000 feet. As darkness came, the risks increased due to lack of visibility and I was given small changes in direction by the scientist when his equipment indicated that we were getting dangerously close to the cloud. There was only one serious incident when the scientist actually screamed for me to turn through 180 degrees immediately.

A DC-3 Dakota being loaded, Port Moresby, 1957

A few years later in South Vietnam, I was exposed to a defoliant known as 'Agent Orange'. After leaving the RAAF, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, which was accepted by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) as war-caused. I assume that there is a possibility that the cancer may have resulted from the atomic cloud penetration, or a combination of the two exposure experiences.

After about a year with 36 Squadron, I was posted to No 2 Squadron at Butterworth in charge of a Dakota flight made up of two aircraft, three sets of aircrews and 14 technicians. In the ferry move from Canberra to Butterworth we experienced excellent weather throughout and had no unserviceability. The route took us through eastern Australia to Darwin, Papua New Guinea,

Dutch New Guinea, Halmahera and the Philippines, before finally landing at Butterworth in Malaysia.

One of the Dakotas was fitted out for VIP duties designed to carry senior service officers, politicians and Malaysian royalty. The standard Dakota did the mundane day-to-day work required by the RAAF base. Regular runs were made between Butterworth and Singapore, almost on a daily basis, but our operations extended much further afield into the Philippines, Borneo, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. The conditions for these away from home trips were excellent, as we always had authority to stay at the best hotels available. It was essential that I had a VIP rating, so it was arranged that I be examined by an RAF officer at Singapore with the necessary qualifications.

My supernumerary appointments at the base were rugby and tennis officer, so those two sports fared very well with many trips throughout our operating area. These sporting tours came to the attention of the Raja of Perlis, who was somewhat of a fanatic about tennis, and on many occasions I took RAAF tennis teams to his palace at Alor Setar in north-western Malaysia. At the conclusion of the day's matches, we would enjoy non-alcoholic drinks and a sumptuous Malaysian meal.

The Shell Company at Brunei was also a great host and took every opportunity to have an RAAF team visit them for a full weekend, where on different occasions we played rugby, tennis, squash and cricket. Unlike our stay in Alor Setar, at Brunei we were offered alcoholic drinks.

I experienced one engine failure during my period on Dakotas, and that was on a very dark night bringing home a rugby team from Singapore to Butterworth. I was RAAF 'all up weight' of 28 000 pounds at time of departure from Singapore, so I was not much lighter 40 minutes later when the port engine failed. I was flying coastal at a cruise height of 4000 feet. After feathering the failed engine, I trimmed the aircraft and set up a cruise speed of 97 knots with a power setting on the good engine of just above normal cruise. This worked out perfectly. Although the actual landing was without incident, it would have been very difficult for a pilot not familiar with night facilities at the three RAF bases in Singapore. The runway lighting was designed in such a way that it could not be seen until the aircraft was on final approach, due to each runway light being hooded. Even with sound knowledge of the geography and layout of all the airfields on Singapore Island, I found it difficult to set up accurate down-wind and cross-wind legs of the circuit, so as to be in the correct position for final approach and landing.

After two years at Butterworth, I was posted to No 38 Squadron on Dakotas, based at Richmond, being appointed chief instructor and flight commander.

The work and area of operations were identical to that experienced in 36 Squadron at Fairbairn. I had reached a stage where I had to make a firm decision on my future within the RAAF. I had received offers from three civilian air transport companies, one of these guaranteeing a quick promotion in the instructional section of the company.

Promotion in the RAAF was dependent on the passing of promotion examinations as well as general performance. I had made the decision much earlier in my RAAF career to not complete the promotion examinations, as it would lead to a life in the RAAF sitting behind a desk, making administrative decisions. I had decided to accept a move to one of the civilian air transport companies when I received a phone call that changed a lot of my plans.

Australian RAAF pilots at the Bell Helicopter establishment at Fort Worth Texas, 1962. They are operating a Hovercraft, one of the first working models in the world

Chapter 9

Helicopter Training – United States

Just before Christmas of 1961, I received a phone call from Squadron Leader Raymond Scott. He told me that the Australian Government had finalised a contract to purchase eight Bell 204 Iroquois helicopters from the United States. He was to be Commanding Officer and for starters, he would need three flying instructors. We would be given an introduction to helicopters at RAAF Base, Amberley, where the Australian Army had a Bell Sioux helicopter flight.

On 6 January 1962 I received official advice of my posting to Amberley for initial training before deploying to the United States for advanced training. At the conclusion of my training, I was to be appointed as chief flying instructor and flight commander of the newly formed squadron. The No 16 Army Light Aircraft Flight was still dependent on the RAAF to a great extent, even though it had been in existence since the Korean War days. The Commanding Officer and Chief Instructor/Flight Commander were both RAAF members, as were most of the technical personnel, particularly the senior NCOs.

The helicopter had a lot of similarities to the fixed-wing, but all pilots, irrespective of flying hours, had the same difficulties with hovering, taking eight hours to master. The autorotations were initially a shock to the system, but once I became proficient, they were good fun. The course at Amberley lasted six weeks, and the three of us were examined at the conclusion on flying and ground subjects. The total flying hours for the course was 45, which included night, dual and solo flights.

After three weeks home leave, we left in early March for the United States Air Wing at Fort Rucker Army base in the state of Alabama. Our arrival at Fort Rucker coincided with a large intake of United States Army pilot trainees who had successfully completed the same type of course that we had completed at Amberley. There were also trainee pilots from Great Britain, Iran, Iraq and South Vietnam. This particular phase of the training was to be over a period of two months with a daily program of half-day lectures and half-day flying. The helicopter type was the piston-engined Sikorsky H34 Choctaw, known in Australia as the S.58. The ground school was a very high pressure environment, using civilian instructors who were probably qualified school teachers. There was a lot of use of TV screens and very modern technical aids. Progress and final examinations were all the multiple choice system.

An interesting classmate, with whom I shared a classroom desk, was the American song writer and actor, Kris Kristofferson. His claim to fame at that particular time though was that he was a Rhodes Scholar, but he showed no interest or aptitude for the skills that made him famous. The flying part of the course was hectic in that there were many parallel strips in the base complex and hundreds of helicopters of several types. When there was a wind change during flying training, the controller in the tower had to coordinate the reverse landing and take-off direction, plus in some cases, a change in circuit pattern. Somehow or other, no accidents happened during these change periods.

At the conclusion at this phase of the course, the United States Army pilots advanced on to a specialist gunnery and general army operations phase. Our role when the RAAF squadron formed was specialising in 'search and rescue', so we elected to complete a conversion and training course on the Bell 204 Iroquois, which was the helicopter type that the RAAF was procuring. The Iroquois was powered by a turbine engine that was a dramatic advance in the power-to-weight ratio. The feature that pilots liked the most was the elimination of throttle use. The piston engine required use of the throttle in much the same way as that on a motor bike, whereas the turbine engine, once throttled to full power, did not require any further adjustment. Fuel, and therefore power requirement, was automatic through the use of the collective control, which also changed the pitch of the main rotor blades. The Iroquois was a very comfortable helicopter designed for the pilot and co-pilot to have excellent forward, sideways and downward vision. The passenger area was roomy, and the sliding doors in that area could be left open in flight, which allowed repelling or quick departure of troops on or near landing.

This course, after conversion, comprised a lot of instrument flying, night flying and cross-country navigation exercises. I had my first experience with a helicopter engine failure or should I say the equivalent of an engine failure during one of these navigational exercises. The final 'out' destination was the city of Jacksonville situated on the Florida coast, with one stop en route for re-fuel. It was in the vicinity of the Oke Finoke swamps or Everglades of Florida that I heard a bang behind my head and had a change of feeling in the tail-rotor pedals. I was travelling at 4000 feet, so I immediately put out a Mayday call, throttled back to idle position, dropped the collective lever to autorotation and looked for a forced landing area. The area below me was good, and I selected a grassed three acre paddock with a farmhouse at one end. My next step was to check my engine instruments. Finding that everything was normal made me feel that I had been premature in putting out the Mayday call. By this time I was at about 2000 feet in autorotation and decided to roll throttle to full power and pull in some

collective. There was an immediate drop in rotor revs so I rolled the throttle back to idle, dropped the collective to full autorotation and carried out a successful landing near the farmhouse.

An autorotation needs some explanation to the uninitiated. In normal powered flight, the rotor blades are producing lift in the same way that the wings of a fixed-wing aircraft produce when moving through the air. Loss of engine power in the helicopter will cause the rotor blades to slow down and stop if they are left in the positive pitch. With change of the pitch to negative by quick lowering of the collective lever, the helicopter will descend at somewhere between 1500 and 2000 feet per minute. During this descent, the rotor blades will turn at the same speed as they would in powered flight. The pilot, on reaching a point roughly 30 feet above the terrain, will change the pitch of the rotor blades to positive, which should produce a soft landing. The instant that the blades are put into positive pitch there will be a reduction in blade speed—if the terrain is reasonable, there should be no problem for a well-trained pilot.

On the cross-country flight in Florida, I was unaware of what had failed due to my inexperience. The radar system throughout the United States had located my position on receiving the Mayday call, and had a full recovery team at my location within two hours. The problem that I had experienced was short-shaft failure, which is the drive shaft between the engine and transmission system.

I had an interesting two hours on the ground whilst waiting for the recovery team to arrive. Eight children; brothers and sisters ranging from 12 years-of-age down to two years, sat on the ground and watched me for some time without saying a word. I tried to make conversation but could not extract a single answer until a boy of about eight years asked if I would like to see his blueberry bush. On reaching the bush with all the kids trailing, I ate some of his ripe blueberries and returned to the helicopter. Another long silence followed before the same boy asked me if I would like to see his swimming hole. Back past the blueberries and another 100 yards and I was at the swimming hole. Walking in the hot sun, I felt like jumping into the pool but resisted and returned to the helicopter.

I decided to go to the farmhouse and make a phone call. On reaching the house, my mind went back to school days when I read Huckleberry Finn. Both parents of the children were at home and I could not understand how they would stay in the house when the helicopter had landed only 200 yards away from them. It was evident that they were just as shy as the kids. The farmhouse was weatherboard, had no glass in the windows nor was it painted. For curtains, they had hessian bags, and there was no linoleum or mats on the floor. There was no electricity, and of course, no phone. It was all a contradiction of the idea that I, as an Australian, had on the prosperity of white America at that time.

The recovery team soon had the new short shaft in place, and I was ready to complete the flight. I had passed a small village a mile or so away, which I assumed would have a corner shop. Landing in a nearby paddock, I walked up to the shop and purchased some fruit, biscuits and chocolates and took them back to the kids who showed no emotion on receiving the goodies. Total hours for the Iroquois course were 35, which still left us short of helicopter experience. There was a flying instructor course for Iroquois just about to commence so we enrolled. The course was a valuable course for the three of us mainly because it gave us more time on the helicopter type that we would be flying in Australia. For the Americans doing their first instructor course, I believe that it was far inferior to the one we received at East Sale—the American course was for one month, whereas the Australian equivalent was five-and-a-half months long.

After finishing the instructor course, we enrolled in an instrument course and followed that with an instruments instructor course. This was all done on Bell 204 Iroquois. I learnt a lot from these two courses as there were a lot of differences to instrument flying in fixed-wing aircraft, and a lot more danger. On leaving Fort Rucker we applied for and received permission to visit appropriate bases and establishments throughout the United States. The authority for all the courses and visits came from the Australian Air Attaché in Washington.

At this point we were joined by three more pilots from Australia, one of whom was Squadron Leader Raymond Scott, the elected CO of the Iroquois squadron when it formed. Our first visit was to the Bell Corporation factory at Fort Worth, near the city of Dallas in Texas. We spent a week there, living in a Dallas hotel and spending the days at the Bell factory where the Iroquois destined for Australia were in the process of construction. We did a few hours flying on factory helicopters.

For some reason we were not permitted to see any of our helicopters. The eight of them were behind fabric enclosures in different stages of construction. The only difference to the standard would have been the inclusion of a rescue hoist at one side of the cabin area.

The Bell Corporation at that time was working on ground hovercraft, and they had their first working model in operation. We were offered the opportunity to try it out, which we did, and would be a handful of the first persons in the world to operate a hovercraft. It was motorbike size and seated one person. We then visited the Sikorsky factory at Newport, near New York City. We spent a week at their factory and enjoyed our stay, but without the enthusiasm that we experienced at the Bell establishment. After so long in the

United States, someone must have decided that we needed a break so were allowed a week in New York, staying in a five-star hotel.

Following our holiday break, we visited a large USN base in Philadelphia, where we were able to observe and study helicopter search and rescue operations. An additional interest was seeing two 'blimp' airships, which were in daily use. From the Navy base, we flew to an Air Force base in Reno, a city with a reputation for quick divorces and marriages. The base had built its reputation on the speciality for 'fire suppression' by use of helicopters, so we were able to learn these skills.

There was an arrangement between the Air Force base and the huge gambling complex in Reno for visiting servicemen from overseas to visit their club with some advantages. With an introductory visiting card we were allowed half an hour of free drinks, 10 dollars worth of free gambling chips each and a voucher for two meals each. Throughout my life, I had played a lot of poker, pontoon and blackjack, so I had a special interest in the blackjack tables. I watched play for almost an hour and decided on my strategy. I have always been a great believer in the 'law of averages' so all my actions at the table were based on that law. I was only betting two dollars at a time, which was embarrassing when the man next to me was betting in hundreds. He was a rough looking character in his fifties and my guess was that he was a driller on an oil rig. He was not shy about anyone seeing how much money he had, which was a roll of hundred dollar bills that he could hardly get his hand around. He had a very attractive young woman on each arm and when he had a win, he would pass a hundred dollar bill to one telling her to buy a drink for the three of them. I noticed that he never received any change.

I stayed playing blackjack until about two in the morning, and had won 130 dollars. The following night I won 280 dollars and the third and last night, 310 dollars. I am convinced that one could make a good living playing blackjack at the big gambling complexes by strictly observing the 'law of averages'. For the non-gambler, there was plenty of pleasure to be had in viewing the marvellous display of historical hand weapons from the Wild West era. After Reno, we had two days at Salt Lake City, then on to San Francisco and home.

Chapter 10

Return to Australia and back to Papua New Guinea

On the day of my arrival home from America, I received word that my youngest sister's husband had been killed that same day in a helicopter crash at Amberley. He had been Chief Flying Instructor and flight commander with the Army Light Aircraft Flight and it was he that had trained me in my initial introduction to helicopters. He had been teaching a young army officer the technique of landing a helicopter on a ridge or hilltop, and the student was on the controls at the time. A misjudgement resulted in the helicopter rolling down the hillside and catching fire. The instructor was killed instantly but the student lived for eight days and was able to give details of the event.

It is far more dangerous instructing on helicopters than it is on fixed-wing aircraft. On fixed-wing, a student can make a mistake—even a serious one—but the instructor is able to take control and remedy the situation. In helicopters, it is essential that an instructor not give a student too much latitude, as even a small mistake can result in disaster, as was the case with my brother-in-law.

A very understanding senior officer in the Department of Air contacted me and advised that there was a Canberra bomber with pilot ready to take me from Fairbairn to Amberley, and that a car would be sent to my home immediately if I decided to leave for Amberley that day. I accepted the invitation, spent three days in Amberley with my sister and arranged for her husband's body to be brought back to Canberra for cremation.

I had purchased a home in Canberra only a week before leaving for America, acting on a rumour that our Iroquois squadron would be based there. Having no aircraft and very few personnel, we were posted into Richmond while waiting the three months for our helicopters to arrive. That three-month period was not all wasted time for me though, as I had the task of preparing the operations manual, rules and regulations. Every weekend I was able to get home to my family in Canberra.

On 5 November 1962 I carried out a test flight on our first helicopter arrival. We were soon at full strength in aircraft, pilots and ground staff, and it was a very busy time for me and the other two instructors as most of the new pilots had no helicopter flying time. We remained at Richmond until mid-December 1962, training new pilots plus the crewmen who were to operate the hoist rescue

equipment. These crewmen were mostly volunteers in a competitive field, and our selection proved correct as we had no failures.

From Richmond we moved to Fairbairn, Canberra, our permanent base in Australia, so the earlier rumour had proved correct. At Fairbairn, we carried out more advanced training, carrying sling loads of maximum weight and operating the hoist rescue equipment. Water rescue operations were part of our syllabus and Lake George, being only 10 minutes flying time from Fairbairn, was most convenient. These days, it is a rare occasion to see Lake George full of water, but it was at its best in 1963. We would leave Fairbairn about 9.00 am, with a cut lunch each and in three helicopters.

Total personnel was about 20. We would get a full day of training in dinghy and hoist rescue work. An area just south of the town of Queanbeyan, over the border in New South Wales, was allotted to the squadron for training purposes. We selected several confined spaces and hill peaks within the area and numbered them for identification.

Another specialised phase of training took place at the snowfields of Kosciusko. We had planned six months ahead so were able to get accommodation for 40 RAAF personnel. We took six Iroquois helicopters and stayed in the snowfields for 10 days, experiencing marvellous conditions. The high peaks at around 7000 feet level gave us a good introduction to the higher altitudes that we would contend with in Papua New Guinea at a future date.

Apart from search and rescue, our operations were to be heavily integrated with the Army. We trained with the Army on small and large exercises in all parts of the country except Western Australia. Now and again, we would get special requests from government departments, such as spraying gum trees in the Khancoban area where there were plans for Her Majesty, the Queen, to be entertained at an Australian bush barbecue. Apparently, there were small bugs or beetles that fell from the gum trees, making life uncomfortable for anyone underneath.

Another special request was from the National Trust to assist in placing a religious cross on the top of Saint Matthew's Anglican Church in the town of Windsor, west of Sydney. The church was one of the first to be built in Australia, or at least the oldest still standing. I decided to do this task myself and took the two best crewmen in the squadron with me. Hovering with a short sling load and close vision for the pilot on any fixed object ahead is a minimum requirement. The ideal setup is having a trained person in front of the hovering helicopter passing information by hand signals on horizontal or vertical adjustments required.

Laddie (far right) and crew making preparations for placing the cross on Saint Matthew's Anglican Church, Windsor, New South Wales, 1963. In the background on the right, you can make out the RAAF Iroqouis helicopter used in the operation

In this task, the church roof was high; the cross was long, and the vertical stem hexagonal, which meant that it had to be inserted into the receiving hole with precision. Due to the wind direction at the time, I was facing away from the church roof and had no close reference in front of me. In this situation it is almost impossible to hover without some vertical or horizontal movement. The tradesmen working on the roof underneath the helicopter must have had some dangerous moments, but eventually the job was successfully completed.

During the floods of 1963, we undertook a number of rescue and general supply operations. The major ones were in south-eastern Queensland, and the Kempsey/Lismore areas of New South Wales. Most of the women that were put into the sling collar and lifted 30 feet into the helicopter were very stressed—for the kids, it was as good as a picnic. Of particular interest was a woman in her mid-fifties who had managed to get onto the roof of a chicken shed. She was a big woman, weighing about 18 stone (roughly 114 kilograms). It must have been

touch and go whether she stayed on the roof and risked drowning or get into the rescue collar. She chose the collar.

We did a lot of training with the regular army units in many locations. On occasions we would use the eight helicopters in quick troop movements over a short distance. Working with artillery units, only two or three helicopters were required lifting the artillery guns and their crews from one location to another. The Iroquois were flying at their weight limits on these exercises.

The way things were shaping up in Malaysia and South Vietnam, it was evident that our younger crews, pilots and crewmen would benefit from training in mountaineering through tropical areas such as Papua New Guinea. I submitted a training schedule, which was approved at all levels, and departed Fairbairn with four Iroquois crewed with additional pilots and crewmen, plus technical personnel across all the trades.

On our way north, we travelled along the eastern coast; landing at RAAF bases and towns for re-fuel and overnight stays. We landed at Horn Island for re-fuel and moved the short distance to Thursday Island for our overnight stay. There was only one hotel on the island, which was a two-level weatherboard building that lacked any comforts of note. The beds were not much better than what we had during the war and the food was of a similar standard. Cooling of rooms was from over-head fans and if you did not like living two to a room, one pulled his bed out onto the veranda. There was one community bathroom and toilet. There were no complaints about the beer—it was cold.

From Thursday Island we flew to Daru Island situated less than a mile off the southern coast of Papua New Guinea, where we spent one night and went through the customs checks. Daru was much the same as Thursday Island in accommodation but the food was excellent. Crayfish were in abundance; for breakfast, lunch and dinner. We departed Daru in clear weather that lasted all the way to Goroka in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Goroka was to be our base for the next 10 days, but we did overnight in Bulolo, Lae, and Wewak.

The arrival of our four helicopters at Goroka in 1963 generated a lot of interest amongst the local population. There would have been the occasional piston engine helicopter, such as the Bell 47G passing through the area but generally, helicopters were still quite a novelty. Goroka was a very nice town in every respect; situated at 5000 feet in a lovely valley it had mountains on both sides up to 11 000 feet. The streets were reasonably clean with well-kept gardens. The shops were also clean and tidy, owned and run by citizens of Chinese origin. The airstrip was second only to Port Moresby, suitable for jet engine passenger aircraft. It was situated east-west, as was the valley, and had a noticeable downhill slope away from the town. The western end of the strip, which was the

high ground, was within a stones throw of the town, and was the compulsory take-off point for fixed-wing aircraft. Landings were the reverse.

We selected several confined landing areas amongst the jungle trees on the valley floor but allowed complete freedom of choice on any of the hill tops. The hill tops in the Goroka Valley were mainly devoid of trees, being covered in the kunai grass that also covered the valley floor. The maximum height of these valley hills was 8000 feet, which was close to the limit of an Iroquois helicopter carrying an average load. The limitation was not in engine power but in directional control from the tail rotor. During the 10 days we had no unserviceability of any significance and no accidents or incidents, so it proved to be a valuable phase of our training program and it was conducted twice a year whilst we were based at Fairbairn.

It was during Christmas of 1964 that I received word of a posting from No 9 Squadron to No 5 Squadron based at Butterworth, Malaysia.

Loading a RAAF Iroquois helicopter on a mountain ridge in Malaysia, 1965

Chapter 11

Helicopter Operations – Malaysia

During World War II, No 5 Squadron operated Wirraways and Boomerangs, working in close liaison with the Australian Army on Bougainville Island. Disbanded after the war, it was reformed in 1964 as a helicopter squadron equipped with the Bell 204 Iroquois. I was appointed as Commanding Officer arriving at Butterworth on 17 January 1965. Butterworth had not changed much from when I knew it flying Mosquitoes in 1952, and Dakotas in 1957. The British had built Butterworth on much the same lines that they had built Changi, Tengah, and Seletar bases in Singapore—very substantial and handsome buildings with an openness that created relief from the hot and humid conditions.

Butterworth, in my opinion, had the best weather in the Singapore and Malaysia region. The rain usually came at night, which gave us excellent flying conditions throughout the day, and the runways were of a standard acceptable by any jet powered aircraft of that period. Married personnel lived in Georgetown on the island of Penang, which was only five or six minutes travel in a ferry service that catered for motor vehicles as well as passengers. The homes were scattered throughout Georgetown and were of a very high standard. As an example, the home that I and my family occupied had five bedrooms, each with its own bathroom and toilet. The house was two storey and the rooms were huge and expensively furnished. There were servants' quarters at the rear and the front garden area was a quarter of an acre with double driveway, a badminton court, many frangipani trees and attractive palms. We had three servants; a cook, housemaid, and gardener. This all added up to making Butterworth a very popular posting.

The Penang population was mainly Chinese with some Indians, Pakistanis and Malays. The religious fervour of the Indians was of special interest to Europeans. The young men and women endured physical pain as a form of penance, having spikes inserted through both cheeks and their tongue, fish hooks with cords attached put into the skin on their backs and the cords pulled by men walking behind. They also did 'fire walking' and all these things and others, done without any show of emotion. Food, for anyone who liked Asian food, was one of the pleasures of Penang. The Indians and Pakistanis made curries that one would never see in Australia—all meats and every type of seafood that one could imagine. The Chinese produced their food with the

special difference between the various provinces of China. The price of all the Asian type food was ridiculously cheap.

Social life varied, dependent on the interests of individuals. A game of cards and a few drinks was standard during the evenings of the working days. The weekends were always spent at the Penang sports club where one could completely relax in the top class facilities such as the swimming pool, dance floor and restaurant. The role of the squadron in Malaysia was varied. Our main task was working in close cooperation with the police, who were in small detachments of four or five men, situated at small village outposts. Most of these outposts were north of Butterworth and inland from the coast, right up to within a few miles of the Thailand border.

The Malay Communists were very active in these northern areas and I always thought that these small police detachments were at great risk of losing their lives. From aerial photographs that showed camp activity in the jungle we were able to positively identify communist movements. The communists would usually stay for one night only in these transit camps and then move back into relative safety across the border in Thai territory.

The Malaysian Army was also scattered about northern Malaysia, but in different areas to the police. Also, they were in large numbers of 30 or 40 at each location. We had the task of moving these army units into any coastal area where Indonesian troops had landed or were suspected of landing. One day, we were assigned an interesting task with regard to Indonesian confrontation on a small island just a short distance from Singapore. I was directed by the RAAF authority to take four Iroquois to Singapore, where we would be briefed by RAF authorities about a suspected Indonesian force landing on the island. A surveillance aircraft had spotted a large open boat, which had been pulled up onto the sandy beach and partly hidden by the jungle. The part of the boat that could not be pulled into the jungle had been covered by foliage, which was not completely effective in concealing the craft. We transported 24 Singaporean and Malaysian troops into a small grassed area in the jungle on the island, where we left them with the understanding that they would be picked up from the same area the following day, or early if for any reason required.

The story that unfolded later was that the Indonesian troops, numbering 15, were positioned at the edge of the clearing, which was only large enough for one helicopter at a time. On the completion of the troop insertion, and the helicopter departure, the Indonesians challenged the Malaysian troops to throw down their arms and surrender. The senior NCO in charge of the Malaysian troops called for his men to fire on the enemy. This was an unwise command, as his troops were in the open and the Indonesians were protected by the jungle. Seven Malaysian

troops were killed. Following the assault, the Indonesians must have decided that they had no chance of getting off the island, as lack of radio reports from the Malaysian troops to base in Singapore would indicate major problems and surely result in reinforcements landing to investigate. Radio reports were received in Singapore announcing that the Indonesian force had surrendered, and that same day, we brought the Malaysians and Indonesians back to Singapore.

It has always been a mystery to me why the Indonesians did not fire at the first helicopter when it landed in the clearing. Each helicopter had a crewman on each side of the rear cabin equipped with a high powered automatic rifle, but they would have been no more effective than the troops departing the helicopter. We carried out many combined Air Force and Army exercises with the British, New Zealand and Ghurkha forces throughout most of Singapore and Malaysia. It was all very similar to the training that we had done in Australia with the Australian Army. I was most impressed with the Ghurkha troops, who were very professional and took to the training exercises most seriously.

The British officers in charge of the Ghurkhas invited me to one of their 'dining-in' nights at their base north of Butterworth. It was a most impressive night in all respects, but the highlight was the 'piping-in' of port wine. The Ghurkhas had a wonderful pipe band and entertained us with Scottish music throughout the night. The 'Duke of Gloucester Cup' is awarded annually to the squadron of the RAAF considered as having been the most proficient for that year. In 1965, 5 Squadron won the award. Just by chance, the Duke and Duchess were visiting Australia that year and decided to call in at Butterworth and present the cup. This was the first and only time in the history of the award that the Duke of Gloucester presented the award in person.

At the same time, there were rumours and indications that the Australian government intended to increase its military presence in South Vietnam. I received advice in early April 1966, that 5 Squadron would be recalled to Australia, and I was directed to compile a list of squadron personnel who would volunteer for service in South Vietnam. There was only one, a technical sergeant, who did not volunteer—he was a married man with 10 children so it was understandable. I departed Butterworth with my wife and three children and arrived back at Fairbairn on 22 April 1966.

No 5 Squadron Iroquois, landing at RAF Base Changi, Singapore, 1965

Hindley being presented with the Duke of Gloucester Cup, Butterworth, Malaysia, 1965

Hindley with the Australian Minister for Air, Peter Howson, Butterworth, Malaysia, 1965

Chapter 12

Helicopter Operations – South Vietnam

On my return to Australia, I was back in No 9 Squadron as flight commander and chief flying instructor. I had purchased a Mercedes Benz car whilst at Butterworth, and on its arrival in Australia it was cleared free of customs tax. However, while filling in forms for the Customs Department, it came to the attention of an official that I was departing Australia for South Vietnam and would not be driving the car for my personal use. My wife would be driving the car, but that was not acceptable to Customs. After several letters, I managed to get an interview with the Director of Customs in Canberra. By saying that I could cancel the posting to South Vietnam, drive the car the required time and then go to South Vietnam, the car was cleared of Customs tax after all.

The training that I acquired over the previous three years, particularly in Papua New Guinea and Malaysia, would make the move to South Vietnam seem quite normal. The squadron was to move initially with eight Iroquois helicopters crewed with 30 pilots and 24 crewmen, plus all the ground musterings required. The aircraft and most of the ground crew travelled on HMAS *Sydney*, leaving Sydney on 24 May 1966. Most of the aircrew and I travelled by Qantas commercial airline.

Prior to departing Sydney, I led eight Iroquois on a 'flag waving' formation flight over the city. With a tongue-in-cheek remark, I had requested permission to take the formation under the Harbour Bridge, but as expected, this was refused. On completion of the formation flight, the helicopters were flown onto the deck of HMAS *Sydney* and then stored at a lower deck.

I was familiar with Saigon from my Dakota flying days, but the city had changed in atmosphere. Back in 1956-57, we would sit at tables on the sidewalk drinking wine, watching the girls leaving their workplace for home. Now it was all hustle and bustle, and foreign troops made up a large part of the busy crowd. From Saigon, we were bussed to our lodgings at a majestic old French villa in the coastal city of Vung Tau. The ceiling manhole at this villa had been removed, probably quite a few years previously, and thousands of small bats had made their home in the ceiling. The bats would depart just before darkness and arrive back at the villa early in the morning. One of our officers got the bright idea of closing the ceiling manhole, which proved to be a disaster. The bats on return at dawn were in complete confusion, and ended up clinging to curtains and landing on our beds. The manhole cover was swiftly removed once again.

The Australian Army was situated about 15 minutes flying time from Vung Tau at a village location named Nui Dat. There were two battalions with support sections such as headquarters, engineers and artillery, the latter being mostly New Zealanders. Another unit under the control of the Army, but doing their own thing operationally, was the Special Air Service (SAS). From the start, the Army wanted the Iroquois located fulltime at Nui Dat. Squadron personnel would live as the Army lived; in tents. Our Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Raymond Scott, strongly resisted their demands, and with the support of the RAAF higher levels, won the day.

Scott's argument was that aircrews needed unbroken sleep, and the result of poor lodgings would be that aircraft serviceability would suffer. There was also the possibility that there would be a lot of damage inflicted on the helicopters from enemy mortar attacks, which were quite frequent at Nui Dat.

The squadron had its way of doing things, and the Army was of the opinion that it should be able to say when, where and why, with regard to helicopter operations. Over the first 12 months of 9 Squadron's stay in South Vietnam, a lot of tension built up between the RAAF and the Army at Nui Dat. An exception to this situation was the SAS unit, and a very strong bond developed between 9 Squadron and the SAS. The main role of the SAS was to obtain information on Viet Cong movements and strength within the Phouc Tuy province, which was the Australian area of responsibility. The SAS operated in small sections of six or seven men, each one a specialist in the type of weapon that they carried.

Scott and I worked out a technique for positioning the SAS at prearranged locations within enemy areas. We had access to excellent air photomaps of the complete Phouc Tuy province. In fact, the maps were so good, that it was like looking at the terrain underneath when flying the helicopter. We would use three Iroquois for inserting the SAS troops. Two would carry the troops at tree top level, which made navigation virtually impossible. The third helicopter, flying at 2000 feet above the terrain, and just behind the troop carriers, would do the navigation. Using the air photomaps made navigation simple and very accurate. Using a particular FM radio frequency, the troop carriers would be given small directional alterations until getting close to the destination. They would then be advised that landing would be coming up in 30 seconds, and then as they came abreast of the zone, they would be told to turn left or right through 180 degrees and land immediately ahead. As soon as touchdown was made, the troops would be out in seconds and in the cover of the jungle. The helicopters would then quickly climb back up to 2000 feet, joining up with the navigation helicopter. Radio communication would determine whether it was a smooth insertion, in which case, the three helicopters would return to Nui Dat.

On these SAS troop insertions, two Iroquois gunships flew in formation with the navigation helicopter. Not having our own gunships in the first 12 months, the Americans filled this role. They were very heavily armed with rockets, grenade launchers and machine guns, giving great practical support and morale boosters for the SAS troops during insertions and withdrawals. Withdrawals would usually be made within three or four days, if the troops managed to remain undetected by the enemy. If detected, we would be alerted and proceed to a prearranged pick up point where the SAS would release a coloured smoke signal. We would relay the colour of the smoke to the SAS troops, who would confirm or deny. The Viet Cong, when pursuing, would on occasions attempt to trick the helicopters into landing in front of them and becoming an easy target. This trick always backfired on the Viet Cong as it disclosed their position in the jungle and they became targets for the gunships.

The SAS troops, when inserted in enemy territory, found the Viet Cong walking trails or temporary camps and stealthily watched for those three or four days recording numbers and actions. There was a certain amount of frustration for the SAS, knowing that they were in a position to make a successful ambush. If Australian Army authorities considered that sufficient information had been acquired for the specific area, and if SAS troops would not be required to go into the same area, permission would be given for an ambush. With the special skill and training that these young men possessed, there was approximately a 20-1 kill rate in favour of the SAS throughout the full period of the South Vietnam conflict.

Our work with the two Australian Army battalions usually involved moving large numbers of infantry into assault areas within Phouc Tuy province. These assaults were as a result of information obtained by the SAS patrols. When very large numbers of Australian troops were positioned, American helicopters would assist. Nui Dat Army base was situated amongst a rubber plantation that had the advantage of providing shade during the hot, dry days. However, a decision was made to defoliate the area using Agent Orange, a highly toxic herbicide and defoliant. At the time, I had never heard of Agent Orange nor the damage it may present to humans.

With no knowledge of the risks involved, I decided to do the spraying myself. The crewmen and I placed two full drums of Agent Orange on the floor of the passenger compartment and placed about 10 feet of half-inch rubber hose in each drum, with the other end hanging just below the landing skids of the helicopter. When over the tops of the rubber trees, the crewmen sucked on the end of the hoses and started the liquid flowing from the drums. The rotor down-wash did the rest and a very effective fine spray fell onto the trees.

From memory, I think that we emptied about six drums in total. On completion of the spraying, we closed down the helicopter, walked through the rubber plantation on the way to the coffee urn at the camp headquarters with Agent Orange liquid dripping from the trees onto our heads and clothing. I, and one of the two crewmen involved on that day have since been diagnosed with prostate cancer and are in remission.

Later on in 1984, the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (VVAA) would succeed in initiating a Royal Commission into claims by veterans that they have experienced serious medical problems as a result of their exposure to Agent Orange. While the findings were ultimately contrary to the claims of the VVAA—a decision that attracted much criticism—the fight continued for recognition and support to those suffering from illness believed to be related to Agent Orange. Today, The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) provides medical and other support to veterans suffering from most cancers and illnesses, regardless of whether or not Agent Orange is claimed to be responsible.[1]

In the early days of August 1966, there was an increase in Viet Cong attacks on the Nui Dat complex, particularly with the firing of mortar shells at close range. This vindicated 9 Squadron's Commanding Officer in his assertion that helicopters parked at Nui Dat were exposed to unnecessary risk of damage or destruction. It was normal practice for two Iroquois helicopters to be positioned at Nui Dat each day, from early morning until late afternoon. They were exposed to the risk of mortar attacks, but it did pacify the Army, and gave it immediate support if and when required.

At mid-afternoon on 18 August 1966, the battle of Long Tan commenced. Many books have been written about Australia's involvement in South Vietnam, all of which highlight the details of the Long Tan battle, which lasted less than half a day. D Company of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, made contact with a Viet Cong force of a much greater numerical strength, and held its line long enough for the artillery to decimate the enemy. The artillery maintained a constant and heavy barrage throughout the battle.

D Company had reached a critical shortage of ammunition and the decision was made to use two helicopters from 9 Squadron to make a supply drop directly to our front-line troops. In blinding rain, the helicopters made a successful ammunition drop and were a major contribution to the success of the battle.

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1 Department of Veteran's Affairs, *After the War*, Topic 7, 07 March 2007, http://www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg/commemorations/education/Documents/avw_topic7.pdf, accessed 31 May 2013.

A concert had been planned for the same day, and included such celebrities as Col Joye and Little Pattie. Whether it was purely coincidence, or a result of planning by the Viet Cong in the belief that the Australian forces would be concentrating on the concert, rather than on perimeter patrols, patrols on that day were actually stronger than normal due to the Viet Cong activity in the area over the previous three days.

It was decided that the Australian dead and wounded would be airlifted by helicopter back to the Nui Dat hospitals. In addition to the two helicopters already at Nui Dat, the other six were flown from Vung Tau to assist in the medical evacuation.

The eight helicopters sat at Nui Dat complete with crews waiting for the word to proceed to the pickup area. This waiting time was three or four hours, and during that time I had the company of Col Joye. Naturally, he was a very interesting person to converse with, but his main desire was to get my approval to travel in the helicopter to the evacuation area and back to Vung Tau, which I could not approve.

The call for us to proceed was made close to midnight and it was a very dark night. We flew line-astern and our only vision of the aircraft ahead was the red navigation light at the rear of the fuselage. The pickup zone was about the size of a double tennis court, and our approach was guided by four soldiers holding battery torches above their heads at each of the four corners of the zone. As the lead helicopter landed, the remainder continued in a wide circuit, allowing time for the helicopter on the ground to collect the dead and wounded and vacate the area. This procedure continued until the eighth helicopter had departed the area. It was well after midnight when the eight helicopters departed Nui Dat and returned to Vung Tau.

The following morning I flew to Nui Dat, and from a safe height, I examined the battle area. The destruction of trees by the artillery was massive and it was evident that the Viet Cong sustained very heavy losses. There were many bodies, or parts of bodies, hanging on limbs of trees, 20 feet from the ground. After the battle of Long Tan, operations returned to normal until I completed my tour of duty and returned to No 5 Squadron at Fairbairn as flight commander and chief instructor.

It was approximately 10.00 pm on the night of 17 December 1967, that I received a phone call at my home from a RAAF senior officer. He explained that what he was about to tell me was in strict confidence. I was told to alert the required crew members and take an Iroquois helicopter to Portsea, Victoria. The news was that the Australian Prime Minister, Harold Holt, was missing, believed drowned. I contacted the crew members that I required plus squadron

engineering personnel and was ready for departure from Fairbairn at 3.00 am, which I figured would get me to Portsea in full daylight. On arrival, Portsea was a hive of activity with senior Army and Navy personnel. After briefing and planning, we positioned at Cheviot Bay and carried out a variety of searches throughout the day. The weather was good, but the water at the small beach was rough.

Expert navy divers checked the waters between the beach and the open sea. This may be thought of as a big task, but with the small area of the bay, the divers were satisfied within a couple of hours that there was no body to be found in that area. They then concentrated on a rocky shelf area, which was only two feet below water level at low tide. There was a cavity in this shelf that would allow a slim man to enter, but it would be impossible with breathing equipment on his back. All of the Navy divers made the decision not to enter the rock cavity.

In order to check the currents and water movements, I dropped floating buoys into the open sea just outside the mouth of Cheviot Bay. All of these buoys moved westwards, some entering the first bay westwards of Cheviot Bay. Over a period of two weeks, I checked the open sea and Port Phillip Bay for sightings of sharks. I saw one very close to the mouth of Cheviot Bay and three in Port Phillip Bay. The four sharks were medium size but I was unable to identify the variety. Even with all this effort, the body of Harold Holt was never recovered, and I returned to Fairbairn.

I spent the next two months instructing on the Iroquois helicopters and planning my future retirement from the RAAF. Over my years in the RAAF, I had acquired a considerable number of medals due to operational service in various conflicts such as World War II, Singapore, Malaya, Malaysia and South Vietnam. They looked impressive on such events as Anzac Day, but were only evidence of my service in those operational areas. In particular, I was very proud to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for my service in South Vietnam in 1966, which was presented to me at a ceremony in Canberra by the Governor-General of the time, Lord Casey.

Presentation of DFC by the Governor-General Lord Casey at Government House, Canberra, 1968

Chapter 13

Helicopter Commercial – Papua New Guinea Oil and Minerals

I retired from the RAAF in February of 1968 and decided to take a two-month holiday period before obtaining my commercial licence for both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. On completion of the examinations and receipt of the licenses, there was a follow up letter from the Department of Civil Aviation a few days later saying that they had discovered that I had a colour reading problem in my eyesight test. A booking had been made with Dr Deane-Butcher, an eye specialist in Sydney and a familiar face. In 1951, he tested me thoroughly and assessed me as defective, but safe for flight—this visit resulted in the same diagnosis. It was a pleasure to see each other again and discuss old times, as we had during 1944 in Papua New Guinea. Following Dr Deane-Butcher's tick of approval, the department confirmed my eligibility, and presented me with licences for fixed and rotary wing aircraft.

I made applications for helicopter work with four of the largest helicopter companies in Australia and Papua New Guinea. I received acceptances from all four, plus two others that I had not even contacted. This was an indication of the severe shortage of experienced helicopter pilots in Australia and Papua New Guinea at the time.

The part owner of one of the two companies that approached me, Helitrans, was a friend of mine from the RAAF, and this no doubt influenced my decision to join that company. At the time, it was also one of the smallest companies operating, with only two Bell 47Gs, and it was based at Lae on the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. I was appointed Chief Pilot and Chief Flying Instructor, but that did not mean much as I could have had the same appointment with companies operating 15 turbine-engined helicopters. With more luck than foresight, after my joining Helitrans grew from a small operator to be one of the biggest in a very short time.

The Finisterre Range was only a short distance from Lae, so I was able to get valuable refresher training at the high altitude of 11 000 feet in very marginal situations. A lot of skill was required to operate the piston-engined Bell 47G at this altitude and there was also a lot of danger. My first job was with a British mineral company searching for nickel in the Amboin area, south of Wewak. The procedure was to move out each day from our base camp with a geologist and

field assistant taking sand or sediment samples at any river junction or exposed rock or gravel area in the rivers or streams. The samples were brought back to base camp and later, at an opportune time, were taken to the nearest town with an airport for forward movement to the company chemist in Lae or Port Moresby.

Waiting on the side of a small creek for a geologist to collect samples south of Amboin

I completed several smaller jobs with different mineral companies over a wide area of Papua New Guinea, including a one-day task for an American company—Placer Development. I was located at Waitape, which had good accomodation and an excellent airstrip at the 4000 feet level. I was advised to depart Waitape after breakfast and proceed to Ioma. Waitape is on the southern side of Mount Albert Edward, and Ioma is at sea level on the northern side. The mountain is one of the highest in Papua New Guinea at 13 000 feet, with two twin peaks separated by a saddle at 9000 feet, which I hoped to get through so as to remain under the cloud cover throughout the trip. There was no cloud whatsoever on the southern side of the mountain range, so I was confident that I would not experience any weather problems. In Papua New Guinea, the cloud develops quickly, and the climb rate in the Bell 47G is very slow. I found the gap of Mount Albert Edward at 9000 feet to be closed, so I continued to climb to 12 000 feet and found a smooth layer of cloud at that level on the northern side of the mountain range. The peaks of the mountain were jutting out from the

cloud. It is extremely rare in tropical countries such as Papua New Guinea to see complete cloud coverage for 60 or 70 miles in the morning periods of the day, so I made the unwise decision to skim over the top of the cloud until I found a gap and could descend on the northern side of Mount Albert Edward.

I travelled for approximately 15 minutes and noticed that I was now at 13 000 feet due to the atmosphere warming and the cloud rising. Looking ahead, there was still cloud coverage as far as I could see, so I called up Lae on the radio and requested general weather on the coast, and the actual weather at Lae. The report was the same as what I could see ahead of me, so I was committed to continue on dead reckoning to the coast and descend through the cloud over the sea and hope that the cloud base was not down to sea level. The reason that I continued on northwards instead of turning back was that behind me over the mountain range, the cloud would have risen to 15 000 feet and I could not climb to that height.

There was a lot of danger in making an instrument descent at the northern coast. Any helicopter is more difficult to fly on instruments than any fixed-wing aircraft. Added to that, the Bell 47G had minimum basics, equipped with an altimeter, an airspeed indicator and a turn and balance instrument. Suddenly, I noticed a small break in the cloud not much larger than the helicopter and could see the ground underneath. When I think back to that day, it was an amazing weather phenomenon. In case the cloud closed over, I put the helicopter into autorotation to get maximum rate of descent and hoped that I could keep the helicopter inside the vertical hole. I did manage to descend to the cloud base a mere 2000 feet above the ground, and found myself directly over my destination of Ioma. Given that I was not a religious man, I decided that I was simply born lucky.

My unique experiences in Papua New Guinea would continue. I was at the Travelodge Motel in Rabaul having lunch one afternoon, when I heard a lot of excited shouting coming from motel staff. The motel was only 50 yards from the water's edge in a small bay, and I was amazed to see the water receding slowly. I could see bottles and cans that minutes earlier were covered by three feet of sea water. This was the beginning of a Tsunami, something that I had never heard of at the time, so I had no idea of what might be happening. When watching television in 2004 or some time near that period, I saw coverage of a Tsunami hitting the north-west coast of Papua New Guinea at the village of Tadji, an area that I operated from during World War II. I've since learnt that if the earthquake or volcanic eruption is close, there will be a destructive wave. If the trigger event occurs a long distance away, there will be a slow withdrawal of water from the shore, followed by a slow increase, which will be higher than the normal

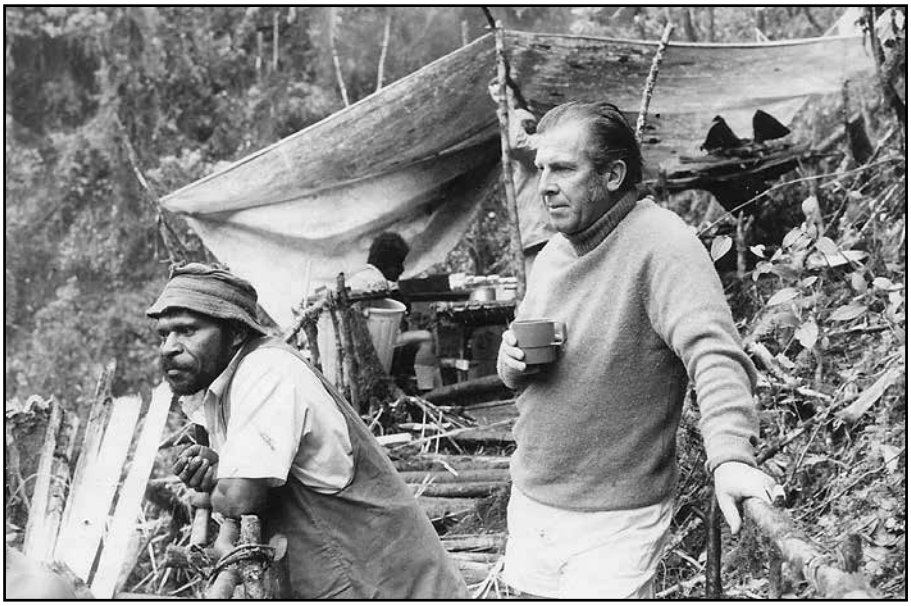
sea level, but less destructive initially. At Rabaul, the incoming sea water rose to eight feet above normal before slowly returning to the regular levels. At one stage, those of us in the motel were standing in two feet of water.

In the late 1960s, many mineral and oil companies began coming to Papua New Guinea, looking to profit from the rich, untapped natural resources. They were mainly American, Canadian, British and French. Interest in the timber resources came from Korea, Japan, Singapore and Australia. I worked for several weeks with a French mineral company searching for nickel. The majority of companies at that time were interested in nickel, but during my 20 years in Papua New Guinea, none of any commercial quantity was found. All successful deposits were copper and gold. A French company was concentrating its efforts in New Ireland, situated to the north-east of New Britain. It is a long, narrow stretch of land with a few mountain peaks ranging up to 7000 and 8000 feet. Navigation was simple and the weather was excellent. The beaches provided a welcome outlet for enjoyment, with opportunities to swim and snorkel in crystal clear water.

When we think of French customs, our thoughts go to food and wine. My experience with this particular company would confirm my expectations. They excelled in serving freshly caught lobsters and fish as a choice amongst many culinary delights for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I had expected that wines would be available, but certainly did not believe that they would be served at breakfast. There was a bottle placed before every two men at the breakfast tables, and they were the best varieties available, such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape and wines from the Beaujolais region. My sampling of the wines did not commence until darkness however, due to the possibility of the helicopter being required for a medical evacuation to the hospital in Rabaul.

By this time it was evident that a lot of easy money could be made on the stock exchange. The geologists, field assistants, and pilots were receiving information long before the general public and a few of us took advantage of the situation. I am conservative in nature and never took any financial risks. I would buy at the correct time, but would sell much earlier than I needed to. When mineral and oil companies commenced exploration, there were occasions when there was a slight rise in shares. The big move, however, was when drillers from Canada or Australia were brought into the particular location. It was not the big companies such as BHP in Australia or Kennecott in America that were of interest, it was the smaller unknown companies, whose share values were three or four cents. In my experience in Papua New Guinea, none of the small companies hit the jackpot, but if they drilled, their shares rose to as much as 70 cents before collapsing. In Australia, a small mineral company, Ashton Mining,

commenced its diamond exploration when its share value was 17 cents. They were a success story.



At a bush camp on the side of Mount Victoria at 7000 feet, 1969

The helicopter company that I was working for received a boost to their fortunes and prestige by gaining a contract with the giant American copper company, Kennecott. We started operations at the eastern end of Papua New Guinea at Milne Bay, planning to take river and stream samples all along the mountain range to the border of what was known at the time as West Irian. While on this operation, we had reached an area on the southern side of Mount Victoria, another of the highest mountains in Papua New Guinea at 14 000 feet. We set up camp at a native village at 7000 feet, still operating with the piston-engined Bell 47G. I had earlier in the day positioned a geologist at a location where he wished to spend a few hours before I was to pick him up at a certain time. I departed the camp area, climbed to 1000 feet above the terrain and was roughly seven minutes out when I had a partial engine failure. I immediately put out a Mayday call, which was answered by Port Moresby control who requested that all other aircraft on the frequency remain silent, or change to another frequency.

I turned 180 degrees and was faced with a very critical decision. The shortest way back to the camp was direct, but if the engine failed completely I was dead. The alternative route was a curved path via a small creek, which gave

me a slight chance of getting out alive in the case of total engine failure. In such mountainous terrain, the creek had a very pronounced rate of descent and was full of rock boulders the size of a small car. I decided to follow the creek. If I had taken the direct route, I would have reached safety with a minute to spare. On the creek route, I lost the engine completely when short of my destination, but managed to get most of the helicopter onto a small native garden on the bank of the creek. I had landed amongst the bananas, which received a neat haircut from the rotating blades. Approximately two feet of the landing skids were overhanging the creek bank and there was a risk that any movement by me could result in the helicopter toppling over the creek bank and smashing onto the rock boulders 100 feet below. I could see two natives peeping out from behind the jungle trees, so I tried to coax them to come forward and put their weight on the front of the skids. Given the nervous nature of the natives, I had as much chance of getting a stone building to come forward, so I had no choice but to ease myself very carefully out of the helicopter. It rocked two or three times, but stayed on the bank in the end.

I was able to give the Port Moresby control an accurate location that was immediately passed on to the helicopter company in Lae. As a result of the increased interest from mineral and oil companies from all over the world in Papua New Guinea, Helitrans, the company that I was working for at the time, began increasing its helicopter strength with Bell Jet Rangers. They had just acquired their first Jet Ranger, which was able to carry a replacement engine for the 47G plus an engineer. Whilst the engine change was in progress, I flew the Jet Ranger to the location of the waiting geologist, who not knowing the circumstances, greeted me in a very unfriendly manner. He had been waiting for me for four hours longer than the planned pick up time.

Leaving the Mount Victoria area we continued westwards, taking stream samples that did not show anything of particular interest until arriving at the village of Fani, which had a large mission centre run by French priests and nuns. Fani was only a mile or two from the large centre of Waitape on the southern side of Mount Albert Edward.

The copper find at Fani was promising enough for Kennecott to carry out major drilling, spending a lot of money in the process. I went back to work on the project at a later date, flying Alouette helicopters, but the deposit was never assessed as suitable to become a viable mine.

Another promising find was further west at the village of Yanderra, situated on the northern slopes of Mount Wilhelm, the highest mountain in Papua New Guinea at roughly 15 000 feet. Yanderra was at 5000 feet and the centre of the copper deposit was 7000 feet. Again, at a later date, the deposit was drilled

and found to be borderline acceptable before proceeding to the mining stage. Possibly, if sometime in the future, copper is in greater demand, or higher in value, the deposit at Yanderra may be mined.

A Lama helicopter, flown by Hindley on the slopes of Mount Wilhelm at the Yanderra copper deposit, 1978

After our initial stay at Yanderra, I moved to another contract working with the Australian Bureau of Mineral Resources (BMR). Based at Wewak, the task was to carry out a gravity survey in the Sepik River area south of Wewak, operating with a Bell Jet Ranger. The survey was carried out through the use of a Magnetometer; a device used to measure the strength and sometimes, the direction of a magnetic field. If an irregularity is detected, this may indicate the location of magnetic ore deposits, such as iron ore, or other geological formations. The Magnetometer was attached to a holding cable. Also attached was an electrical cable hanging 200 feet underneath the helicopter, which could, in an emergency, be released manually or electrically from the cockpit. Readings from the Magnetometer were transmitted back to a special instrument panel that had been fitted into the helicopter. A geologist monitored the readings.

The area south of Wewak is similar to the Riverina area of Australia, with open grasslands and a small number of trees spaced well apart. The grass type is known as kunai, which is very coarse and grows to the height of an average man. The helicopter was operating at close to all up weight, and for each reading the Magnetometer had to be placed on the ground for approximately two minutes.

To hover at the weight and height above ground that we were operating, the engine was reaching maximum allowable temperature at each location, and I was becoming apprehensive. I advised Helitrans back in Lae of my fears but was advised to press on, as the contract was lucrative and at that time, the Ok Tedi deposit had not yet been discovered.

The engine failed between locations when I was flying at 1000 feet above terrain, which was flat and treeless. I transmitted a quick Mayday call to Wewak control and then concentrated on the forced landing, which I knew would be quite simple. My main concern was the Magnetometer, which I was loath to release immediately and cause serious damage to.

I did a partial arrest of the autorotation at 200 feet from the ground, releasing the Magnetometer without damage and then going into full autorotation and touching down successfully in the tall kunai grass. The helicopter company at Lae had been contacted by Wewak control and that same day a relief drop was made by the company fixed-wing aircraft. There were two mosquito nets, plenty of food and water, but no mosquito repellent. There was no place to hang the mosquito nets, the area being devoid of trees, so when dusk came with the thousands of mosquitoes, we entered the helicopter and closed the doors and windows. Even so, hundreds of mosquitoes had managed to get inside the cabin of the helicopter, and it turned out to be one of the worst nights of my life.

On completion of the BMR contract, I rejoined the Kennecott project 15 miles from the border. Without helicopters, I doubt that the Ok Tedi deposit would ever have been found due to the combination of weather and terrain. The deposit area was like a semi-submerged egg about the length and width of the largest sea passenger liners. Vegetation was limited with stunted trees and small brush, whereas the rest of the area was dense jungle. From each end of the deposit, two small creeks descended approximately 400 yards and then joined up to be one creek for another 300 yards. These waters were known as the Ok Tedi (pronounced 'Ok' translated as river and 'Tedi' as the name of the river. The Ok Tedi ran into the Alice River, which came out of the Victor Emanuel Range. The Alice River was the beginning of The Fly River, one of the great rivers of the world. Apart from the stunted growth of vegetation, it was clearly evident that there was a substantial mineral deposit, as the exposed rock surfaces were brightly coloured green, red and blue.

We set up camp on the bank on one of the two Ok Tedi arms, only 200 yards from the deposit. The rainfall readings taken over the years ahead were recorded at 330 inches-per-year, which made it one of the wettest places in the world. This made flying operations difficult and dangerous, and resulted in the loss of a helicopter and two lives during our first two weeks in the area.

Senior staff members of Kennecott made a visit to the area and made the decision to commence drilling. Experienced drillers from Canada soon arrived and drills were brought in from Australia. The drilling equipment was brought into Kiunga, a large village on the banks of The Fly River. Kiunga was 70 miles south of the Ok Tedi. Substantial loading wharves were constructed along with accommodation and messing facilities for approximately 100 personnel. The width and depth of The Fly at Kiunga could accommodate any shipping operating in the Papua New Guinea area.

During these early stages, movement of equipment from Kiunga to Ok Tedi was by helicopter only, and the largest helicopter that we had was a Jet Ranger. The first drill was disassembled to weights that the Jet Ranger could lift and carry some distance. To carry the heaviest pieces of the drill, I had to depart Kiunga with just enough fuel to reach refuelling pads 20 miles apart.

Helitrans realised that it had a lucrative long-term contract and immediately purchased better weight carrying helicopters such as the Alouette IIs and IIIs and the Aérospatiele Lamas. The Lama was a wonderful helicopter, tough as nails and most suitable for the work at the Ok Tedi. The deposit was at 6300 feet, which presented no problem whatsoever to the engine capacity of the Lama. In the breakdown of the drill rigs, the largest or heaviest piece was 2500 pounds.

My position with Helitrans was Chief Pilot, and with the Department of Civil Aviation as Pilot Examiner. The pilot strength of the company at that time was 30 helicopter pilots and three fixed-wing pilots. It was difficult to recruit experienced helicopter pilots in Australia, so the company advertised throughout the world and selected suitable pilots from applications received across New Zealand, the United States, Britain, Canada, South Africa, Scandinavia and Korea. The New Zealanders proved to be the most reliable and skilled, perhaps been due to the demanding task of deer hunting in the high country of New Zealand.

No doubt due to the pilot shortage, working conditions were good. Salaries were excellent, but work times unusual. We worked for 28 days and then had 14 days leave, flown by international airline to any country of our choice. All airfares, taxis, motel and meals en route were paid for by Helitrans.

I operated on and off at Ok Tedi from 1968 until 1980, and in all that time only had two pilots that were unsuitable in that location. It may seem unfair to call it a fault, but those two pilots were not prepared to take any risks. This resulted in tasks not being completed or even attempted. There was a third pilot who had operated as a Spitfire pilot during World War II and had flown helicopters in Malaysia and Australia. After three days at Ok Tedi, he was honest

enough to advise me that he wished to live a while longer and would like to be sent back home to Britain.

Once drilling commenced it was evident that we needed to set up a more substantial camp. At the base of the mountain range, only 700 yards from the deposit, we selected a flat area on the banks of the Alice River and it was named Tabubil after a very small native village nearby. Over the years ahead, Tabubil grew into a large base with comfortable pre-fabricated buildings and excellent mess facilities. Parallel to the river, an airstrip was built that could accommodate such aircraft as the DC-3 Dakota.

The elevation of Tabubil was 2000 feet, and the terrain right through to the southern coast of Papua New Guinea was reasonably level and flat. Even so, it was still a wet area—the annual rainfall at Tabubil being 220 inches. Movement of personnel and equipment from Kiunga to Tabubil by helicopter was accomplished in extreme weather conditions with rain or fog right down to ground level. The Fly and Alice Rivers made navigation unnecessary and the width of the rivers made for safe passage below tree top level.

Before the decision was made to mine the deposit, approximately 25 holes were drilled. Drill pads were established on the steep slopes of the deposit that allowed just enough room for the helicopter to build-up the rig with tips of rotor blades only 12 inches from the deposit wall. A lot of this work was done in shocking weather conditions and success was an indication of the experience and skill of the pilots involved.

There was a lot of unfair manipulation of the mining contracts by the Papua New Guinea government that eventually resulted in Kennecott deciding to withdraw from the Ok Tedi development and Papua New Guinea explorations in general. The Australia mining giant, Broken Hill Pty Ltd (BHP) became the main shareholder in conjunction with the Papua New Guinea government, plus minor shareholders from Germany and Japan. This happened in 1973, five years after the finding of the Ok Tedi deposit, but a lot of work had been accomplished in that time.

It was absolutely essential that a road be built between Kiunga and Tabubil for the mine to be viable. This was accomplished and was extended past Tabubil up the mountain to the deposit. Another major requisite was a tailings dam, which was constructed on the Ok Ma, a small stream originating within 100 yards of the deposit and running parallel to the Alice River for a distance of 30 miles at which point it joined the Alice. The excavation of the dam revealed that the area was limestone to the full depth of the dam, which meant that the downstream walls would lack holding strength. The walls did eventually break,

resulting in the contaminated sludge flowing down the Ok Ma and into the Alice River.

There was no further attempt to construct a tailings dam and although there was some international criticism, BHP and the Papua New Guinea government decided to continue mining without a tailings dam.

Hindley standing below a Bell Jet Ranger that he took into a proposed site for the dam at the Ok Tedi mine, 1976

At this time, I moved out of the Ok Tedi and operated with an American oil company—Crude Oil, based at Wewak. I always liked Wewak, as the weather was good and it had nice beaches. Crude Oil, from previous exploration work, had found a most promising anticline, which was about 50 miles to the west/south-west of Wewak, near the village of Nuku. The company immediately began building a road that proved to be as good as any road in Papua New Guinea, between the border of West Irian Jaya (changed from West Irian in 1973) and Madang. They built substantial bridges over all the rivers and streams en route and when the road was completed, the huge drills were disassembled and transported to the drill site by low loader trucks, then reassembled. All this effort would go to nought however, as the drilling proved to be negative.

From 1975 onwards, I decided to do private contract work rather than be employed full time by any particular helicopter company. This gave me the choice of working at the best seasonal times in Papua New Guinea and Australia. In 1975, I was contracted to work at a possible copper deposit on Manus Island, situated 300 kilometres north of Karkar Island, which in turn was 60 kilometres north of Madang. From Karkar Island to Manus Island we had the shortest possible jump across the water. The contract required a Jet Ranger helicopter, which I positioned at Karkar and was accompanied by a company fixed-wing aircraft, which was to be my navigational support. Manus was just within range of the Jet Ranger with no fuel to spare, so once past the halfway mark, we were committed. We waited for a favourable weather forecast and everything proceeded according to plan. After the dangers of the high altitudes and bad weather of the Ok Tedi and Yanderra regions, Manus was a real holiday. We set up base camp on the beach and spent all our spare time snorkelling in the crystal clear, warm water. There was no high terrain on Manus and the weather was excellent—navigation could not be easier. We took sand and gravel samples throughout the island without any promising finds.

Departing Manus, I accepted a contract flying a Jet Ranger on exploration work with an oil company in the Bamu River area, which is in the gulf on the south coast of Papua New Guinea. There was nothing pleasant about the area. Many rivers, including the mighty Fly, distribute their mud into the gulf, and as well as the adverse appearance this produces, it abounds with crocodiles, mosquitoes and disease. It was decided, that to exist in such an environment, a large houseboat would be preferable to the swampy land that was available to erect a camp. We anchored in the Bamu River, and had log helicopter pads constructed only a short walk from the houseboat. It was evident that we would be bored stiff during the free periods, so the oil company had two 12-foot boats with outboard motors brought in complete with top class fishing gear. It turned out to be a fisherman's dream, and we were catching 30-pound barramundi as fast as we would cast a lure. It took all my willpower to release all but two of the fish back into the sea, as two would keep the camp stocked with seafood meals for two or three days.

I had heard or read about tidal bores at the mouth of Severn River in England, but was vague on what they would look like, and the height that they would be above the river level. I was to experience one at the Bamu River. I had spent a lot of time at the mouths of the Fly and Kikori Rivers on the south coast of Papua New Guinea but had never witnessed a bore action. I'm sure that this would be due to much wider mouths in those two rivers with a lower meeting force between the rivers and the sea tide. The Bamu bore stretched the full

width of the river and lasted for a considerable time. The height of the bore was approximately two feet.

After several more contracts with oil companies, I returned to Ok Tedi in 1977, flying Jet Rangers, Alouette IIIs and Lamas until early 1978. I had returned to my home in Canberra with the intention of having a two or three-month break pottering around in the garden, but was home only a few days before I received a phone call from Jayrow Helicopters Pty Ltd in Melbourne, asking me if I'd do some work with the Forests Commission on bushfire control in the Corryong district. Jayrow was a very well respected helicopter company and bushfire control was to be a new experience, so I accepted.

Having agreed, the company advised me that they would arrange for a fixed-wing aircraft to take me from Canberra to Corryong, and that the pilot would pick me up in his car and take me from my home to the airport. The pilot had lived most of his life in the Corryong district and knew the area extremely well. The smoke from the bushfires was almost as dense as a Canberra fog in winter, but he had no trouble finding the airstrip and landing successfully. The helicopter waiting for me at Corryong was a turbine-engined Hughes 500. It was not a helicopter that I particularly liked, but it did have some good points when compared with its main competitor, the Bell Jet Ranger. It was fast and compact and could be manoeuvred into space-restricted areas.

The forestry officers were very experienced in bushfire control and could assess the overall situation from their lofty viewpoint in the helicopter. They would advise the fire suppression workers on the ground of any dangers and where they should carry out controlled burning operations. Controlled burning operations were also carried out directly from the helicopter. A special metal bin was positioned on the inside of the front passenger door. This bin was filled with large four-inch Delayed Action Incendiary Devices (DAID), which consisted of a small match head on one end for striking and a larger match head on the other, which was designed on landing in the forest litter to be an ignition source. The two match heads were joined by a length of safety fuse. On one side of the bin there was a striker plate similar to the side of a common match box. The DAID was struck on the pad and then thrown out of the helicopter where it fell into the forest litter below.

During the summer of 1978 we did a lot of bushfire suppression on the south-east of New South Wales and Victoria, the worst areas being the upper reaches of the Murray River, Bright and Noojee. It was only two weeks after I departed the upper reaches of the Murray River and returned home to Canberra, that an unfortunate accident occurred. The Jet Ranger, with pilot and two forestry officers on board, was carrying out controlled burning operations

when an explosion of fire engulfed the three crew. The helicopter crashed with no survivors. Following the tragedy, it was deduced that a DAID was struck on the ignition plate and flicked accidentally into the DAID container box, causing the explosion and subsequent fire. It was evident that the DAIDs presented a significant risk, which resulted in a new ignition device being used from that time on.

On my return to Canberra, I was contacted by the owner manager of a newly formed helicopter company based in Canberra. He had only one helicopter at the time, but it was special—the Aérospatiele Lama. He said that he had just purchased the Lama from the Helitrans Company in Cairns and asked if I would fly it for him on a contract he had acquired for work in the Snowy Mountains. There were only three pilots in Australia at that time with Lama experience and I, living in Canberra and not otherwise engaged, fitted the bill perfectly. After lengthy discussions, I agreed on the condition that he tried to get another pilot to replace me, as I had finally made the decision to retire from commercial flying.

The first phase of the Snowy contract was at Perisher Valley. New ski lifts were being erected on the slopes and the Parks and Wildlife Service had excluded all ground vehicles from anywhere but sealed roads. When the base holes were dug out, I would carry in the wet concrete mix in kibbles. Everything was well organised and had to be done quickly, which it was. We then built up the steel structures, piece by piece, in much the same way as we had done with the drill rigs in Papua New Guinea. Hovering had to be done with only single inch adjustments until security bolts had been inserted. Everything went to plan and we completed the project well ahead of schedule.

The change of scenery must have weakened my decision to retire from flying, as I immediately accepted a contract to work for Jayrow again, this time in the Kimberley region of West Australia. On arrival at Moorabbin, I received a briefing from the company manager and spent the night in a motel. The following day, accompanied by an engineer, I departed the airport in a Jet Ranger, travelling to the west via Nhill, Whyalla, Ceduna, Forrest, Kalgoolie, Perth, Geraldton and Port Hedland.

I enjoyed working in the Kimberley and probably covered every square-inch of the area during the three or four winter months that I was there. The weather was good and the mining companies made sure that we could never complain about the food. One would expect navigation to be difficult in such a desolate area, but this was not the case. Maps were up-to-date, and the lack of detail was an advantage as rivers, creeks and small hill ranges stood out. Conzinc Riotinto of Australia (CRA) was the big operator in the west during 1978 and usually had

services of four or five helicopters. Ashton Mining was a very small company, but was the successful one in making a diamond find. I'm not aware of the politics or intricacies of the mining companies, but CRA either partially owned or took over Ashton Mining following their discovery.

The Kimberley area is pockmarked with a lot of kimberlite pipes, but I'm told that the two names have no common connection. These kimberlite pipes had been volcanic eruptions millions of years ago but were now barely visible. Over a period of many months, we took sand and gravel samples from all these kimberlite pipes and also from the dry river and stream beds at five kilometre intervals. There was one kimberlite pipe that had its perimeter still intact up to a height of about 200 feet. From a break in the perimeter wall, a small dry creek came out and extended into Lake Argyle. This creek was named 'Smoke' and was only 10 feet wide and three feet deep. The geologists didn't need to tell the pilots and field assistants that something exciting was happening in this Smoke Creek area. Three Jet Rangers were concentrated on this area and claim pegging was conducted at a hectic rate.

The chief geologist needed heavy vehicles, so he hired not only what he wanted, but every serviceable heavy vehicle in the area so that there was none available for any other competition. This proved to be a good tactic, as news of the diamond find did leak out and other mining companies moved in quickly with the aim of pegging claims. There were disputes on claims, some of which went to court, but CRA was successful in all of those disputes. I often had to sit down in the shade of trees in Smoke Creek waiting for geologists and would scratch the creek bed surface with my finger or a stick and find two or three small diamonds. The eastern end of Lake Argyle is only a few hundred yards from the Smoke Creek kimberlite pipe, so we could always stop work for 30 minutes to refresh ourselves with a swim. There may come a time when the kimberlite pipe is exhausted, and the diamonds are mined from the creek and into the lake.

Once the need for helicopters decreased at Smoke Creek, we continued exploration work in the Marble Bar and Wittenoom areas. Fortunately, Marble Bar did not disclose anything of interest, so our stay only lasted several days. The motel rooms were very small, lacking any facilities such as refrigerators or air conditioners, and having been in every corner of Australia, I would rate Marble Bar as the hottest and least attractive place I had ever visited.

Wittenoom was a ghost town. The company houses were still in good order, but at the time, we had no knowledge of the danger of asbestos and no concern when the helicopter sucked up clouds of asbestos dust from the tarmac area

when landing or taking off. The mine authorities, in their wisdom, had packed inches of asbestos filings over the airstrip tarmac area to subdue the red dust.

The gorges in the Wittenoom area were beautiful. In the three months that I was at Wittenoom, I did not see a single tourist, so I would say that pollution would be negligible. The gorges were part of a National Park and there was a full-time ranger with whom we made contact. Usually, in the heat of the day, we would descend into the narrow gorges onto a sandbank to eat our lunch and enjoy a swim in the crystal clear water.

From Wittenoom we moved further north and set up camp in a deserted homestead and did the usual thing of stream sampling. The area was on the banks of the Gibb River within minutes of the coast. I'm not aware whether the mineral companies made contact with the owners of these deserted cattle properties but the few that we occupied throughout the Kimberley were always unlocked, fully furnished and overall, in excellent condition. In the barns there was all the standard working gear you might expect, such as riding saddles and machinery. We only spent about two weeks at the Gibb River and I then flew the Jet Ranger back to Moorabbin via Alice Springs, Leigh Creek and Broken Hill.

I had five weeks at home in Canberra and then flew a Lama helicopter from Canberra to Zeehan, on the west coast of Tasmania. The client was a Canadian company undertaking mineral exploration using a very large Magnetometer, shaped like a cigar and weighing 650 pounds. At the rear of the Magnetometer was a weathercock fin. A technician would sit at the instrument panel to monitor the recorded readings. We had photo maps of the areas and I had to parallel each run so that we had an overlap of the previous run. It was not easy work as the Magnetometer had to be kept at a constant 200 feet above the terrain. On the cockpit panel, I had three coloured lights of a radio altimeter: when it was green, I was at the correct height; when it showed yellow, I was getting too low; when it was red, I was dangerously low. If all lights were out, I was too high.

On completion of this project, I moved to Saint Helens on the north-eastern coast of Tasmania. The work was the same as that at Zeehan, but the location was far more pleasant. Zeehan had a heavy rainfall, and mineralised soil, which restricted the development of house gardens with colourful flowers.

Saint Helens had a good climate and the town in general was attractive, with excellent food and accommodation. Unfortunately, at both Zeehan and Saint Helens, we rarely achieved much success with our air work. For some reason unknown to me, the Magnetometer readings were not acceptable if carried out in windy conditions of any magnitude. There would be days when we would not get airborne, and others when we were lucky to get 30 minutes. However, we completed the task successfully, and

according to plan, I was to fly the Lama back to Canberra. By this time, I had remarried, and my wife Lesley had accompanied me to Tasmania and would normally travel with me in the helicopter, but on the morning of my departure the weather was borderline. I could have waited in Saint Helens for improved weather conditions, but the range forecast was bad weather for another five days. I asked the company to fly my wife back to Canberra by commercial airlines, to which they agreed.

I departed Tasmania, landed at Phillip Island and then flew on to Moorabbin where I received a message that instead of proceeding to Canberra, I was to fly the Lama to Mount Hotham in the Victorian snow country. This was another ski lift construction and the client was the same as that at Perisher and Thredbo, so there was no lack of understanding about the work to be undertaken. The weather was good and, much like the previous jobs, everything went to plan, finishing well ahead of schedule.

Returning to Canberra, I had two weeks at home followed by a request from Jayrow Helicopters at Moorabbin to carry out work with the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission (known as Hydro Tasmania since 1998), based at Hobart. I was told that air tickets were waiting for me at Canberra airport, what hotel I was booked into at Hobart, and that an engineer and hire car would be waiting for me at Hobart airport. The Jet Ranger that I was to use was also at Hobart Airport. This job was full of interest as we did a lot of inspection work along the Gordon and Franklin Rivers, particularly in the upper reaches where the mountains were very picturesque. Back in the 1950s, I had seen Lake Pedder in its natural form. Certainly it was unique with its sandy bank but I was more impressed with the much larger, and in my opinion, better lake as it now was, for I could only see it as a magnificent stretch of water.

I completed my contract on 28 February 1981, and although I did not know it at the time, it was to be my last flight in Australia as pilot in command. The reason was not that I had decided to retire again, but it was that from now on, all my flying was to be in and around the islands of Papua New Guinea, including New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville.

I had been back at home in Canberra three weeks when I had a phone call from Aviation Development, a Port Moresby based helicopter company. They advised me that they now had a helicopter contract at the Ok Tedi, using five helicopters, and offered me the position of Chief Pilot on site. They gave me a choice of working four weeks on and two weeks off, or accepting a house on site with my wife available to join me and all my expenses covered. I accepted based on the latter condition and was back at Ok Tedi on 7 April 1981.

I stayed at Ok Tedi until late November and decided to retire once more. The manager of Aviation Development suggested that I might change my mind if I relaxed in Port Moresby for a couple of weeks staying in the best hotel, drinking champagne and eating lobster. I was also told that I could purchase any new clothing that I and my wife would need. At the end of those two weeks of luxury, I was still determined to retire. The company countered by asking if I would do them a last favour by working three weeks at either Thursday Island in Australia, or Mount Hagen in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. My wife could remain at the Port Moresby hotel until the three week task was completed. I felt obligated to help them out in return for their generosity, and agreed to do the three weeks at Mount Hagen. Those three weeks extended into five years.

Chapter 14

Helicopter Commercial – Papua New Guinea Police

Aviation Development had secured a contract with the Papua New Guinea Police Department supplying a Jet Ranger helicopter with pilot and engineer, based at Mount Hagen. It was a sobering assignment. The majority of the work was to be controlling tribal fights, murders and rapes. I was sworn in as a police constable, supplied with a uniform, a six-cylinder revolver and a car. Lesley had decided to accompany me instead of returning to Australia, so it was agreed by both Aviation Development and the Papua New Guinea Police Department that I would work full-time and take annual leave. Our accommodation and meals were to be in the Mount Hagen motel.

I spent the first few days getting familiar with locations and personnel. The Papua New Guinea Government had strengthened the Mount Hagen police force by offering lucrative contracts to police officers from Great Britain. There were eight of them, two of whom had held senior positions in Scotland Yard.

The force at Mount Hagen was made up of two divisions: the Headquarters/Administration, and the Operational. The Headquarters/Administration division was in the middle of the town and the Operational division was based on the outskirts, flanked by strong, high fencing and guarded entry gates. There was a large secure armoury where we collected what armaments we required for our daily sorties. I had two permanent police constables that I had trained in the firing of live ammunition from the rear seats of the helicopter—a side-benefit of my time spent in the RAAF.

Each working day, I would report to the officer in charge at the operational base and receive a briefing. In most cases of tribal fighting, I would depart base with just the two constables equipped with tear gas launchers and rubber bullet guns. At extended tribal fights, rapes and murders, I would also have an officer equipped with pellet shotguns and a high-powered rifle—the rifle was only used as a last resort.

Murder cases were, unfortunately, a daily event across the Eastern and Western Highland provinces and were usually the result of a husband punching his wife in the stomach and bursting her spleen, which was often swollen from a lifetime of Malaria infection. The husband would be taken back to Mount Hagen for trial, where in the majority of cases, he would be found guilty of

manslaughter. While recalling my experiences, a number of specific murder cases come to mind. One day there was a report that a youth had killed his mother and grandmother at a very small village 20 miles north of Mount Hagen. The boy was about 16 years-of-age and it was obvious that he was suffering from mental disability. The court at Mount Hagen did not try the boy, instead turning him loose outside the police station, where for the next three days, he begged for food. Having no mental health institutions and no social security framework, plus in this case, no supportive family, I requested that the boy be taken back to his tribal area. I was experienced enough at this stage in the tribal ways and was aware that he would probably be killed by his own tribe; however, I believed that he had more chance of survival in the jungle that he knew than in the unfamiliar streets of Mount Hagen. The next day, I put him down two miles from his village. I never found out what happened to him.

Another disturbing case occurred when I was directed to a small village 17 miles east of Mount Hagen. It was late afternoon and the weather was ominous. A village man, about 25 years-of-age, had murdered his wife in a rather gruesome way by severing her neck with an axe. A fold of skin and flesh kept the head intact with the body, but lolling at an angle of 90 degrees. The husband had fled the village and was apparently hiding in the nearby jungle. Due to the weather conditions we took no time taking evidence and we decided to take the body of the deceased woman back to the morgue at Mount Hagen. Two of her brothers requested permission to travel with the body, which we agreed to. She had been wrapped in plastic sheets and I expected that the body would be placed on the floor of the rear compartment. Due to the increasing deterioration of the weather, I did not check the passengers or look behind me until I was well clear of the ground. The body was sitting upright, in the passenger seating, head at 90 degrees clear of the plastic, neatly strapped with a safety belt between her two brothers. Perhaps due to my years of combat experience, one learns to see the humour in serious situations.

Another murder involved residents of two villages (which I will refer to as Village A and B), each on a mountain ridge, separated by a narrow valley and stream. These two villages alternated between stages of peace and tribal fighting, so there was no surprise at the following events. At Village A, a man had murdered his sister's husband. The murdered man was originally from Village B. I was told that Village B wanted the body returned to them for burial, so I took the trouble of flying over to confirm the request. On my return to Village A, I found the body to be stiff, and beginning to advance in decomposition—and odour. I determined that the best way to carry the body across the valley would

be to strap it to the landing skid of the helicopter. Following my instructions, the villagers wrapped the body in banana leaves and secured it to the skid.

On arrival at Village B, there was a change in mood. The women had reached a high-pitch of mourning and were tearing their hair out by the roots, which was the usual custom in such situations. The men were also agitated, and told me that they had changed their minds and they wanted the body taken to the morgue at Mount Hagen. Having further and urgent commitments elsewhere, I informed the village elders that the body had to be offloaded at their village as previously agreed and that I would pick up the body again in two or three hours. I then proceeded to undo the binding cords holding the body to the landing skids. At this point, the most vocal chief slashed a large machete knife past my ear and cut into the ground only millimetres from my hand. My response could very well have cost me my life. Without moving from a kneeling position I advised the native detective accompanying me, in English, to take the double-barrel shotgun from the back seat of the helicopter and point it directly at the tribal chief whilst I continued to undo the cords. Fortunately the detective was an impressive individual who carried out his task with authority. This assured our safe departure from the village followed by sullen glares. Regardless, I did keep my promise to collect the body later in the day, to a tense but relatively safe reception.

Of the many rape cases investigated over the five-year period, 20 per cent would have involved lust and the remaining 80 per cent would have been cruel and malicious revenge rapes associated with tribal fights. For one particular incident, I travelled with a detective to a reported rape case at a small village a few miles from the large centre of Mendi in the Southern Highlands. The victims were two girls, aged 13 and 14 years, both strong and well developed, which is normal for Highland females of that age. After interrogation of the victims and witnesses, the offender was brought to the helicopter for transfer to Mount Hagen. On seeing the accused, I was very surprised to discover that he was a frail, elderly man who needed my assistance into the helicopter.

When the Leahy brothers first made contact with the Highlanders in 1931, tribal fighting was a way of life—it still is, and probably will remain so for the next 100 years. Although education had come to the area and television to the main centres of Mount Hagen, Goroka, Mendi and Tari, the young boys abandon the schools in periods of fighting and join their elder kin in the battles. The task of the smaller boys is collecting the enemy arrows and spears, which are then used again against the enemy. The main centre of tribal fighting is in the area of Wabag, situated between Mount Hagen and Porgera. The fights were always between any two adjoining villages, but could mushroom to a stage

where several villages, amounting to approximately 1000 men and woman, could be involved. While the men are fighting, the woman are destroying the enemy gardens and burning the thatched huts.

During the five-year period that I was with the police, the biggest tribal battle I experienced was at Wapenamanda, situated about halfway between Mount Hagen and Wabag. Over a period of three weeks, and in the latter part, twice daily, I would arrive over the battle area and the crewmen would exhaust all their supplies of tear gas and rubber bullets without any notable success. This was mainly due to the number of tribesmen fighting and the spacious nature of the area, this being the widest and flattest part of the valley. The police and government rarely knew the number of tribesmen killed or injured, in particular the injured. They would not be brought forward to a government or mission hospital for fear of being charged—tribal fighting was an offence. Many deaths were preventable with treatment and most died from a minor injury, such as an arrow wound in a non-critical area of the body. Without proper attention, this would often result in Septicemia.

It was at the end of this three-week period, with no success on our part, that a police officer on the helicopter decided to use the shotgun. Only four shots were fired: two towards each opposing side. The results were surprising: firstly because the fighting ceased immediately, and secondly because we learned later that two tribesmen had been killed by the shotgun blasts. Signals from the battle area indicated that the tribal elders wished to speak to us, so I landed amongst them. This may not seem prudent, but past experience had convinced me that no animosity would be directed towards the helicopter crews provided that our attacks against them were shared equally. It was probably fortunate in this case that the two tribesmen were from opposing sides. Having visited and spoken with the elders of the two opposing groups, it was agreed that there would be no more fighting. We were told that there would be a peace and compensation ceremony in five days time and that we were invited to attend. In a large and prolonged battle such as this was, the compensation payout can be huge, and is an indication of how much money must be hidden away in the thatched huts, or buried in the ground. The compensation recipient is always the tribe that was attacked first, and over the years, this usually balances out equally.

In the case of tribal villagers being killed by action of the helicopter crews, there is always an inquiry with witnesses or involved parties giving evidence at a court hearing. In the Wapenamanda incident, it was determined that the helicopter crews were innocent of any misdemeanour; however, as was the usual practice within the police force, the officer that fired the shotgun was moved quickly and discreetly to an area well away from the Western Highlands.

This was purely for his own protection due to the culture of revenge and 'payback' that is prevalent throughout Papua New Guinea, particularly so in the Highlands. If he had remained within the area, it is certain that within two months, he and one other of his immediate family would have been killed.

There was another prolonged battle at Gumine, a large village in very hilly country between Mount Hagen and Goroka. This area of Gumine is part of the Chimbu clans, who are a very war-like people and always very difficult to reason with. After nearly three weeks of using tear gas and rubber bullets, we started to become frustrated with our efforts, so the shotgun was brought into play. As this did not have the desired effect, I was not surprised to see the officer in the adjacent front seat change from the shotgun to the high powered rifle. There were 30 tribesmen making an attack up a very steep slope. In the lead was a tribal chief carrying an elaborate shield. I was directed by the officer to make a slow run along the line of the lead warriors at a distance of about 50 yards. As I heard the rifle fire, I saw the tribal chief fall to the ground with the shield finishing up on top of him.

There is evidently a very effective signal system within the tribes, as the fighting ceased immediately. This was a rather tense situation, so instead of landing and talking, we departed for Mount Hagen. The officer involved in the incident came from the Sepik River area and was the commander of the Operational Task Force. It was just seven days later that I left home at the usual time of 8.00 am, driving to the commander's office for the day's briefing. As I drove through the entry gates, I heard a rifle shot and saw policemen running in all directions. The distance from the gates to the office was only 30 yards. A sergeant was running towards me and it was evident that I was being directed to turn around and depart the area, which I immediately did. I returned to my home and telephoned the commander's office and was informed that the commander had been shot through the head and killed by a police corporal, who in turn was also shot and killed. The corporal who killed the commander had come from the village of Gumine. I believe that the reason that this commander had not been immediately posted to another area was either because of his rank and position, or because he had not reported the shooting of the tribal chief to a higher authority. This incident very clearly demonstrated the danger of interference in tribal conflicts, even to high ranking police officials.

In one of the more distressing incidents of tribal warfare, I was deployed to Wabag, which was the centre of tribal fighting activities. It was, as usual, embroiled in one of its neverending battles. The terrain lent itself to sneak attacks by the helicopter and I could not resist approaching the battle area very low and fast so that I was over the top of the participants before they realised

my presence. Taking in the general picture of the fighting, from the corner of my eye I noticed some 50 yards away from the battle, six men in the process of raping a woman. On seeing me approach, the men broke into pairs and ran either towards the battle area or towards the tree cover at the river. Apart from firing some tear gas, we did not spend much time on the rapists but returned to the girl and took her back to her village. This was a case where the girl was being raped as a means of hurting the enemy. If we had not intervened, again drawing on past experience, she would have likely had her breasts cut off, a bottle or large stick forced into her vagina and her throat cut or head severed with an axe.

I was briefed to go to a tribal fight in the Baiyer River area, which is 20 miles north of Mount Hagen. The usual procedure followed: our helicopter crew fired tear gas and rubber bullets until the tribesmen dispersed and returned to their respective villages. This same procedure was followed for the next six or seven days, by which time we were running short of ammunition. We had plenty of shotgun and rifle ammunition but the decision was made not to use these weapons as this area was generally very peaceful. The fighting tribesmen evidently realised the situation and made the most of it. The only thing that we could do was watch from above, a situation for which I am now grateful, as it was an opportunity to witness their battle strategy. Each side had a warrior chief at the lead with a very ornate shield. In a battle of 300 warriors per side, there would be 50 holding shields in a 'V' formation who did nothing but carry the shield. A group of 50 men equipped with bows and arrows would position themselves behind the protective shield layer and would only expose themselves long enough to fire an arrow into the opposing force.

Inside the V formation was a group of 100 warriors equipped with either spears or bows and arrows, firing over the head of the lead shield man. On the outside of the formation was a group of 100 roving spear and bowmen, who had almost unlimited freedom of movement. Behind the main force were the 12-year-old boys who picked up the spears and arrows fired by the opposition—this meant that both sides never ran short of ammunition. Our stocks of tear gas and rubber bullets were replenished within a few days, by which time the Baiyer River tribes had reverted back to peaceful co-existence.

It was the morning of New Year's Eve, 1983, that I was programmed to proceed with two detectives to investigate a murder at a village in the Tari area, 70 miles west of Mount Hagen. I fuelled the Jet Ranger to maximum capacity and was about to depart when I received advice of a change of plan. There had been a break-in at the radio transmitter and receiver station situated at the top of Mount Hagen. The mountain was 12 000 feet high and only 10 minutes flying time from Mount Hagen airfield. I could see the top of the mountain as I stood

at the airfield and assessed the cloud as about six-eighths cumulus and stratus. I had no idea what the wind strength or direction would be. If winds were favourable, I would not need to lessen my fuel load.

On reaching 12 000 feet, I could see a solid bank of cloud on the eastern side of the mountain, which had an almost vertical rock face for about 5000 feet. The wind was strong and also coming from the east, so I knew that there would be a curl-over with down draft if I made a direct approach to the helipad. Weight, height and wind combined to make this a borderline dangerous situation. In hindsight, I should have backed off and gone home. Instead, I made an approach across the face of the cloud bank, 90 degrees out of wind, which would allow me the opportunity to abort and pick up speed down the western slope of the mountain. I had to abort four times on this type of approach, and in desperation, decided to try a direct approach with some extra height for insurance. Making this approach with the extra height, I was evidently above the down draft zone and was maintaining height with minimum power, but was too high when over the helipad. My next approach was again into wind but at normal approach path. I was in a perfect position with 30 yards to cover and 50 feet to descend when I entered the down draft zone. The result was dramatic—I was descending at an alarming rate with the collective lever pulled to maximum power.

The top 2000 feet of the mountain was free of trees but the slope was considerable and the grass slippery. I had hit the ground hard without sustaining any damage, but the helicopter started to slide down the western side of the mountain. My predicament was that if I closed the engine down, I would have no control on direction of the slide and I could not pull collective and engine power without the risk of the main rotor blades hitting the ground slope. I had an additional problem in that the slide speed was increasing, which left me with the choice of hitting a cluster of trees at a reasonably slow speed, or bypassing those trees and risking the unknown further down the mountain.

I manoeuvred towards this first cluster of trees, put out a Mayday, closed the throttle and turned off the fuel cock. I hit the trees with the rotors still turning and from then on, it was a lottery as to the fate of the passengers and I. The rotors crumpled and twisted around the airframe, which ended up on its side. I had no trouble getting out of the helicopter on the high side, and then opened the passenger compartment door and helped the two detectives to vacate. My next action was to return to the cockpit, make radio contact with Port Moresby control and then turn off all electrical switches. We were taken off the mountain that same afternoon by another helicopter and returned to Mount Hagen airfield. The day's adventures in no way restricted my ability to enjoy New

Year's Eve. I had my quota of alcoholic drinks, sang and danced to the sound of Scottish music played on the bagpipes. The following day the company supplied me with a replacement Jet Ranger.

My immediate task in the New Year was to take a company engineer and an insurance assessor to the damaged helicopter. That same day, after the engineer had reduced the helicopter to manageable sections, I transported the parts and personnel from the mountain to the Mount Hagen airfield. The helicopter company did very well out of the accident. They received full insurance cover, plus the wreck, free of cost. Within three months, the company engineers had reconstructed the wreck to a fully serviceable Jet Ranger.

In 1986, I felt like a change of scenery, so I decided to leave police work. The night before I departed for Australia, Aviation Development and the Papua New Guinea Police Department gave me a memorable send off from Port Moresby. Guests included the Government Minister, the Commissioner and all Divisional Commanders throughout the country. In addition, the internationally respected Papua New Guinea Police Band played music for us throughout the night. It was a great way to end an intially unexpected, but very interesting change in career.

Chapter 15

Medical Claims, Department of Veterans' Affairs, and Life after Flight

I left Port Moresby on the first day of June 1986, believing that this was the end of my flying career. On 22 June however, I was on Bougainville Island working for CRA on a gold and copper project that was in full production. The mine at Panguna had the appearance of a huge volcano, made more so by the deep, man-made excavations extracting the valuable metals. All the workers were well housed in either dormitories or married quarters. The mess facilities, although graded on a rank structure, were excellent for all. A first class sealed road was built from the mine to Arawa, the main town situated on the coast, and further on to the airport at Kieta, also on the coast. There was no tailings dam built at Panguna, so all the waste run-off went the opposite direction to where Arawa and Kieta were situated. The waste went via a natural river, which, over the years, was silting up and becoming a sore point with the local natives living in the villages along the river banks. One of my periodic tasks was to take the CRA environmentalist on sample testing at intervals along the river to the sea. The river looked terrible, but apparently the samples tested okay and that may be the case, as every day, I would see healthy crocodiles basking on the river banks well in from the sea.

We had only one helicopter at Bougainville and it was used primarily on 'milk run' jobs such as the environmental stream sampling, monitoring rain records throughout the island, checking radio masts, receiver/transmitter stations and sun powered panels, and running airport deliveries and collections. There was a limited amount of drilling in the area using small, one-man rigs, which could be moved easily by the Jet Ranger. Community goodwill was encouraged, so the helicopter was always available for any medical emergency in any part of the island. Schools in the immediate area were given support in many ways, including the transport of teachers to Arawa on a Friday afternoon and back to the school on Monday mornings.

Navigation was simple, even in very bad weather conditions, but there were dangers when attempting to get on and off some of the higher mountains. There would be a mixture of cumulonimbus and stratus cloud, which in the late afternoon, would be fast moving. I know that it was only my long experience in

the tropics where I could judge that I had 30 seconds and not 40 seconds to get through a hole that kept me alive.

I departed Bougainville just before Christmas of 1986 and began my longest break from commercial flying since I started in 1968. I was at home in Canberra until the beginning of September 1987, when a company by the name of Island Helicopters, based at Rabaul in Papua New Guinea, contacted me with a request to work out of Lae. I had operated around Lae in fixed-wing aircraft during the war years and post-war, but very little in helicopters, so I was looking forward to the experience. Lae is the second largest town or city in Papua New Guinea and it had plenty of good hotels and sports clubs, so social life was pleasant.

The helicopter was a Jet Ranger and the work was demanding due to the complicated weather and terrain. Lae gets more than its share of rain and the Finisterre Range, where most of our work was located, was one of the toughest areas to fly in Papua New Guinea. Some of the locations that we had to reach were nestled on the northern side of the range, which meant on occasions, climbing to 12 000 feet before descending through broken cloud and finding our destination, which was often far from easy. Sometimes, due to worsening weather, it was more difficult getting home again.

The Lae Airport at this time was downgraded and used only by helicopters and general maintenance. Fixed-wing operations were moved to Nadzab, 15 miles from Lae up the Markham Valley. The hangars at Lae were open-ended and the locals could move freely from one side of the runway to the other. The freedom of movement and access that the locals had would prove complicated when a local native bank clerk decided that he would like to take a flight in the Jet Ranger, with himself as pilot. To get inside the helicopter, he broke the lower front perspex screen and then went through the starting procedure, with one important omission: he failed to turn the fuel cock to the 'on' position. He had also failed to remove the tie-down from the main rotor blades. As for starting the helicopter, he did an amazing job, as he did get it started, but there was only enough fuel in the system for the engine to run for a few seconds. With the main rotor tied down, a lot of damage would have been done had the fuel cock been turned on. There is no doubt that had the rotor blades been free, and fuel cock on, the intruder would have been killed and massive damage done as the helicopter was inside a large metal hangar. Security guards took the bank clerk into custody and called a psychiatrist for mental evaluation. There being no real mental care facilities in Papua New Guinea, I assume that the bank clerk ended up in gaol, whatever his mental state.

It was near the end of 1987 when I finished the Lae project, and I had a nice long stretch of six months at my hobby farm situated five miles from the town

of Kendall in the Port Macquarie region of New South Wales. I was back in Bougainville in early June 1988, filling in for the pilot/manager, who was having a few weeks leave in Europe. At this stage, everything was normal in Bougainville, with no indication of the troubles coming up in the future. During this period, I was contacted by the owner of Island Helicopters in Rabaul again. He offered me a very generous contract and suggested that instead of returning to Australia at the conclusion of my Bougainville contract, I could come direct to Rabaul. Lesley had accompanied me to Bougainville and also came with me to Rabaul, where the living conditions were excellent. The helicopter company gave us two houses, one on the beach and one in town. Each house had three servants.

There was a lot of variation in the work out of Rabaul. There were many mining companies on exploration and two or three had reached the drilling stage. By far, the most promising deposit was at Lihir Island, situated 40 miles north of New Ireland Province. In fact, it was more than promising, it was a certainty.

Lihir is shaped like a horseshoe due to a volcanic eruption, and the perimeter walls went to a height of 2400 feet. Sulphur smoke was still oozing out of the land and sea immediately off the beach. This situation presented problems for geologists, engineers and drillers, but no doubt these problems would be solved, as the deposit was probably the richest gold find in modern times.

We had difficulty moving the drill rigs with the standard Jet Ranger, so the company acquired two of the larger, more powerful models. It was not as efficient for drill rig shifting as the Aérospatiele Lama, but we did manage. Sir Julius Chan was the major shareholder in Island Helicopters and I developed a close friendship with him and his family. Occasionally I would stay overnight at his home in New Ireland. He had a very impressive two-storey home, 20 miles east of Namatanai, his parliamentary electorate. The property ran Brahman-type cattle.

Rabaul still had a lot of history from the World War II days. Many caves that the Japanese carved out of the volcanic hills and cliff walls were still in existence and to the surprise of everyone in Rabaul, a new one was found during the period that I was there in 1988. I believe that I inspected every Japanese constructed cave in Rabaul. The most interesting one was carved out of the cliff face and the sea coral, allowing submarines to enter the cave at high tide and tradesmen to work on the vessels at low tide. There was also the added advantage of protection from Allied bombers.

I spent most of my living time at the beach house, which had waves lapping at the front gate. The swimming was great, with warm water that I liked and waves big enough for a bit of body surfing. My wife and I were never short of

something to do. We were both golfers and bridge players, and there were many people in Rabaul with those interests. The three or four clubs in the area catered for our evening social activities: having a few drinks and a high quality meal.

The volcano at the end of the airstrip was a shell of what it was in 1958 when I was in Rabaul with the RAAF, flying DC-3 Dakotas. The walls of the volcano had eroded and the only activity was wispy smoke and some yellow sulphur oozing out of the centre area.

The timber companies were very active in New Britain and New Ireland and I did quite a lot of work with them, mainly on plotting new areas. The companies were from Japan, Korea and Singapore. I never liked the sight of devastation inflicted on the jungle by these companies, but maybe there was no need for my concern. I do not know enough about this topic to know if the tropical jungle could heal itself quickly.

An unusual task in the Rabaul area was the drop-off of the weekly pay to the crop growing plantations. The money was delivered by the Rabaul banks to the helicopter head office in calico bags with the name of the individual plantation on each bag. We had a very exact time schedule and the manager would be waiting at the house lawns with guards carrying shotguns. In order to cause some confusion to potential robbers, the sequence of drops was changed every week, and was known only to the plantation manager and the helicopter company.

When one is landing a helicopter near villages, amongst primitive people, there is always the risk of an injury to someone. I was on my way back from Lihir Island and still 20 miles short of Rabaul when I received a message from Rabaul control to bypass them and proceed to a location 20 miles further south. I was not told why, but on reaching the location, I saw a large crowd around the Hughes 500 helicopter with a damaged tail rotor. The pilot of the Hughes came over to me and explained that a native had walked into the tail rotor, killing him instantly. My first reaction was surprise. After hearing what had happened, it was amazing that the pilot had not been hacked to death by relatives of the dead man as revenge for what they may have perceived as a result of the pilot's error. It was absolute luck for the pilot that the native was from Kimbe, a large village, but quite a long way west of Rabaul. He was a loner with no relatives in the Rabaul area.

It was about this same time that reports were received of trouble at the Panguna Mine in Bougainville. The office and hangar complex of Island Helicopters had been set alight by a group of rebels wanting independence for Bougainville. They had also set alight other CRA office buildings, and by use of explosives, had managed to topple one of the main pylons of the electrical grid.

The helicopter at Bougainville, a Jet Ranger, sustained major damage to the tail section and would be out of action for about three weeks. The company was asked to supply a relief Jet Ranger, and because I was familiar with Bougainville, I was requested to get on my way that same afternoon. I knew that it would be a dangerous trip weatherwise even in daylight hours, so instead of my wife travelling with me in the helicopter, I asked that she be sent to Bougainville by commercial aircraft, which the company complied with.

I departed Rabaul with extra fuel in jerry cans and passed directly east, over the wide part of New Ireland, then headed for the Feni Islands another 40 miles east. The weather was bad, with rain squalls but negligible winds, so I kept low on the water and had worked out a time for arrival over the Feni Islands. If they did not show up on time, I would turn 180 degrees and head for home. I did reach Feni, changed direction south-east for Green Island and made the decision that if I missed Green Island, 60 miles from Feni, I would continue on another 60 miles to Buka Island, a much larger target. I did manage to reach Green and Buka, where I topped up the fuel tanks from the jerry cans and then carried on to the Panguna mine complex where I arrived just on last light.

I was met at Panguna by the CRA authorities and briefed on the situation. For the next three weeks, I played 'cowboys and indians' with the rebel forces, who continued to harass operations and cause as much damage as they were capable of. I usually carried two, three, or four police that I would put down on clearings when chasing rebels, but we never had any success as the police wore hobnailed boots and the rebels were barefoot.

When the local helicopter was again serviceable, I returned to Rabaul and continued the work at Lihir Island until my 66th birthday on 28 February 1989. I had not talked about not coming back again, but on the flight from Rabaul to Port Moresby, my wife nudged me out of my doze and asked what mountains those were that we passed over. I said: 'that's the Owen Stanley Range, and the high peak is Mount Victoria'. My wife said: 'take a good look at them, as you won't be coming back again'. My reply was: 'Well, I guess I've got to quit sometime' and I went back to dozing. I really did quit this time.

My total hours flying were just on 18 000. On the Jet Ranger, I had flown just short of 9000 hours alone. The number of different aircraft types that I had flown added up to 23, and of those fixed-wing types, I rate the de Havilland Hornet as the best, and the Vultee Vengeance the worst. In rotary wing, the Aérospatiele Lama was the best I had flown. I am unable to say that there was any helicopter that was the worst. They were all very effective in their particular period and played their part in the evolution of rotary wing aircraft.

I was always a frustrated farmer, so I was now ready to indulge myself on a 15 acre hobby farm that I had purchased in 1985. I had a beautiful three level home, complete with swimming pool, built on the high corner of the land looking down on the flats and rippling stream to the north-east. The location was three miles from the small town of Kendall, situated between the towns of Port Macquarie and Taree. That area of the mid-north coast of New South Wales is said to have the best weather in Australia, and I believe that it deserves that reputation.

I had a busy time over the next two years erecting internal fencing, poultry enclosures and planting fruit trees. Breeding exhibition poultry had always been my hobby so I acquired the best available breeding stock in Australia and then aimed for improvement by careful selection of a particular cock mated with the best two or three hens. During the 11 years that I was on the farm, the exhibition standard did improve to a stage that I was winning major trophies throughout New South Wales. Foxes, as expected, were a major problem. Their reputation as being cunning has not been overstated, and I lost many of my best chickens over the years to their raids. I decided that I would not use poison baits, as it was a risk to my own dog and the wild birds, so the solution was a .22 rifle, complete with a telescopic sight. From the top level veranda of the house, it was approximately 100 yards down the slope to the poultry sheds. I set up a target on a large piece of cardboard, the centre marked distinctly to the size of a tennis ball. When I could hit the centre five times out of 10, I was satisfied that the sight was correctly adjusted. An inspection of the fox carcasses all showed that the bullet hit the fox just behind the shoulder and passed through the lungs or heart.

For no particular reason, I had never become a member of the organisation now known as the Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL). At the village of Kendall there was a sub-branch that attracted my interest, and I was almost immediately elected as the Branch Secretary.

It was during this period as Secretary that I was involved in helping branch members complete application forms for submission to the DVA in relation to war caused illnesses and injuries. As a result of my colourful flying career and wartime experience, I had my own medical problems, but in the first 12 months living in Kendall, I only applied for recognition of Malaria and hearing loss—both were accepted. As time went on, back problems that I had been experiencing since the end of the war in 1945 had progressively worsened. The DVA, in order to assess claims, had compiled a list of illnesses and injuries under the heading of 'Statement of Principles' that detailed the minimum requirements, plus evidence of location, time and reason for the complaint. My back pain was caused by

Lumbar Spondylosis, a condition caused by degenerative osteoarthritis of the joints between the centre of the spinal vertebrae and/or neural foraminae.

In determining how I came to be afflicted with the condition, I traced it back to the South-West Pacific, 1943 to 1944, and the reason was operating in a warzone flying for a minimum of 500 hours in aircraft capable of positive gravity forces of two g forces.

I met the requirements easily and submitted a claim to the Sydney branch of the DVA. The claim was refused on the basis that the various aircraft I had been flying were not capable of operating at the two-g force level. It was evident that the officer handling my claim knew very little about wartime fighter aircraft. Almost daily, whilst dive-bombing and strafing Japanese bases, I was pulling out at the bottom of the dive at four g forces, which was very close to the full 'blackout' stage, the term used to describe the point where gravitational forces inflicted on the pilot would cause them to lose consciousness. Every fighter pilot flying Kittyhawks, Spitfires and Mustangs knew that these aircraft were capable of g forces up to nine.

If a claimant believes that his claim has not been processed correctly or fairly, he can ask for a review, which will be processed by a more experienced or senior officer. I asked for this review to take place. The review officer rejected my claim, stating that he agreed with the original decision taken by the processing officer. Instead of applying for the third stage of the application, which would involve legal processes with the government and more time and expense, I short-circuited the process by contacting the medical authorities at the DVA head office in Canberra. The result was an acceptance of my claim within three days.

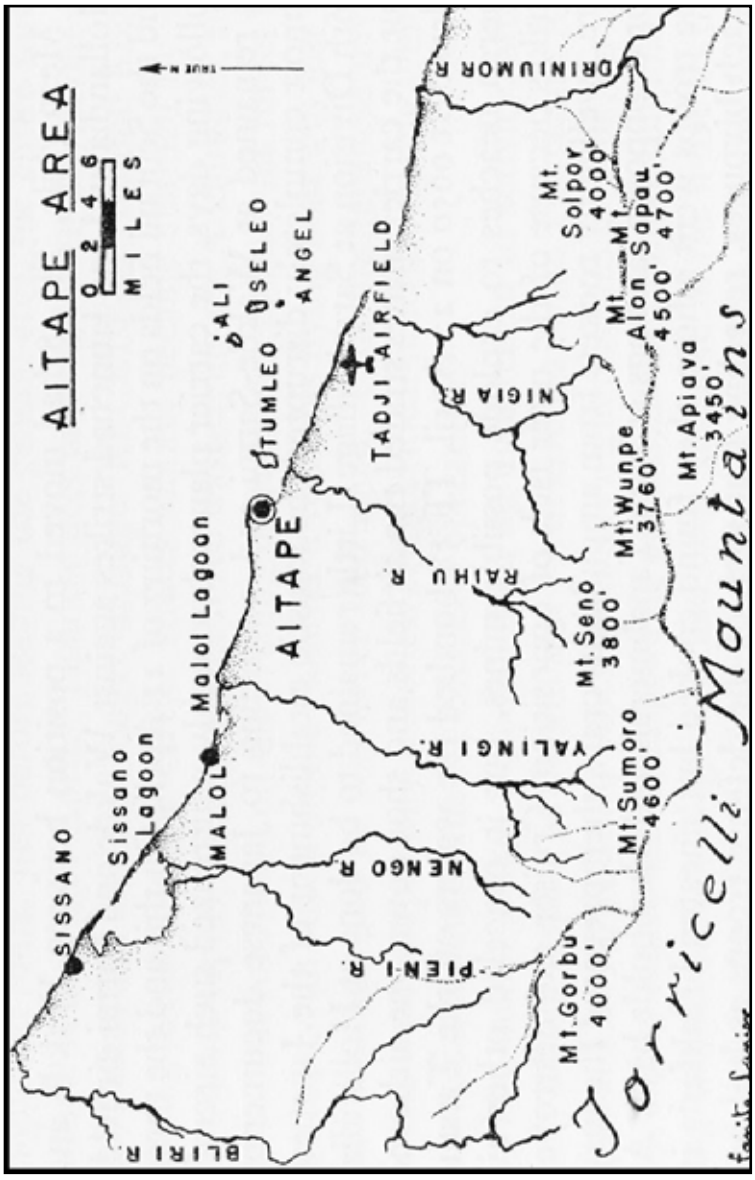
I applied for and received all correspondence that had transpired both ways and discovered that the authorities in Canberra had expressed the opinion that the personnel in Sydney who had handled my application 'were a mob of monkeys'. Unfortunately, this set off a vindictive attack on me and I became the subject of a special inquisition, combined with medical tests by specialists selected by the DVA. In addition, I had a complete and comprehensive check on my financial situation to see if I had at any time been overpaid on any of my claims. I have come to accept that any organisation makes mistakes, or has personnel not qualified or trained for a particular task, however, justice will prevail if one is determined to achieve their goal and continue through the appropriate channels. Despite my experience, I believe that the DVA has done much that we, the war veterans, can be thankful for.

For the 11 years that I lived at the hobby farm, every day was full of interest. Attending to the animals, orchard and garden was a pleasure rather

than a chore. The card game, bridge, was a passion for both Lesley and me. We developed a bridge club based at the coastal town of Laurieton, which increased from two members to 60, and is probably still increasing. I had promised Lesley that I would only stay on the farm for a maximum of five years, so I was more than satisfied with the 11 years that I got in the end. In 1998, I sold the Kendall farm and returned to our house in Canberra.

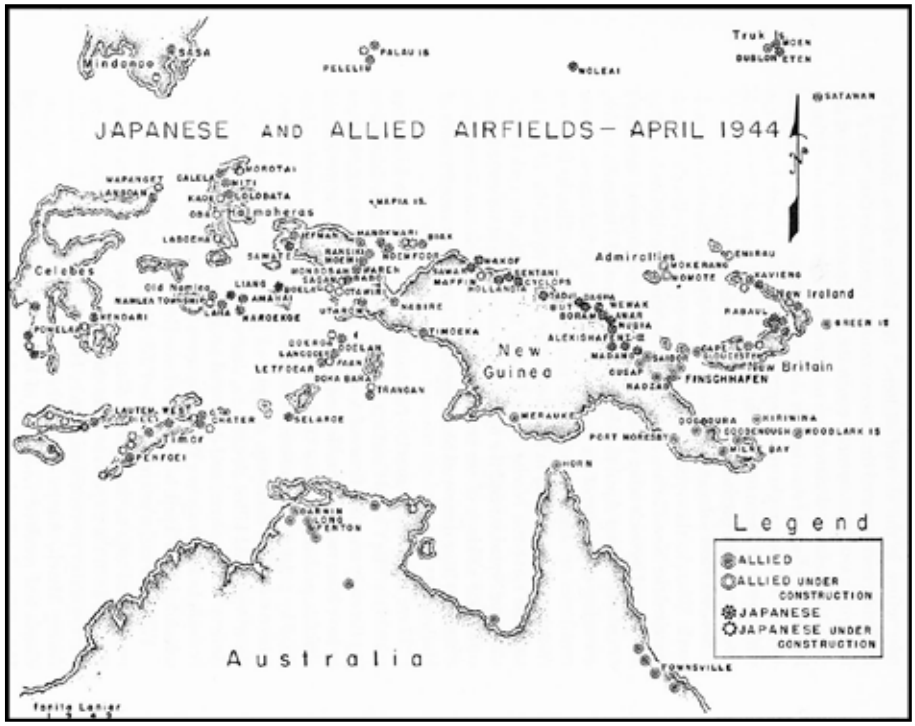
My parents passed on genes to me which promised that I should reach at least 90 years-of-age. Whilst body and mind allow, I'll socialise and play competition bridge for the remainder of what has been an interesting life, spiced with adventure and a degree of danger.

Appendix 1 - Maps



Aitape and Tadji, World War II

(*The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV, p. 606)



Japanese and Allied airfields, April 1944

(*The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV, p. 600)

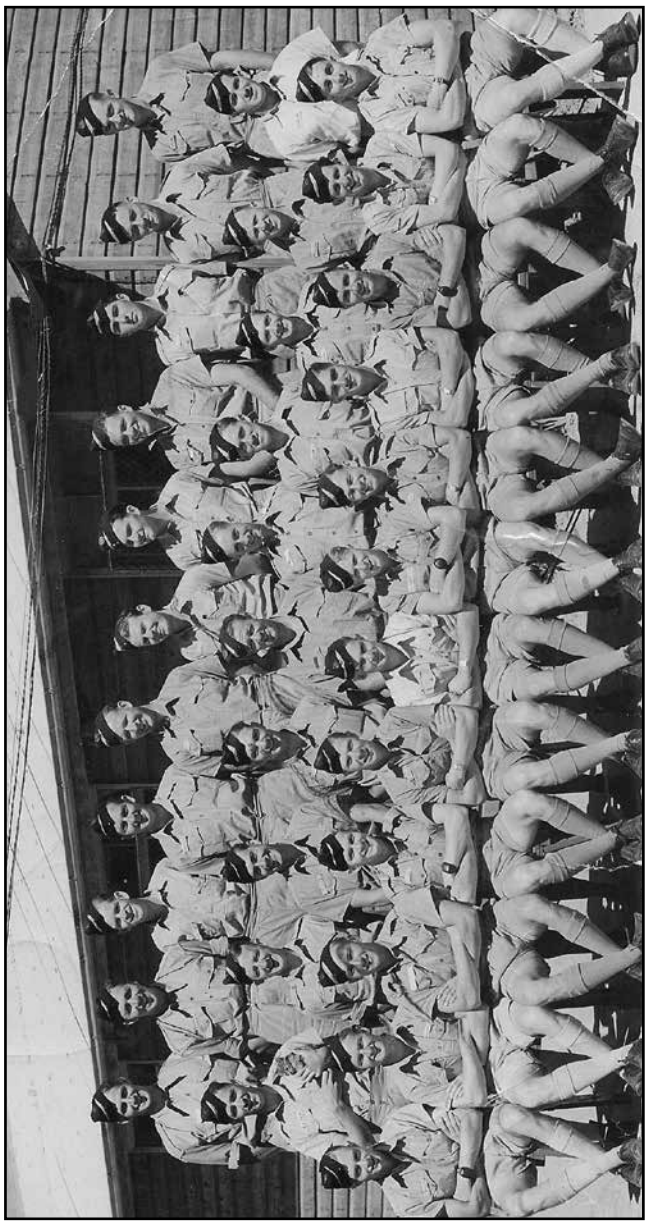
South Vietnam provinces, 1967

(United States Army)

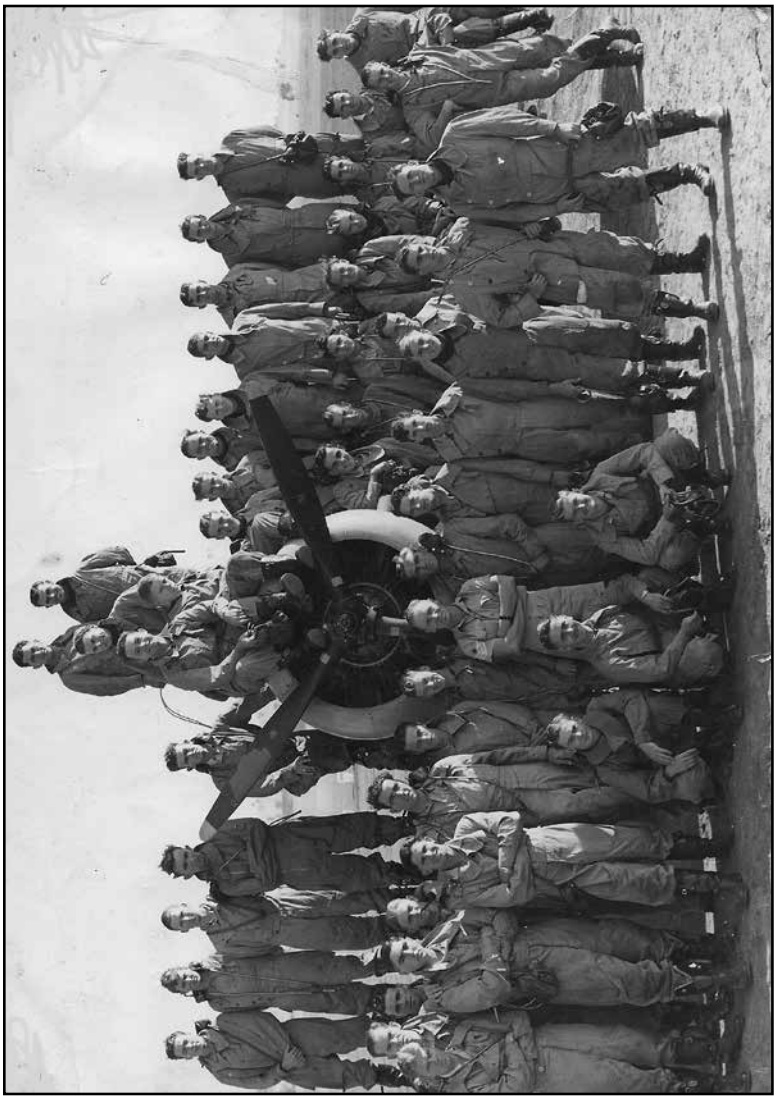
Papua New Guinea

(Central Intelligence Agency)

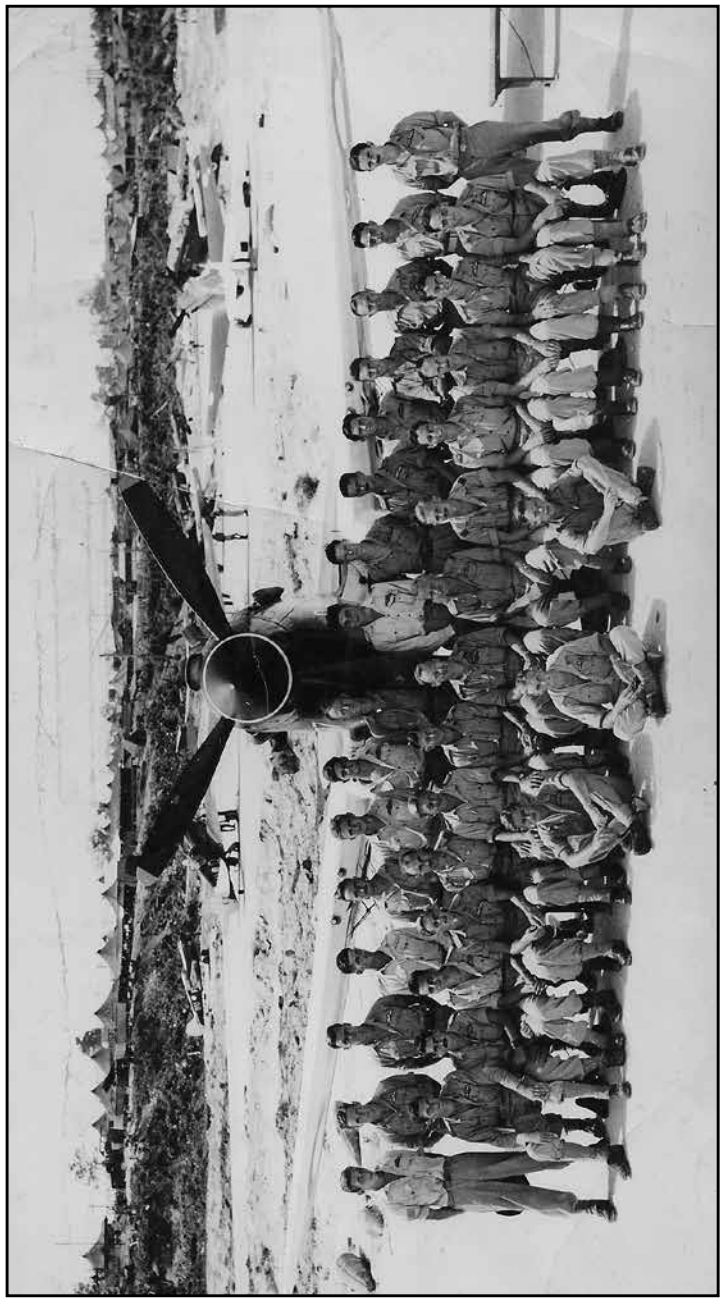
Appendix 2 - Squadron Photographs



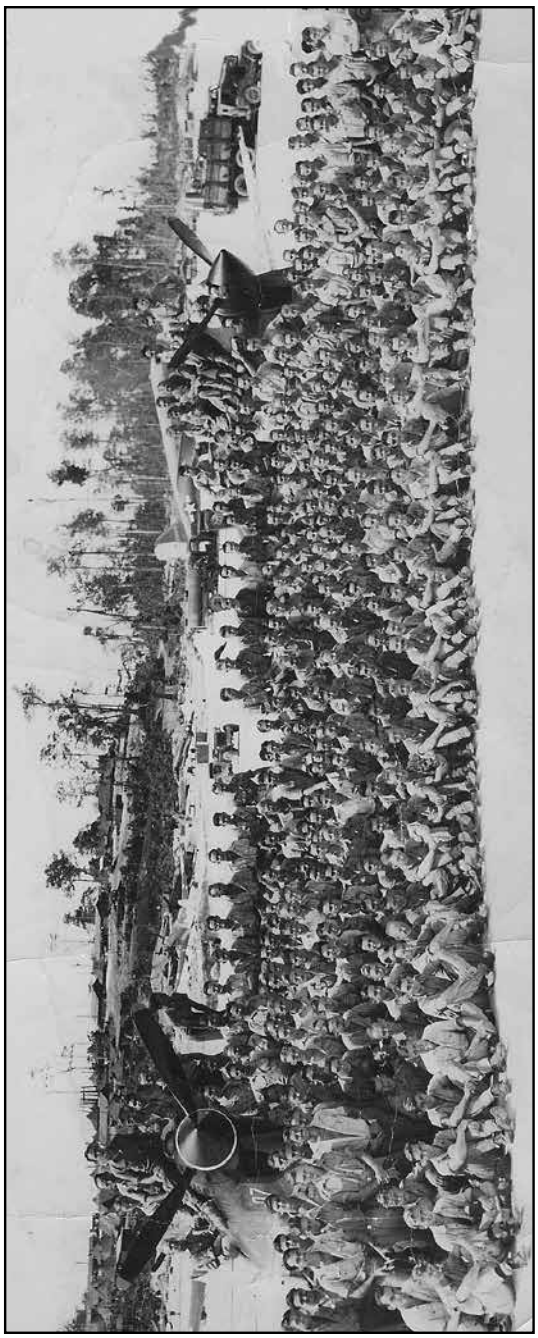
Trainee pilots at Uranquinty, 1943. Hindley at bottom row, second from the right



Trainee pilots at Uranquinty, 1943. Hindley is third from the left, front row standing



Pilots from No 80 Squadron, Noemfoor Island, 1944



Full complement of No 80 Squadron at Noemfoor Island, 1944

RAF Exchange, Butterworth, Malaysia, 1953. Laddie Hindley and Mike Wood sitting front and centre

Iroquois Helicopters on display over Sydney the day before leaving for South Vietnam, 1966

Appendix 3 - Aircraft

This is a list of the aircraft that Laddie Hindley has flown as qualified captain:

- Aérospatiele SA 31B Lama Helicopter
- Aérospatiele SA 318 Alouette II Helicopter
- Aérospatiele SA 319 Alouette III Helicopter
- Auster
- de Havilland Canada DHC-1 Chipmunk
- Sikorsky H-34 Choctaw Helicopter
- Douglas C-47B Dakota
- de Havilland DH.103 Hornet
- Hughes MD 500 Helicopter
- Bell Iroquois Helicopter (various models)
- Bell 206A JetRanger Helicopter
- Curtiss P-40 Kittyhawk
- Consolidated Liberator B-24
- Avro Lincoln
- de Havilland DH 98 Mosquito
- Mustang Fighter
- Supermarine Seafire
- Bell Sioux Helicopter
- Supermarine Spitfire
- de Havilland Canada DH 82A Tiger Moth
- Vultee Vengeance
- Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Winjeel
- Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation Wirraway

Mosquiotoes preparing to take-off from Townsville, 1952

Appendix 4 – Honours and Awards

This list contains the various Honours and Awards presented to Laddie Hindley over the course of his career.

- Distinguished Flying Cross, presented by Governor-General Lord Casey in 1968
- 1939–1945 Star
- Pacific Star
- War Medal 1939–1949
- Australian Service Medal 1939–1945
- Australian Active Service Medal 1945–1975, including clasps for:
  - Malaya,
  - Malaysia, and
  - Vietnam.
- General Service Medal 1918–1962
- General Service Medal 1962, with the Malay Peninsula clasp
- Vietnam Medal
- Australian Service Medal 1945–1975, with the Thai–Malay clasp
- Australian Defence Medal
- Netherlands War Cross
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Pingat Jasa Malaysia

Laddie Hindley's Medals and Clasps

Laddie Hindley's Medals and Clasps

Distinguished Flying Cross Citation

Flight Lieutenant Leigh Oxley HINDLEY joined the Royal Australian Air Force on 24th April 1942 and was awarded his pilot badge in April 1943. He was commissioned on 1st October 1944 and served in the RAAF until the end of the Second World War 1939–1945. He rejoined the RAAF in February 1951 and has served continuously since that date.

Flight Lieutenant Hindley was posted to No 9 Squadron Vietnam, for flight commander duties and in that capacity he was responsible for the supervision of flying operations. His skill in the air and his experience contributed a great deal towards the development of the operational techniques so successfully employed by No 9 Squadron in the first 10 months of operations. He participated in a large number of the more hasardous [sic] missions flown by the squadron, and on many occasions his helicopter came under direct small arms fire from the Viet Cong.

His strong sense of duty, resourcefulness and personal qualities revealed him as a courageous leader who earned the respect of all squadron members. He constantly pushed himself to the limits to ensure the best operational results and set an excellent example at all times. Much of the success enjoyed by No 9 Squadron in air operations in support of No 1 Australian Task Force was due to the personal efforts of Flight Lieutenant Hindley.

—Recommendation for Honours and Awards, DFC Citation for Leigh Oxley Hindley, 23 November 1967.[1]

1 National Archives of Australia, Series A2880, Item 5/5/34, p. 2.

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National Archives of Australia

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