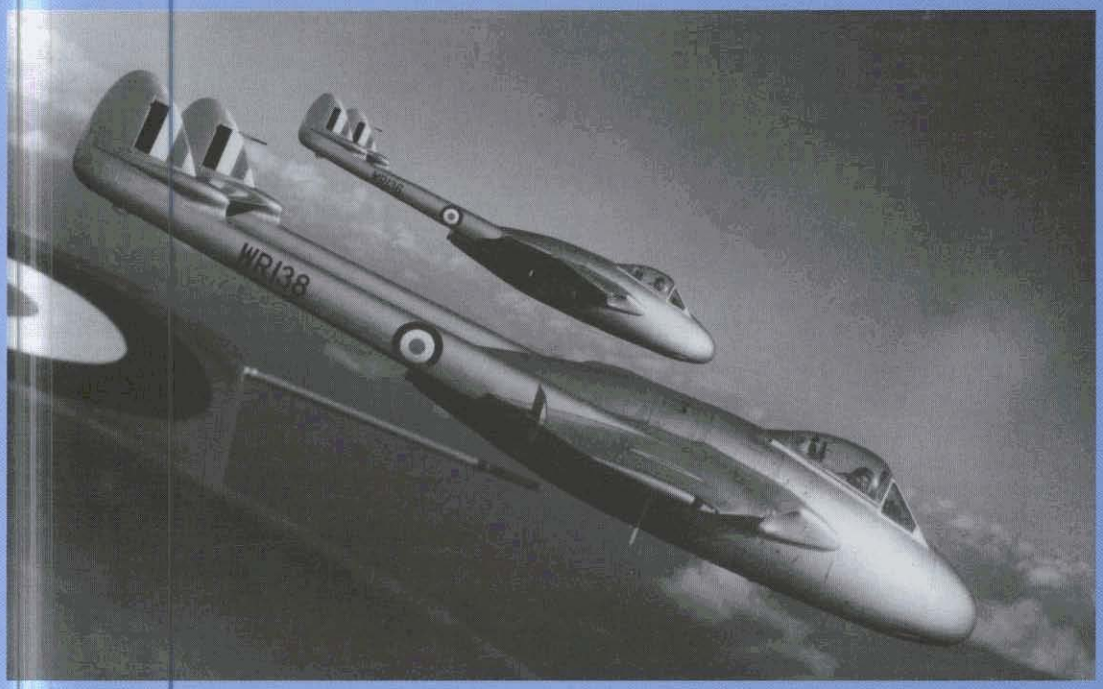
HERITAGE SERIES

UP AND AWAY

Memoirs of a Pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force 1950–1981

JOHN JACOBS



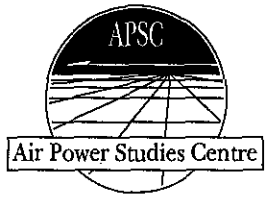
WINNER OF THE 1998 HERITAGE AWARD

1998 RAAF HERITAGE AWARDS

UP AND AWAY

MEMOIRS OF A PILOT IN THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE 1950-1981

JOHN JACOBS



AIR POWER STUDIES CENTRE

Other titles in the series:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

First published in 1999 by:

Air Power Studies Centre
RAAF Base
Fairbairn ACT 2600
Australia

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Jacobs, John, 1928 -.
Up and away: memoirs of a pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force 1950-1981

ISBN 0 642 26523 8.

1. Australia. Royal Australian Air Force – Biography. 2. Air pilots, Military – Australia – Biography. I. Australia. Royal Australian Air Force. Air Power Studies Centre. II. Title. (Series: Heritage series (Canberra A.C.T.)).

358.41331092

FOREWORD

When John Jacobs enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force as a 22 year-old trainee pilot in 1950, the organisation was just emerging from a period of confusion and frustration. The RAAF's remarkable expansion and inspirational triumphs of the wartime years had been immediately followed by massive demobilisation and uncertainty, as from 1946 to 1949 the Air Force was officially placed on an 'Interim' footing while the government decided what kind of defence capability it would need in a vastly changed world.

Military aviation itself was also experiencing a profound transition, as propellers, piston-engines and subsonic flight were superseded by jet propulsion and flight at the speed of sound, and aircraft started to fire missiles as well as guns.

The Interim period may have been necessary, but it was a depressing time, and it left a great many experienced and talented people with little option other than to quit the RAAF, an exodus which placed at risk the professionalism acquired at such grievous cost during the war.

It was to be young men like Sergeant, eventually Air Commodore, Jacobs who helped ensure that the RAAF successfully navigated this most significant generational and technological transition. In doing so, they laid the foundations for today's Air Force as one of the world's best military flying organisations.

Up and Away presents a thoughtful, informative and accessible memoir of that achievement, as seen through the eyes of one of the era's most respected pilots. Few contemporary authors have described so clearly and so well the experience of becoming a military flier, from basic to advanced training, and then onto operational fighters and bombers. The training loop, incidentally, was closed some years later when the by-then Squadron Leader Jacobs returned to the Central Flying School as its chief flying instructor, arguably the most important flying post in a peacetime air force. As CFI of CFS, John was known for his integrity and impartiality as he insisted on maintaining standards across the RAAF, regardless of the rank of his students.

Other threads of this book include staff duties in various headquarters, close association with major RAAF identities (from which readers may, in some cases, infer intriguing conclusions), and entertaining accounts of overseas service, particularly in Malta, the United States and Southeast Asia.

There is no more important thread, however, than that of the Jacobs family. Service people are generally posted every two or three years, and until the very recent past their families were expected simply to up stakes and follow, with little formal support, leaving behind their homes, schools, jobs, friends – indeed, a large part of their lives – without complaint, which they almost invariably did. John and Joyce Jacobs raised seven children under that system. *Up and Away* is as much a tribute to the cheerful spirit and stoicism of Air Force families as it is to a flying career.

Despite the significance of the period which John's career spanned, few Air Force historians have given it their serious attention. This well-written, entertaining and informative memoir helps fill a large gap in the RAAF's recorded history.

Alan Stephens
RAAF Historian
Fairbairn
January 1999

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This story was originally an explanation to my children of the disrupted lifestyle they endured during their childhood. In those years they were too young to understand what their father did for a living or why the RAAF moved us so frequently on postings. Gradually the story was enlarged by the inclusion of more anecdotal material and recollection of significant events during those exciting and challenging years following World War II when the RAAF enthusiastically entered the new era of operating turbo-jet and turbo-prop aircraft.

There is neither a list of references nor a bibliography for this book. The story is simply a recollection of episodes, events and experiences of a typical RAAF pilot of those times, many details corroborated by my private records and a trunk full of accumulated memorabilia.

The task could not have been completed with out the help and backing of numerous friends and acquaintances to whom I owe my grateful thanks: to Barry Weymouth and Gerry Sebastian for the loan of photographs; to Trevor Simpson (Deception Bay, Queensland) for patiently guiding me into the field of word processing; to Alix and Russell Fortescue (Designer Training, Strathpine, Queensland) for their enthusiasm in assembling my first manuscript; to Lex McAulay (Banner Books) for his unsolicited but valued critique and recommendations; to my neighbour Michael Foster for his meticulous editing; and to my wife Joyce and several of my children for their encouragement and contributions.

John A. Jacobs
Canberra 1998

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AFB	Air Force Base
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFTS	Applied Flying Training School
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AOP	Air Observation Post
ARDU	Aircraft Research and Development Unit
ATU	Air Trials Unit
CAFM	Chief of Air Force Materiel
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CFI	Chief Flying Instructor
CFS	Central Flying School
CO	Commanding Officer
DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
DEFAIR	Department of Defence — Air Force Office
DEPAIR	Department of Air
DPC	Department of Project Co-ordination
DS	Directing Staff
FAA	Federal Aviation Authority
FTS	Flying Training School
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
HQ	Headquarters
IADS	Integrated Air Defence System
LAC	Leading Aircraftman
LEC	Locally Employed Civilian
LORAN	Long-Range Aid to Navigation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NST	National Service Trainee
OC	Officer Commanding
PMC	President of the Mess Committee
PX	Post Exchange
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy

RMAF	Royal Malaysian Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
R/P	Rocket Projectiles
RTU	Recruit Training Unit
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
TACAN	Tactical Aid to Navigation
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
U/S	Unserviceable
USA	United States of America
USAF	United States Air Force
VHF	Very High Frequency
WRE	Weapons Research Establishment

INTRODUCTION

The Why and the Wherefore

Some years ago my sister-in-law Pat told me how she was convinced that her recovery from a bowel cancer operation was attributable to the power of prayer. When she asked me if I had known any spiritual experiences during my 30-year flying career I replied that on numerous occasions I was sure the hand of the Lord had saved me from a sticky situation. Indeed, I still have vivid memories of numerous flights which caused me some anxiety, to say the least, through my not being completely in control of the situation or through not being absolutely confident about handling an unexpected problem. Although my circumstances were quite different from Pat's, I could readily agree with her about the power of prayer.

Pat asked me why I had not written a book about my flying days. Having read many books recounting the gripping and adventurous experiences of aircrew in wartime, I thought that the answer was fairly obvious. As I had not been to war nor seen any combat, I could not imagine that anybody would be interested in the day-to-day memories of a peacetime pilot, even one with a spread of thrilling experiences during 30 years as a pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force. Her response was that I should write the story of my flying adventures and my numerous postings, even if only for the enlightenment of my children who, of course, were too young to know why we led such a nomadic existence during their early years. Furthermore, she insisted, the telling of the events and travels which our family accepted as commonplace might be quite intriguing to others who enjoyed a fairly static existence and who would have no inkling of our roving kind of lifestyle.

So here is 'Up and Away'.

Why this title? Well, it does seem applicable in representing those years when I zoomed 'up and away' into the wild blue yonder — and sometimes the black threatening yonder! Flying is an exhilarating experience, but sometimes bad weather conditions impose a concentration of effort and attention when tension replaces elation. Not even my flying log books would truly reveal the number of times I made a take-off and climbed away on the authorised task, confident in my ability and in the reliability of my aircraft, but always alert to the probability of having to deal with an emergency. In a car one can pull over to the roadside to investigate that sudden loss of power or alarming clunking noise; in an aircraft you have to keep it flying as best you can while you analyse the symptoms and deal with the problem. So, the seemingly mechanical act of taking-off into the sky demands a lot of concentration, strict adherence to rules on aircraft handling and absolute compliance with flight procedures. Flying can be a stimulating adventure for we earthbound mortals but it is unforgiving for those who do not balance the thrill of achievement with the need for

self-discipline, as I (and probably most pilots) learned in my early days of zooming 'up and away'.

This story is not just about a pilot's adventures. This pilot was also a husband and father, raising a large family of seven children and coping with the challenges associated with frequent postings around Australia and overseas. My story title also reminds us of the many times we 'packed up and moved away' on another posting to some strange place. It must have been quite bewildering to smaller family members, though perhaps our children presumed that every family lived like we did.

I must stress that this is not an autobiography. My story covers only the years 1950 to 1981, and is my recollection of memorable incidents and events that occurred during my years as a pilot. Fortunately I do not have to rely solely on my retentive memory as I have kept a daily diary for fifty years, and have my flying log books, a stack of photo albums and slides, and a box full of memorabilia accumulated during our many years of travel. The story also includes memories of postings and personalities, achievements and agonies, travels and troubles — indeed, all the sorts of things that might befall a peacetime pilot who was also breadwinner for a large family. There is no intention in this story of analysing RAAF policies or Defence philosophies over that 30-year period; I leave that to the official historians and critics. However, I need to include personal observations and opinions about people and events that I consider were significant in the growth and development of our post—war Air Force. Everybody likes to be remembered, preferably for the good they did in their lifetime. Many of those who played some part in my climb up the promotion ladder have now passed on. To those and the others still enjoying their later years I hope to give recognition for the influence they had on me during the many stages of my career.

Unfortunately one cannot write about one's memories without frequent use of the first person pronoun. I can only hope that the reader will be sufficiently interested in the details of the story to forgive the constant appearance of 'I' in the narrative. I also seek tolerance of my mention of units and terms in use in the 1950s and 1960s, before decimal currency and before we adopted metric measurements. Distances were in inches, feet, miles, etc. Temperatures were in degrees Fahrenheit, and capacities measured in gallons. Aircraft still fly distances measured in nautical miles and speed is still expressed in knots, or nautical miles per hour.

Perhaps the sensible way of starting is to explain how I came to join the RAAF in 1950.

Following my schooling in Warwick I won a couple of scholarships to the University of Queensland. For the wrong reasons I chose to do Medicine, then struggled with the study for three years, eventually failing an important subject and losing the scholarship. For the next two years I worked in Brisbane as a laboratory technician at the Red Cross Blood Bank. By 1950 I came to the realisation that I was going nowhere, that my upbringing had instilled in me an obligation to try to meet other people's expectations of me, and that the time had come to make some decisive decisions about my future. During World War II, when I was still a schoolboy, I was an enthusiastic cadet in the Air Training Corps, banking on joining the Air Force as aircrew as soon as I turned 18. When the rest of the world gave heartfelt thanks for the cessation of hostilities in August 1945, the Japanese surrender also marked the end of my dreams of becoming a pilot. Then in 1950 I read that the RAAF was again calling for applicants for pilot training in the post-war Air Force. This was my opportunity. I

made application, was found to be fit and healthy, and had adequate education to pass all written and oral tests, and so was accepted — much to the astonishment (and even dismay) of friends and relations.

In hindsight, and remembering that Australia was still in the throes of post-war rehabilitation, a career in the armed forces was not then regarded by the general populace as having the same degree of distinction as that of a leading professional or, for that matter, the value to the community of a competent tradesman. During the war it was regarded as the noble thing to do, to go off to fight for one's King and Country. With the war over, ex—servicemen were expected to shed the uniform and return to civilian life doing a 'proper' job. For many people a military uniform represented years of loneliness, tension and grief, memories which most citizens wanted to put behind them, so it is understandable that membership of the defence forces did not rate very highly in peoples' conception of post-war occupations. Approval from my own family was not readily forthcoming: my school-teacher father always wanted his son to earn a university degree, and my mother nursed a fear of my becoming another crash victim, like so many aircrew during the war. I have to admit that my resolve was partly a means of breaking free and partly a way of satisfying my long felt desire to fly. I certainly cannot reveal any burning ambition to make the Air Force a full time career by climbing to executive levels. My goal at the time was to learn to fly and to graduate with wings as a Sergeant Pilot. How could I have visualised retiring 31 years later as the senior General Duties Air Commodore in the RAAF?

An essential piece of information to be noted at this point is a matter affecting my social life. Since 1948 I had been keeping company (to use an old-fashioned but perfectly appropriate term) with a sweet young lass named Patricia Joyce Horrigan who charmed me with her gentle nature and happy personality. In August 1950, before I left Brisbane to join the RAAF, we became engaged. Little could we have known what adventures would befall us in the turbulent years ahead! By 1981 we had lived in most of the Australian States, spent seven years in foreign countries, raised seven children and moved house 27 times!

So there is the setting for my story. Readers with a Service background may make a comparison with their own adventures or even raise a chuckle or give a pensive sigh when a distant memory is recalled. Those who have never known the trials and thrills of Service life might have their curiosity satisfied by sharing the experiences of a pilot and his family who were so frequently 'Up and Away'.

CHAPTER ONE

Trainee — Bottom Rung of the Ladder

Point Cook, birthplace of the Royal Australian Air Force, is situated on the shore of Port Phillip Bay south-west of Melbourne and halfway to Geelong. Since 1914, when the first pilots for the Australian Flying Corps were trained at Point Cook, it has been the centre of pilot training for the RAAF, until recent years when the available local airspace became too restricted. With the re-emergence in 1947 of the post-war Air Force, Point Cook was responsible for training all new pilots either through No. 1 Flying Training School (FTS) or through the RAAF College. The College graduated cadets as Pilot Officers after a four year course, whereas FTS produced the majority of the RAAF pilot quota as Sergeants after an 18-month course. At that time all aspirants to RAAF 'Wings' had to learn to fly on the Tiger Moth, the Wirraway and the twin-engined Oxford, these aircraft having been standard trainers during World War II.

We started on No. 6 Course at FTS on 4 September 1950 with 51 Air Force members, 36 of us straight out of civilian life and 15 young airmen who transferred from groundstaff musterings. As well, our course included 12 Royal Australian Navy trainees known as Probationary Naval Airmen who would be promoted to Midshipmen on completion of the course. We Air Force fellows would graduate as Sergeants with an obligation to serve for a further six years, although we learnt after a while that selected Sergeant Pilots were granted commissions if they were assessed as 'officer material'. Exactly what 'officer material' meant, none of us knew, in spite of corny jokes such as the one about the medical officer looking into your ear; if he saw nothing you were accepted into the Air Force, but if he could see right through, you were officer material.

About 1948 the RAAF borrowed a Royal Air Force system of designating aircrew of senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) ranks. Trainees wore an embroidered wreath on the upper sleeve of their blue uniform. On graduation, pilots added a star inside the wreath and were known as Pilot 4th Class (P4). With promotion to P3, P2 and P1 ranks, additional stars were added. Navigators had the same system. Fortunately this system was abandoned about 1950 and Numbers 4 and 5 Courses ahead of us graduated as readily recognisable sergeants. Trainees continued to wear the wreath.

That first four-month period as a Trainee Aircrew proved a sobering experience. Right from Day One when we took the Oath of Allegiance, were given an issue of clothing and uniform items, and then queued up for a series of vaccinations and inoculations which should have guaranteed immunity from every known disease. Swollen arms and pounding heads were no excuse when we paraded for drill periods, especially after issue of our Lee Enfield .303 rifle and bayonet. The pressure was on right from the start — 'Measure up or move on!' Our Drill Sergeant was a fiery type

with a big gingery moustache but a sense of humour; his offsider was an overweight Corporal whose pleasure was bellowing obscenities at us on the parade ground. I am sure we retaliated either by performing the drill movements correctly or by deliberately making errors, as the mood possessed us. After some hasty whispering amongst our ranks just before the 'Quick March' command, it was easy to 'accidentally' step off on the wrong foot, or to turn right when ordered to 'Left Turn'. However, we learnt very early never to drop one's rifle. That earned a jog around the parade ground, carrying the rifle head-high. One of the best aspects of being thrown in with a bunch of novices was the way we developed a sense of comradeship and teamwork, as well as pride of achievement. Perhaps it was because nobody was regarded as being so useless as a Trainee Aircrew that we set out individually and collectively to prove that we were worthy of selection. In any case, whatever the reason, those early days certainly bred into us the feelings of loyalty, esprit de corps and teamwork which I came to recognise as the strength of the RAAF. We had a lot to learn, and not always from the instructional staff. The 'remusters' on course gave us the benefit of their previous experiences as airmen, their warnings and knowledge of 'perks' often saving us from the wrath of the disciplinarians. I do not know where the terms like 'perk' came from but we soon adopted the standard RAAF slang which was probably a leftover from the war. We learned to use acronyms, abbreviations and Air Force idioms with such regularity that they became part of our language. Even today in my retirement I still regard a thing which no longer works properly as U/S, that is, 'unserviceable'.

Although we started with 63 on course, some did not last the distance. Two resigned in the first fortnight, many were unable to handle the academic requirements and a few later on could not reach the flying standards. The speed with which people could be removed from the course was a constant spur to the remainder to keep trying. The ground subjects were not difficult for those with a sound education but we were subjected to frequent tests which allowed no slacking. We covered the expected topics — Physics, Maths, Navigation, Meteorology, Armament, Morse Code, Airmanship, Principles of Flight, Aircraft Engines, Customs of the Service, Health, and Air Force Law. Parade ground drill, with and without rifle, occupied many a dreary hour, but we had plenty of opportunity for physical training and sport. As I had previously earned a Bronze Medallion for Life Saving I elected to go further and eventually won an Award of Merit at the YMCA pool.

It was a very exciting and challenging time for a young fellow. We had something thrilling to look forward to, a great sense of belonging, a new uniform to show off when we went to Melbourne on Saturdays, and £9 ($18 in modern currency) a week to spend. That may not sound very much but as we were fed, housed and clothed by the RAAF our pay was our own to spend or save. In my case I was trying to save to get married at the end of course. Also in 1950, before anyone had heard of inflation, a bus ticket to Melbourne cost only 2 shillings (20 cents), the same as the cost of dry-cleaning a pair of trousers. Smokers paid only one shilling and sixpence (15 cents) for a packet of cigarettes, and a new shirt cost the equivalent of $1.25. Our living conditions were fairly comfortable as each of us had his own room with bed, wardrobe and desk for study. However, the double-storey barracks blocks were decades old and required a lot of vigorous scrubbing and polishing to meet the strict standards of the weekly inspection. Every Monday night was 'Panic Night' when we

were rostered to get the block and our rooms into spic-and-span condition for the weekly inspection the following morning.

Nobody could complain about the meals, which were wholesome and adequate, even though the messing environment was rather primitive. Having been issued with knife, fork and spoon (our 'eating irons') and an enamel mug, we queued outside the Airmen's Mess in all weathers, filed past the kitchen servery and collected our meal which we ate seated on a wooden form at a bare table. Any leftovers we scraped into a large bin (which I believe went to a piggery at Werribee) then washed our cutlery in an adjacent trough. Hardly restaurant standard, but that was the norm in Airmen's Messes in 1950.

On Fridays the lecture period immediately before lunch was usually a briefing by the Medical Officer on some health or hygiene topic with the message that we had to look after our bodies or terrible things would happen. To emphasise the dangers we usually saw a movie film depicting in full ghastly colour the results of mouth ulcers, gum abscesses, rampant tinea, venereal disease or some other gruesome affliction. Some of our fellows were so affected by these 'horror shows' that they stumbled out of the film theatre with faces in various shades of green or deathly white, and certainly in no condition to eat any lunch. This suited me fine. As a former medical student unperturbed by the grisly scenes, I knew that there would be fewer in the lunch queue for the excellent fried fish which was a speciality each Friday.

This new life was an eye-opener for me in many respects. Having enjoyed both Army and Air Force cadet training and camps while at school, I was well prepared for orders and discipline, deference to rank and authority, and all the attitudes that are bred into a military group. However, coming from a strict and almost puritan home life, I was amazed to find that the Air Force had its share of gamblers, drunks, fornicators and even homosexuals. In those times homosexuality was not even spoken about in general conversation and anybody identified as one was out of the Service within hours. One member of our course was found by Service Police dallying with a couple of sailors in Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne on a Sunday evening. We never saw him again. While we were at lectures on the following Monday morning he was brought out to Point Cook to pack up all his possessions and was rapidly discharged from the Service. After lunch our Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Paul Metzler, addressed the entire school on the evils of immorality but few of us had even the faintest idea of what he was talking about. As the word 'homosexual' was never mentioned by a gentleman in those days, our eventual interpretation of the CO's message was that if we wished to stay in the Air Force we had better be seen to prefer the company of girls rather than boys.

My sense of social justice was irked by anything that smelled of snobbery. Across the football field from FTS stood the RAAF College (later the RAAF Academy) where the cadets earned a university degree after four years of training and study. On my arrival at Point Cook I inadvertently embarrassed Barry Thomas, a College cadet, by seeking him out in his quarters. He and I had been next-door neighbours for five years of our schooldays but he clearly wished not to be visited by me. College boys were not supposed to associate with the common herd from FTS.

Occasionally we had a 'church parade', when the whole school was assembled on the drill square and the resident chaplain, an Anglican minister by the name of Padre Beyer, conducted a short service or maybe led the assembled group in prayer for some particular commemorative event. These episodes really riled me because,

before the religious observances got under way, the command was shouted, 'Fall out in the rear all Jews and Roman Catholics!' The handful of us who complied with this discrimination were then marched away, either to our classroom or to do a bit of gardening. I cannot remember having any Jews in our group but felt very annoyed that Catholics were not allowed to participate in an ordinary thanksgiving prayer service. I did not have any hankering to attend an Anglican service, nor expect to see Protestants at our Catholic Mass on Sundays. However, I continued to feel personally offended whenever deliberately excluded from what should have been a secular event. For all I know, the instruction to isolate us from Anglicans and other Protestant denominations could have originated within the Catholic hierarchy. Obviously nobody had taken 'ecumenism' seriously in those days, if indeed it had been under consideration. Thank goodness for modern day tolerance and good sense.

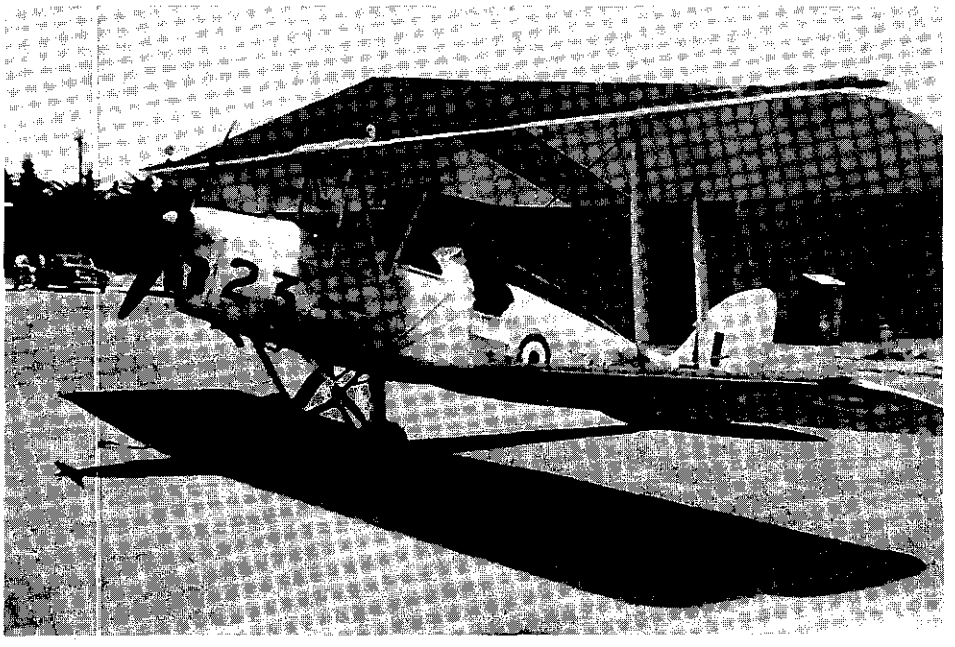
That first four months of the course passed fairly quickly. Our program was tight, we rarely had a break from lectures, drill or tests, and the pressure was on the whole time. Near the end of 1950 we participated in the passing-out parade of No. 4 Course which brought us a step closer to our own start in the flying business. We were given a short leave over Christmas, allowing me to fly home to Brisbane by civil airline to remind my fiancee what I looked like, then back to Point Cook to start the Tiger Moth phase.

Tiger Moth flight line at Point Cook, 1951.

The Tiger was probably the last of the old training aeroplanes — open cockpit, head out in the breeze, wind singing through the wires, no radio, no brakes, a tail skid, and a skin of fabric stretched over an aluminium frame. We had to dress in heavy flying suit and gloves, wool-lined boots, leather helmet and goggles, just to stay warm up to 10,000 feet. With a cumbersome parachute strapped on behind we clambered into the tiny rear cockpit, fastened the safety harness which held us secure when

inverted, and connected the Gosport tubes, the simple communication arrangement with the instructor in the front cockpit. If you accidentally pushed your speaking hose on to the wrong metal tube you spoke into the instructor's mouth instead of his ear — but his roar of admonishment was perfectly clear, even with nearby engines running!

Modern aviators would be very amused at the ritual we followed to prepare a Tiger for flight. The models still flown in the 1990s are fitted with a tail wheel but the originals had only a tail skid. We were not allowed to taxi across bitumen or concrete. In the first place a tail skid would scour a groove in the bitumen, and second we could not maintain directional control on concrete because the rear end just skidded sideways as the aircraft weathercocked into the wind. At least the tail skid found grip on a grassy surface so our Tiger lines were marked out on the grass beyond the hardstand area. We trainees worked in threes, one lifting and carrying the Tiger's tail across his shoulder, leading the way from hangar to lines, and the other two pushing on the lower wing (or mainplane as we were taught to call it).



Tiger Moth at Point Cook, 1951.

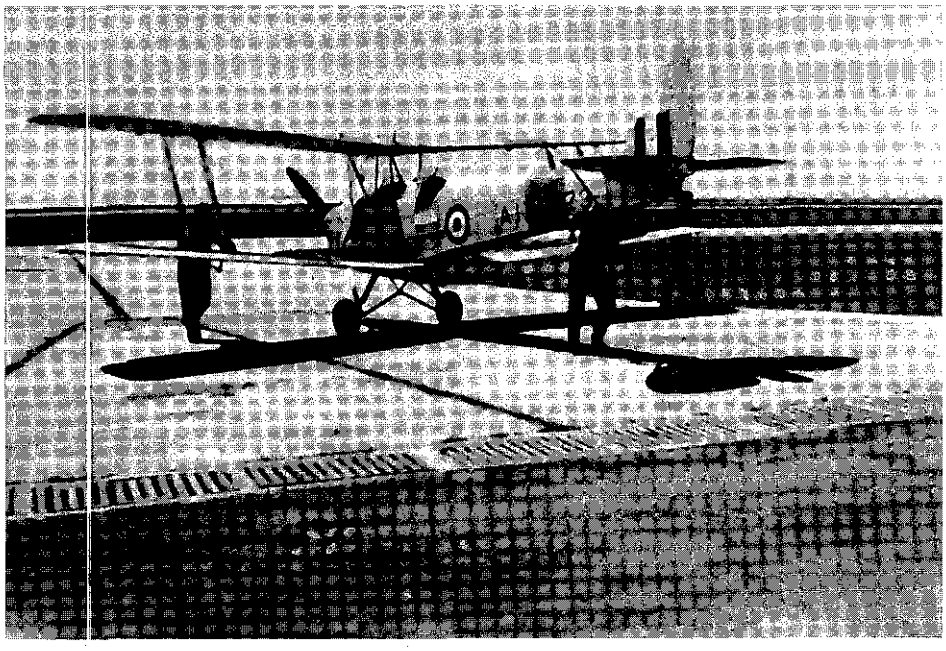
Start-up drill was a very serious and disciplined procedure. With wheel chocks in place, fuel cock on and both magneto switches off, one trainee pulled the propeller round several times to prime the engine. Then, with switches on, he swung the propeller, hoping that the engine fired the first time — which it usually did as the engines were well maintained. Our instructors gave us dire warnings about how to swing the prop safely and correctly, otherwise we could lose an arm, head or life. I am sure that the most powerful incentive to doing it correctly was the threat of a court martial for negligence. After start, when the minimum engine temperature and oil pressure were reached, the pilot moved the throttle fully forward and checked the

magnetos by switching each off in turn. To prevent the tail lifting off the ground with the engine at full power, one trainee had to lie across the rear fuselage ahead of the fin. How I recall those cold winter mornings when one's cheeks were stung by the grass and gravel whipped back in the slipstream.

I must have been unlucky to draw the worst two instructors for my first 20 hours. These were two of a group of wartime pilots being retained by the RAAF for a short time but who were not likely to be given posts in the Permanent Air Force. Obviously resentful of this interim situation they relieved their bitterness by taking it out on the hapless student. During flight both used derogatory criticism and foul-mouthed abuse, the like of which I had never before heard. 'Fifty eight knots, fifty eight knots, not fifty bloody nine! Trim the f.....g thing, you bloody moron! Didn't you hear me say to trim it? Taking over, and I'll show you again, you dimwit, and if you don't f.....g get it right this time you can p...s off out of here!' I found this degrading treatment most humiliating but determined not to be intimidated, particularly over the matter of trimming. When you move the joystick (control column) forward or back to descend or climb, you then adjust the trim tabs on the elevator by moving a small lever in a quadrant near your left knee. If you do it correctly the aircraft maintains its attitude even with hands off. If you don't trim all the tension out of the elevator, the aircraft resumes a wrong attitude — that is, too steep a descent or too flat a climb. In my case I was gripping the joystick so tightly in an effort to satisfy the irate instructor that I had no feel for whether the aircraft was correctly trimmed or not. Those early hours were almost a case of improving one's understanding and ability *despite* the instructors. Fortunately we had frequent changes of instructor, so after about the 20-hour mark I progressed well under the guidance of two decent fellows, Johnny Morris and Charlie Wakeham.

We were expected to go solo after about six hours of dual instruction. There is possibly nothing to equal the exhilaration of completing the first solo circuit — having the instructor grudgingly admit that the last three landings were reasonable then climb out of his cockpit and tell you to try one on your own, 'and don't crash the bloody thing!' You line up, aware that nobody is with you to help or criticise. You get a green light from the airfield controller, open the throttle, and you are away! Settle into the climb, look around that all is clear before turning, level out at 1,000 feet and trim, carry out the Downwind checks, assess the right time to turn in for the approach, then cut the throttle and glide down the Base leg, banking on to Final approach. Now comes the important bit! With the ground coming up fast you ease the stick back at the right time and flare out for the touch-down. Just a small bounce, and it was almost a three-pointer so the watching instructor should be pleased — if he ever shows pleasure at anything! Hooray! I've done it! I can fly!

At the 10-hour mark the Flight Commander gave each pupil the dreaded Flight Grading Test consisting of a few simple manoeuvres and several take-offs and landings. If you passed this test to his satisfaction you continued at Point Cook as a Trainee Pilot; if you did not meet the standards you were transferred to East Sale in Victoria's Gippsland to become a Trainee Navigator. The two best friends I had made went to East Sale. From that point on I was a Trainee Pilot, the first rung up the ladder. One of our course won instant admiration from a lass at a dance by telling her that T/P stood for Test Pilot.



Trainees putting a Tiger away for the night.

Near the intersection of Flinders and Swanston Streets in Melbourne stood a bronze figure of our early explorer Flinders. On the base of the statue a plate proclaimed 'Captain Matthew Flinders. Navigator'. One of my colleagues commented, 'Poor fellow. Missed out on flight grading'. I knew and worked with many navigators in my time; none ever expressed any regret in being a navigator. Yet I must admit that I would have been very disappointed had I 'missed out on flight grading'.

Once we overcame any initial apprehension the Tiger Moth was a delight to fly. It has been criticised for being too basic, but in my opinion its deficiencies were more than balanced by the need to fly it accurately. One aspect of flying is the precise manipulation of controls to complete a desired manoeuvre such as climbing, banking or landing. The Tiger is very sensitive to changes in throttle settings and speed, requiring constant rudder control to prevent it skidding sideways. Being a terrestrial animal, man has to adapt to the unnatural environment of flight and anything that assists this, such as open-cockpit flying, experiencing the sensation of motion through the air, must surely be an advantage. Years later, as an instructor, I trained basic students in jet aircraft which are virtually metal and plastic capsules; the students just followed procedures and assessed the results by reference to their instruments. An example of what I mean is the stall manoeuvre in a Tiger Moth. You pull the throttle right back, the engine growl subsides to a rhythmic ticking-over, the prop rotation slows down, you pull back on the joystick to raise the nose steeply, the airspeed dwindles, the air whistling through the wires dies almost to a whisper, then suddenly the nose drops with a thump and you are pointing down at the earth, ready to begin the

recovery to normal flight. Even sitting comfortably inside a Cessna 172 does not permit the same sensation as in a Tiger Moth for feeling as one with the environment.

One day, about my 27-hour point, I was doing a solo period, the third trip of the afternoon since refuelling at lunch. The fuel tank is between the upper wings above the cockpit, and the fuel gauge a bobbing float in a vertical glass tube on top of the tank. Over the years the bottom of the tube became discoloured by grime which obscured the float after three hours of flight. On the way back to base at the end of the period the engine suddenly stopped. I was out of fuel! Nothing but silence and a stationary propeller! After the initial shock of disbelief I automatically swung into the practised procedure — set up the glide, turn ignition switches off, look for a suitable paddock and plan the forced-landing pattern.

Trainee Pilot Jacobs with a Tiger Moth, April 1951.

Everything went smoothly, I glided in over the fence of my selected paddock not far from Werribee, touched down, and then was horrified to see the far fence approaching rapidly. Without brakes I decide that I ought to groundloop, then realised that I did not know how to. Luckily the aircraft came to a stop just short of the fence. With an immense sigh of relief, but at the same time wondering what the repercussions would be, I climbed out, slung my parachute over my shoulder and headed across the paddocks for help. An instructor in a Wirraway above saw my plight and radioed Point Cook. A little later a staff pilot brought out a can of petrol and flew the Tiger back to base, only about two miles away.

Next day I was on the mat in front of the Chief Flying Instructor, Squadron Leader Geoff Tuck, not knowing what drastic penalty I would be awarded. Imagine my relief when I was merely reprimanded for not paying enough attention to the fuel state and for leaving the aircraft unattended in the paddock. A long time later I found out that the staff were actually delighted that a student had performed a copybook forced landing without damage or injury. Of course, nobody would compliment me on the performance as I was, after all, responsible for running out of fuel. For the rest of my flying career I was always very fuel-conscious.

In the Tiger we did a lot of general handling, including aerobatics and spinning, plus a little formation and an occasional navigation trip, but no further than Ballarat. The Point Cook weather can be atrocious during winter months so we were

often grounded by low cloud, rain, gales, or all three at once. One day when students were not permitted to fly, a couple of instructors took up a Tiger and sat stationary over the field at 1,000 feet, headed into wind and throttled back until their airspeed equalled the windspeed. On the other hand I remember delightful sunny days as we reclined on our parachute packs out on the grassy airfield, waiting for the changeover at the end of the period. We entertained ourselves watching our fellow students doing their touchdowns in front of us and taking bets on how many bounces they would make before the final landing.

Late in June we were given a short leave, just enough time to nip back to Brisbane for a reunion with my fiancee who was busy making wedding plans despite being fed up with the long-distance separation.

In July we completed the Tiger Moth phase and went on parade again to make up the numbers for the graduation of No. 5 Course. Earlier in the year they had the misfortune of losing one of their Course members and an instructor when a Wirraway crashed into Port Phillip Bay after engine failure on a night take-off. That was the first time I attended a Service funeral, solemnly performed with traditional slow marching, muffled drums, firing of the volley by a squad of riflemen, and playing the Last Post — a very sad and moving occasion, but only the first of many which I attended during the next 30 years. Actually we had another funeral during our Tiger Moth phase after one of our own course, Frank Holder, died in a motor-vehicle accident.

Being now the senior course we moved up to flying the Wirraway, not a well-liked aircraft as it had a tendency to stall and scrape a wingtip on landing in a crosswind. With its Pratt & Whitney radial engine we had a lot more power to control than in the Tiger. Now we were in an enclosed cockpit with radio, flaps and retractable undercarriage, propeller-pitch control, and additional instruments which permitted flight in cloud. I feel that it was a suitable trainer for the times, but cannot envisage it as a combat fighter as its lack of power and agility must have been a tremendous disadvantage against the Japanese Zero during World War II.

We still practised circuits and landings, aerobatics and forced landings, but added some night flying, formation, a few periods of dive bombing (why, I cannot imagine) and many hours under a hood in the rear seat trying to master flying on instruments. Navigation and low flying were popular sequences. Our first landing away from Point Cook was on a trip to East Sale in Gippsland, under the watchful eye of the instructor. Our major achievement was our solo flight to Wagga Wagga in New South Wales and return the same day, without getting lost.

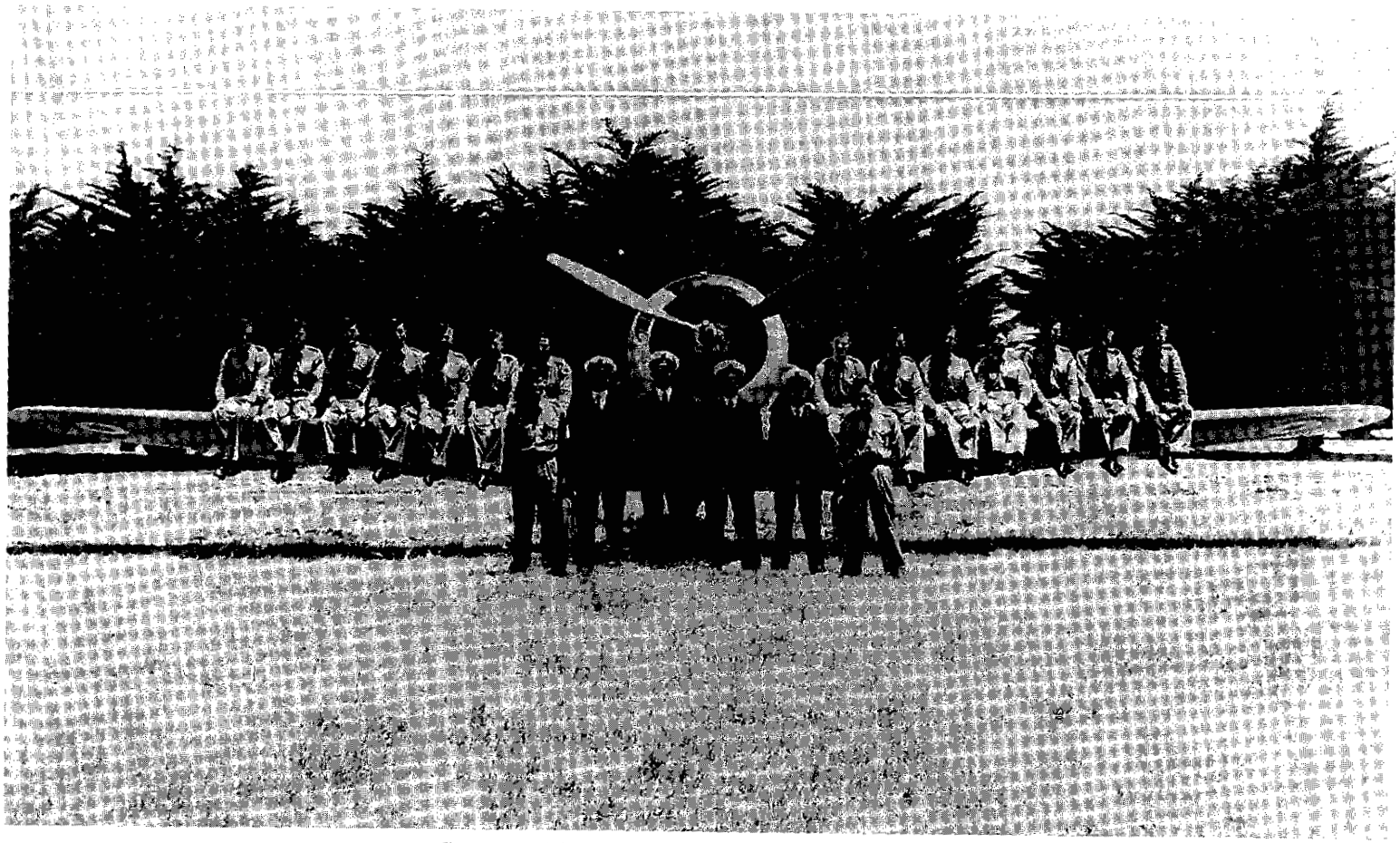
Moving up from the Tiger Moth with a fixed undercarriage to the Wirraway with its retractable landing gear required the new pilot to be certain that he had lowered his wheels before landing. Although this action might seem perfectly obvious, aviation history is full of incidents caused by pilots landing their aircraft on its belly after forgetting to lower the wheels. Every cockpit has some sort of indicator, either a mechanical device or a set of red and green lights, to tell the pilot whether his wheels are fully retracted or are locked down in the landing position. In the Wirraway we also had a horn attached to the frame behind the pilot's head. If you pulled the throttle right back to flare out for a landing and the undercarriage was not safely down and locked, the horn blared loudly as a warning. Suddenly shocked into realisation of his mistake, the pilot then had to 'go round' which meant opening the throttle fully, abandoning the landing approach, and climbing away for another circuit, this time hopefully remembering to follow the check-list by lowering the undercarriage along

Trainee Pilot Jacobs after completing his Wings Test in this Wirraway at Point Cook in 1951.

the Downwind leg. Unbelievable though it might sound, a pilot on an earlier course 'gutzed' his Wirraway on the runway after forgetting to lower his wheels. When asked why he did not respond to the frantic commands of the Air Traffic Controller on his radio to 'Go Round! Go Round!', he replied that he could not hear the radio call on account of the noisy horn blowing in his ear!

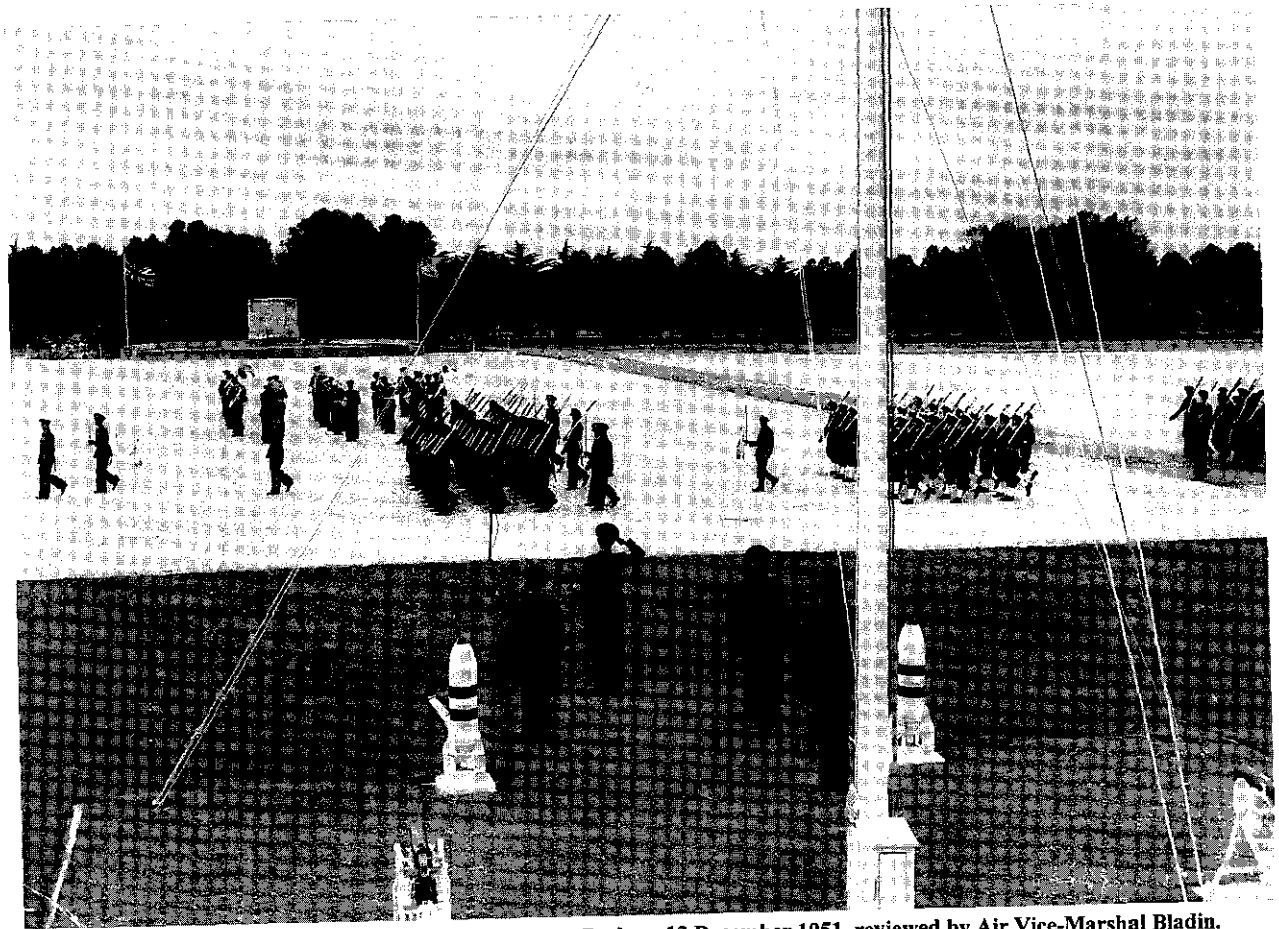
One morning a few of our fellows decided to rendezvous out in the low flying area for a bit of a 'dogfight'. They were unaware that an instructor at altitude overheard their radio conversation so they were matted and severely reprimanded. The staff had reason to be concerned as some students grow too confident towards the end of their course. That same afternoon one of our Navy students, Neil Sweeney, made a low pass over a farmer and pulled up into a slow roll, but mishandled it and dived into the ground with a big bang. Shock and sadness all round, and another funeral.

In those days the RAAF used to stage its commemorative events during September, at the anniversary of the Battle of Britain. I remember the first air show I attended, at the RAAF station at Laverton on a Sunday in September 1951, when the public was treated to a display by every type we owned at the time – Tiger Moths and Wirraways, Dakota transports, Lincoln bombers, Beaufighters and Mustang fighters, and our first jets, the single-seater Vampire fighters based at Williamtown, near Newcastle. During the massed flypast practice on the Saturday before the air show, several of us managed to wangle a ride in one of the participating Dakotas. I was lucky not to be in the Dakota which experienced an engine-failure during the large formation run over Laverton. With the loss of one engine the aircraft captain took immediate action to maintain control, telling the co-pilot to feather the propeller of the failed engine. This turns the propeller blades into the slipstream, thus reducing unwanted drag and improving pilot control. Unfortunately the young sergeant pilot in



Graduates of 6 Course FTS at Point Cook, December 1951.

Seated: Noel Bellamy, John Downie, Jack Green, John Jacobs, Tom Moore, Alex Blechynden, Clive Marshall, Ted Harlin, Tony Armstrong, Geoff Lushey, Barry Weymouth, Vern Pennefather, Ken Janson, Ivan Grove. Standing: Guy Schofields, Jim Ferguson, Herb Becker, Jim O'Farrell, Benny Matthews, Jack Doyle



The graduation parade of 6 Course FTS at Point Cook on 13 December 1951, reviewed by Air Vice-Marshal Bladin.

the co-pilot seat pressed the wrong red button and feathered the propeller on the good engine, causing the Dakota to fall out of the formation and lose height very rapidly. In double-quick time the captain corrected the mistake, unfeathered the prop, and recovered control before the aircraft glided down to the ground – but we heard later that the novice co-pilot wished he had 'gone down with his ship'.

By September we heard rumours that the course would finish earlier than expected. Some higher authority decreed that the Oxfords would be scrapped, so that element of the course was eliminated. We did our final tests in the Wirraway with the Commanding Officer or the Flight Commander Charlie Wakeham, then practised for our graduation parade on 13 December. The Air Member for Personnel, Air Vice-Marshal F.M. Bladin presented our Wings, and we marched proudly off the parade ground to change into a uniform bearing sergeant's chevrons. By this time our pilot numbers were down to 14 RAAF and four Navy. (About the same time eight navigators and Navy observers graduated at East Sale.) I still keep in frequent contact with two of our group, Barry Weymouth and Jack Green, who shared postings with me in later years.

Our wedding in Brisbane on 15 December 1951, with Joyce's sister Judy as flower girl.

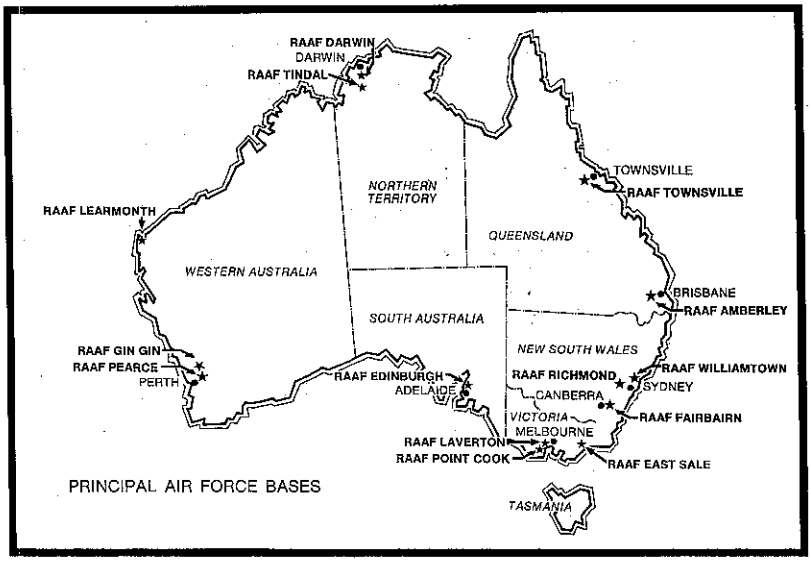
Near the end of the course the Commanding Officer announced our postings at an informal social function. Classing myself as a team person who would work best in a crew, I had applied to be posted to Lincoln bombers, but in typical Air Force fashion I was posted instead to a fighter unit flying Mustangs — No. 3 Squadron at Canberra. So, wearing pilot wings and Sergeant stripes, we departed Point Cook on 14 December 1951, gladly leaving behind the stacks of textbooks, the queues to the Airmen's Mess, the whining drill Corporal and the miserable Victorian weather. In later years when we filled out the annual posting preference forms, indicating where we would like to be posted, it was not uncommon to write, 'Anywhere, except south of the Murray'. Not that this plea had much effect, since the RAAF sent you where it needed you, without regard for a Queenslander's distaste of the cold weather.

Just for fun, we five Queensland graduates had each grown a moustache to mark our graduation. However, when I flew home to Brisbane that night my facial adornment did not meet with approval. So next morning, 15 December 1951, I appeared clean-shaven at St Benedict's Church, East Brisbane where Joyce and I were married. Having endured a frustrating 15-month engagement on her own, she might have guessed that from thenceforth the RAAF was going to govern our lives. It did not matter then. On that day we had our families and friends to share our happiness, we were on Cloud Nine, and life was a big adventure.

CHAPTER TWO

A Fighter Pilot (?)

After three weeks of leave in Queensland which included a honeymoon at Mount Tamborine and visits to both sets of parents, I set off by train to report to my first posting at No. 3 Squadron, RAAF Station Fairbairn, Canberra. In those days 'RAAF Station' was the correct term; we changed to 'RAAF Base' in the 1960s. With a history going back to World War I, No. 3 Squadron was primarily an Army cooperation unit which gained much prestige in the Western Desert and in Italy in 1943 and 1944. When I arrived it was equipped with tactical reconnaissance Mustangs powered by Packard Merlin engines. Although four of my course (Barry Weymouth, Clive Marshal, John Downie and myself) were posted in, we were amazed to learn on arrival that the squadron was soon to be disbanded.



The unit had only five pilots, four officers and an NCO, who all seemed intent on using up the remaining allotted Mustang hours before the squadron closed down. The Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader John Hubble was not particularly interested in brand new NCO pilots, and the Flight Commander, a sour-faced grumpy fellow, directed that we spend all of January flying the unit's Wirraways, until we had learnt the Pilot's Notes for the Mustang to his satisfaction. The Pilot's Notes for each aircraft was a small book which would these days be described as a Manual of Operation, giving handling instructions, limits on oil pressures, engine temperatures, speeds in different configurations, and such data as the pilot must necessarily need to

know for correct and safe handling. Because of his unfriendly attitude to us I privately came to dislike that officer, an emotion which I regretted later on when he was killed in Korea, leaving a wife and family.

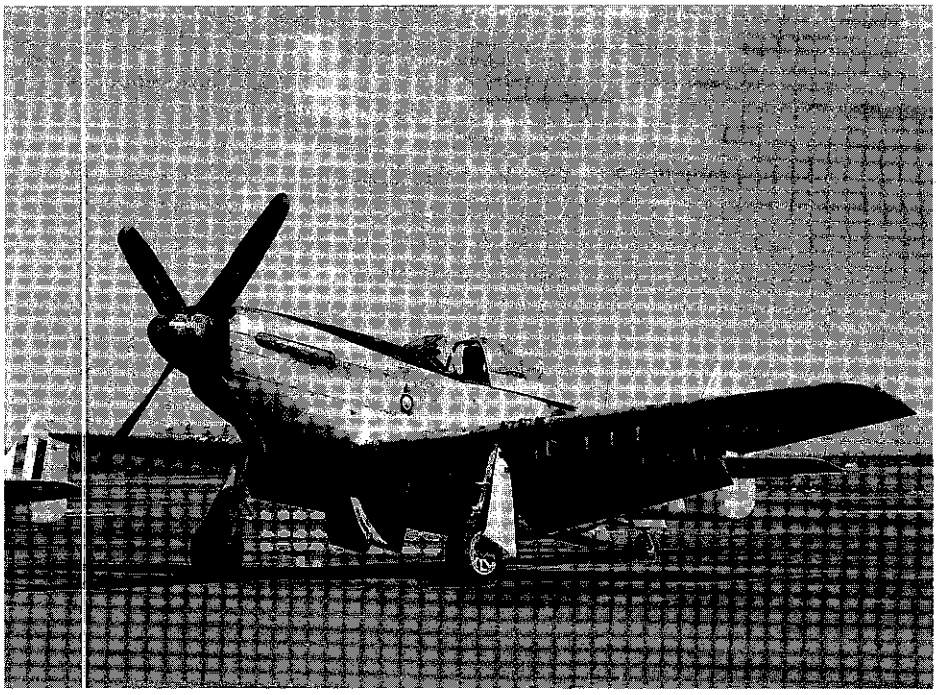
Flying in the Canberra area showed up the shortcomings of our Point Cook training. At FTS all the decisions were made for us by the instructional staff and all we had to do was comply. On a squadron we were expected as qualified pilots to make the right decisions about safety, weather, aircraft handling and so on. It did not take long to find out that we still had a lot to learn. One day I was sent in a Wirraway to RAAF Station Richmond (north-west of Sydney) to collect our CO. For the first time I was responsible for drawing up a flight plan and filing it with the Air Traffic Control office without its perusal and endorsement by an instructor. Having found my way to Richmond, about an hour's flight, I refuelled and waited until the CO climbed aboard, then we headed back to Canberra. On landing he thanked me for the ride, commenting that it had been an interesting trip to have diverted so far from the direct route. I was too dumb to realise that he was well aware that I had been lost several times on the way home and had been weaving around trying to find some feature on the ground that showed up on my map.

My first real scare occurred on the day I was detailed to take an airman fitter in a Wirraway to Williamtown near Newcastle, to repair one of our Mustangs left there. With the airman in the rear seat I headed off to the north-east towards Sydney, only vaguely aware that the cloud cover ahead was thickening. I was obliged to stay in the clear, so, as the cloud base got lower and lower, I flew lower too. This made map reading difficult but I was not worried as all I had to do was to follow the main railway line through Mittagong. Although the weather conditions deteriorated, there I was, a hundred feet above the railway line, imagining I was on a train destroy mission in Europe after D-Day.

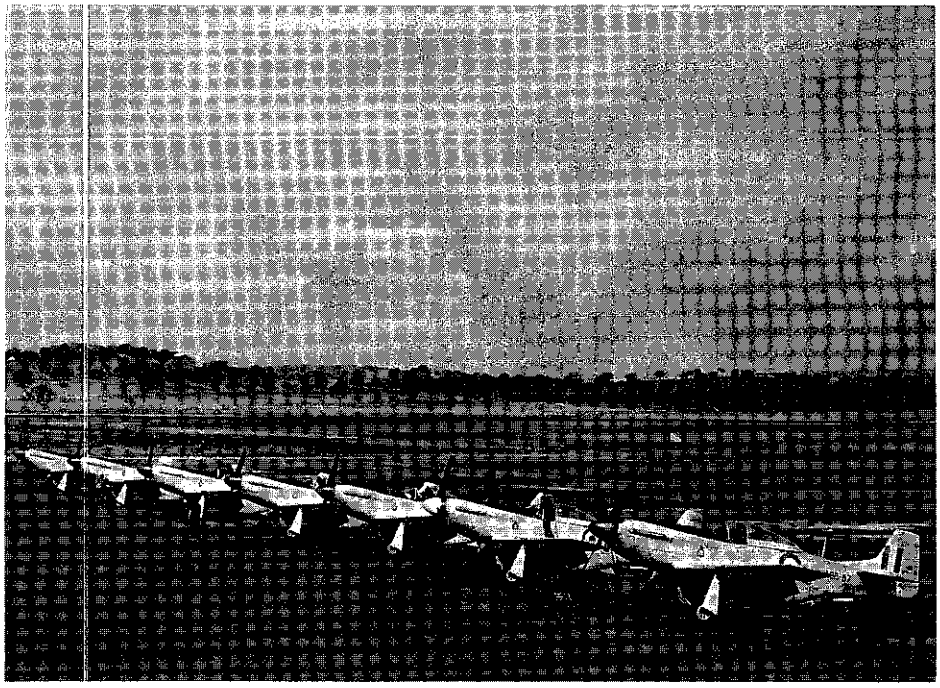
Suddenly the line entered a tunnel and so nearly did I! Ye Gods! Full throttle and roll into a steep turn! What am I doing here? I am in cloud, close to the hillside, trying to make an emergency turn on instruments, and the airman in the back seat yelling to know what was going on!

What a relief! I came out of the cloud just above the tree tops and heading roughly in a southerly direction. With every bit of caution I made my way back to Canberra and told the Flight Commander that as the weather proved unfavourable I decided it wiser to abort the trip. I would probably have added, 'No sweat!' if I had been more familiar with Air Force slang, though I certainly had done some sweating. Only the airman knew what a darned fool I had been. That was the first of many lessons I learned on how to stay alive. The next day I chose a better route to Williamtown — east to Ulladulla then low level up the coast past Sydney to Newcastle. Scenic flights like that make flying a pleasure.

Early in February 1952 we were finally allowed to fly a Mustang. That first take-off in such a powerful machine will always be imprinted in my mind. Lining up on the runway, opening the throttle, feeling the rapid acceleration, getting the tail off the ground and keeping straight with a lot of rudder while looking forward over that long black engine cowl and through the whirring prop, then opening up to 60 inches of boost and experiencing such a terrific punch in the back by the increased acceleration to lift-off speed! Climb away, retract the undercarriage, and zoom off to a thrilling experience! No wonder fighter pilots during the war welcomed the introduction of the Mustang for its superior handling and delight to operate.



A 3 Squadron Mustang at RAAF Fairbairn in 1952.



P51 Mustangs, Tactical Reconnaissance model at No 3 Squadron, Fairbairn in 1952.

During that month I managed to log 30 hours in the Mustang, including a few sorties as introduction to air-to-air gunnery and air-to-ground gunnery. Much of the time I was up at 20,000 feet, seat lowered in the cockpit, trying to fly smoothly and accurately on instruments. On one such flight I found that I was over complete cloud cover which built up while my attention was on the instruments. Believing that I was not far south of Canberra I just throttled back, lowered the nose and started down through cloud. Imagine my shock when I broke through the overcast and found myself down *in the valley* over Captains Flat. A mile or so either side and I would have driven into the hills, still in cloud. Some-one was watching over me!

On another flight I should have practised some aerobatics but ran out of time and headed home. As I taxied to the parking lines I wondered at the horrified expression on the face of the Sergeant who was marshalling me into my allotted space. When I shut the engine down he indicated why — oil spread thickly down the engine cowl and side of the cockpit. Apparently the servicing party had neglected to replace the filler cap on the oil tank. Had I performed any rolls and loops all the oil would have been lost, the engine seized — and goodness knows what might have ensued. That posting, though only of two months, proved a great learning experience.

Also at Fairbairn at that time was 87 Squadron flying Mosquitoes, mainly used for photography of northern Australia for map-making. The hangar next to us housed the Austers of No. 16 AOP Flight, training young Army officers for artillery observation duties in Korea. These fellows were the humble beginnings of the present Army Aviation Corps at Oakey.

Mustang pilots in 3 Squadron at Canberra in February 1952. John Downie, Ray Fox, Clive Marshall and Barry Weymouth (standing).

The notable event of February was the death of King George VI, followed by the accession of Queen Elizabeth II. We had a Station parade to mark the sad occasion. I think that was the first time I saw the Officer Commanding the station, Wing Commander Des Douglas, a highly respected gentleman whom I came to know well in later years. Canberra in 1952 was a small town 'out in the sticks'. Population had reached 27,000. We had small shopping centres at Civic, Manuka and Kingston, but there were no suburbs beyond Braddon, Turner, Griffith and Narrabundah. The lake was still in the future, and the only buildings in the Parliamentary Triangle were Parliament House, East and West Offices, and the Administrative Block. The old railway line from Queanbeyan used to cross the Molonglo River near Dairy Flat and wind around the hill near where Building A of the Defence Department now stands, to the terminus at Reid. We were told that when the new station at Narrabundah was built and the old line torn up, a train was inadvertently left at the old station. I sometimes wondered if that really could happen but now live near a man who spent his youth in Canberra pre-war and knows the truth of the story. Actually the Molonglo in flood carried away the bridge so the line was abandoned early in the 1920s and removed years later.

In my ignorance I knew nothing of the entitlements of a married person in the RAAF. After a few weeks at Fairbairn I found accommodation for Joyce at Barton House, one of the early hostels, and she flew down from Brisbane to join me – at weekends! I lived in Single Quarters behind the Sergeants Mess at Fairbairn and rode in past Duntroon Military College to Barton House on my bicycle on Friday afternoon. At weekends we explored Canberra — not that there was much to see in those days — or went for spins in the country with Barry Weymouth in his Vauxhall tourer. Joyce found her existence so boring that she looked for employment as a means of keeping occupied. Few firms would take on married women in those times, the reasoning being that they either left on transfer of their husband or became pregnant. The day after Joyce persuaded a shopkeeper to give her a job in haberdashery I arrived with the news that 3 Squadron had closed down and we were posted to fighters at Williamtown as from 1 March. The shopkeeper shrugged his shoulders with an 'I told you so' gesture and said, 'At least I didn't waste time training you'.

Little did we know that in the next 30 years we would have five more postings in Canberra, observing the amazing growth of city and suburbs.

CHAPTER THREE

Willy-town

On 2 March 1952 I travelled from Canberra to Williamtown with Barry Weymouth in his Vauxhall and settled in to our quarters in the Sergeants' Mess. The next day the three of us from 3 Squadron (John Downie, Barry and I) were marched into the office of Wing Commander Brian Eaton who asked if there were any reason why we would not be prepared to serve with 77 Squadron in Korea. Although the Korean war had been going since 1950 the thought of my becoming involved had never crossed my mind. However, I realised that the purpose of Williamtown (affectionately known as 'Willytown' or just 'Willy') was to prepare fighter pilots for on-forwarding to Korea so decided to accept whatever postings came my way.

On advice from a friend, Ken Janson, I located suitable accommodation in a house in Hamilton, a suburb of Newcastle, and Joyce flew in from Canberra the following weekend. We had a bedroom and the use of the house with a dear old lady named Mrs Moore who was not long widowed and therefore unused to having strangers in her house. She was very kind and motherly to Joyce and made us most welcome during the next four months. We kept contact with her for many years until she died. Our domestic arrangements were a big improvement after the Canberra situation as I was able to come home each evening by using a bus from 'Willy' to Stockton, the ferry across the Hunter River and a bus to Hamilton.

My first assignment at Willy was to 76 Squadron which flew the high-level fighter version of the Mustang, powered by the supercharged Rolls-Royce engine. Squadron Leader Dick Wilson, CO of 76 Squadron, scoffed at our logged time on Mustangs at Canberra and declared that we would start from scratch with him. For my first few weeks I was detailed to fly with Warrant Officer 'Swos' Williamson on a series of formation and tailchase flights. Eventually I overheard him making favourable comments about my handling ability so concluded that the previous Mustang time had not been wasted. During that month of March we blazed away with bullets, rockets and bombs on the armament range on the beach at Morna Point, up the coast towards Port Stephens. When eventually that range was abandoned in favour of a new one at Saltash, the beach and dunes of Morna Point must have been heavily dosed with expended ammunition and fragments of rocket projectiles. Our program also included a few navigation trips but not landing away from Willy, and an occasional sortie in the authorised low-flying area over the Myall Lakes. There is no exciting act to match low flying in a roaring Mustang, low enough to leave a ripple on the water but not so low as to dampen the propeller. It's too late now to apologise to the two fishermen in a dinghy whom I buzzed one day! Our Mustang conversion finished abruptly at the end of March and we were transferred into 75 Squadron to

learn to fly the Vampire, the first of the post-war jet aircraft, readily recognisable by its twin booms and air intakes in the wing roots.

We had no trainer version of the Vampire in those days. We learned the Pilot's Notes to the satisfaction of a senior pilot, passed an oral quiz, climbed in, fired up, and went. The senior pilot watched our take-off and landing from the control tower, radioing any advice he thought necessary to help us back safely on the ground. The officer who saw me away was Flight Lieutenant Ian Parker. Our paths crossed often in later years.

The first take-off in a jet was absolutely weird. In previous tail-wheeled aircraft we had the benefit of an engine cowl in front to provide attitude reference. In the Vampire with its tricycle undercarriage we sat right up in the nose, with nothing in front except the windscreen. All the aeroplane, engine and noise were behind. It seemed strange then but became the normal thing for me until I finished flying in 1979. Although jet aircraft are accepted as the norm these days, even for civil transport, the 1950s were the infancy period of jet operations, the beginning of a new era. A couple of examples of early problems are worth mentioning.

Jet engines consume a lot of fuel at low levels, so to get best range, or miles per gallon, and to achieve minimum fuel consumption, we cruised and operated at 30,000 feet and above, requiring a thorough understanding of the use of oxygen and of the hazards of depressurisation of the cockpit. We had appropriate drills and checks of our support systems but could do little about the outside environment. For the first time we encountered the jet stream above 30,000 feet. This is a high-altitude westerly wind up to 200 knots or more which is common around the world in latitudes close to 30 degrees. I remember one day the entire group of six aircraft aborting a cross-country trip to Dubbo at 35,000 feet ; with the jet stream right on the nose we were just not getting anywhere. From then on meteorologists became aware of the need for reliable wind forecasts at high altitudes.

The other matter of importance was a tragic one. All pilots were educated about speed of sound and how most aircraft were not sufficiently powered to reach this speed, called Mach 1. Even at full power in a dive the Vampire could reach only Mach 0.78 at which stage it hit compressibility. This means that as the aircraft was not well enough streamlined, the air in front was compressed into a cushion which denied a faster speed. One of our familiarisation sequences was to climb to 35,000 feet then to dive until we hit compressibility, characterised by severe shaking and violent pitching up and down. The purpose was to learn how to fly the aircraft to its limits without losing control. Regrettably the RAAF lost half a dozen pilots who speared in at high speed from 30,000 feet, unable to regain control after a compressibility run. One of them was Tom Moore, our first casualty from 6 Course at FTS.

Eventually, some time after I left Williamtown, design engineers discovered the cause of the problem. The Nene engine in the Australian-built Vampires needed extra air which entered via two protruding air intakes (known as 'elephant ears') positioned on top of the engine bay. At the limiting Mach of the Vampire the intakes interfered with the airflow over the tail surfaces, making it difficult or impossible for the pilot to use his elevator to pull out of the dive. The two intakes were re-positioned under the fuselage which solved the problem of losing control at the critical Mach speed. I believe that the engineers may then have found a need for filters to keep out the grass and debris when taxiing.

With faster speeds of jet aircraft and their rapid consumption of aviation turbine fuel (known as AVTUR but in layman's language, kerosene) we had to learn close monitoring of our fuel use. Flight Lieutenant Peter Raw who had completed the RAF Flying College course in England, introduced us to a simple chart which we plotted on a sheet of graph paper. On a long trip we could plot fuel remaining against our planned progress, enabling early recognition of a critical fuel state. I was still using a simplified version of that technique 25 years later.

Although daily life at Williamtown presented new challenges to improve proficiency as a pilot, I was then too young and naive to recognise that we were not being adequately trained for the future. Of course we were young novices with nothing to contribute but plenty to learn. Nevertheless, there should have been, by that stage, some sort of educational program for the new boys. Instead, we watched and listened, or were snarled at, until we got the hang of doing things correctly, or at least the way our seniors wanted it done. The situation was something like childhood in those times — be seen and not heard! It was almost as though brand-new Sergeant Pilots were there just to make up the numbers, without any genuine attempt at training them to meet standards of performance. Our seniors probably believed that they had survived the war through their skill and aptitude, so it was up to we novices to learn the hard way too — or fall by the wayside. Thank goodness our Air Force today is thorough and professional in its approach to training!

A typical instance of lack of concern for juniors was the way the squadrons entered the circuit for landing. As fighter pilots we had long left behind the sedate return to the landing pattern practised by trainees at Point Cook, where the pilot cautiously joins on the 'dead' side of the airfield, being careful not to conflict with other traffic. Fighters arrive at high speed in formation, along the duty runway usually at 1,000 feet, then peel off tightly at three- or four-second intervals, which provides for suitable spacing on the Downwind Leg where the undercarriage is lowered and checks completed, the entire flight then touching down in neat succession, completing the landing run and taxiing in to the lines still in tidy order. At 'Willy' one squadron used to approach on the 'Initial' with all aircraft in line-astern formation; the other squadron put all members into echelon, that is, in a level line sloping back off the leader's right wingtip. To make things more spectacular, it was common to arrive with a formation of eight or even 12. As the junior I always seemed to be 'Tail End Charlie', the last in the formation, trying to cope with the whip which rippled down the line whenever the whole formation made a turn, such as on to the Initial approach. The sight of 12 fighters roaring in to pitch out for a stream landing was no doubt impressive, but it was sheer hell for us down at the back end or out at the tip of the echelon. Modern fighter squadrons now use common sense by buzz landing in successive groups of four.

I well remember one perilous sortie when we flew a formation of 12, overflying the new Home Command Headquarters being established in the former Lapstone Hotel perched on the edge of the Blue Mountains behind Penrith. On that gusty day we found it difficult to maintain tidy close formation, particularly at the back end. Coming back soaked in sweat after an hour of concentration, the only consolation was the satisfaction of having participated in the special event.

As we were being prepared for Korea we engaged in a lot of gunnery and rocketry as well as basic aerial combat practice. One day an air defence exercise was programmed, the fighters from 'Willy' having to defend BHP at Newcastle from raids

by Lincolns based at Amberley in Queensland. As we had too many Vampire pilots I was detailed to fly a Mustang in a formation of four led by Squadron Leader Wilson. We took off at 0900 hours (9 am) with a full fuel load of 347 gallons and climbed to our assigned altitude of 20,000 feet, patrolling up and down the coast off Newcastle. The engine supercharger was supposed to switch automatically into high blower passing 19,000 feet. The other three did but mine was out of adjustment and stayed in low blower. The pilot could manually engage high blower by holding up a spring-loaded switch in front of his left knee but he needed three hands for this. At full throttle I could not keep up with the formation so I would let go the throttle, lift the manual switch to engage the supercharger, and rocket ahead of the others. Releasing the switch, I would drop behind again. Two hours passed, the leader getting increasingly annoyed by my erratic formation flying but refusing to listen to my explanation of this ridiculous situation.

With all this absurd business of throttling back, holding blower switch up to accelerate, releasing the switch, then throttling on, my fuel consumption was greater than the others who had maintained constant engine revs. Eventually my fuel state became critical. Even so the leader remained unsympathetic. At last, at 1130 hours, the Lincolns came in low level and with a 'Tallyho' we dived to intercept. By this time, worried stiff about having so little fuel remaining, I deserted the battle, declared an emergency and made a fast landing. On refuelling my Mustang the servicing crew found that I had *three gallons* left when I shut down the engine! That is about fourteen litres, not enough to make another circuit. I learnt that day that, as captain of the aircraft, I alone was responsible for safety, even if it meant upsetting somebody else's plans or incurring the wrath of a senior.

On another occasion Barry and I took a Wirraway down to Bankstown (Sydney) to collect two large cans of glycol coolant for Mustang radiators. At Bankstown we loaded the large wooden case, weighing probably 40 kilograms, into the fuselage behind the rear seat. Being of rather short stature, Barry always had to pack a bulky cushion behind his back so that his feet could reach the rudder pedals. Even with this assistance that day he could not get the control column far enough forward to raise the tail for take-off. As we rapidly used up the runway at Bankstown I realised that he was yelling at me to help him get the tail up. With my longer reach I pushed the control column right forward, the tail came up, we lifted off and scraped over the far fence. On return to 'Willy' when we mentioned our difficulty, only then did somebody do a weight and balance calculation, to find that we should not have had that load in the Wirraway at all! Whereas on a transport squadron the weight limits and the positioning of heavy items are critical to flying safety, fighter pilots rarely concern themselves with the principles of weight and balance as the only extra load normally carried are the items of expendable armament. The blase attitude characteristic of many fighter jockeys in those days also extended to a disdain for check lists, although we did learn a series of mnemonics to ensure that all switches, controls, instruments, and indicators, were checked before start or taxi or take-off. I remember several whose pre-take-off check list was abbreviated to, 'Fuel full. Flaps up. Fire up. Go!'

I can well appreciate that a fighter pilot should be bold and aggressive, quick-thinking and determined, confident and even cocky if need be. However, as a young fellow trying to learn from the example of seniors, I could never understand the foolhardiness and brashness exhibited by many who had the reputation of being

'hotshots'. They may have been tigers in combat situations but, in my opinion, rarely showed up as having real leadership qualities. I am sure I was not alone in my dilemma — how to become a dashing fighter pilot without abandoning my natural caution and common sense. I remember the day one of the show-off Mustang pilots made his Initial approach right at ground level — 'on the deck', as we used to say. He pulled up into a loop over the runway, extended his undercarriage (upwards) on top of the loop, lowered some flap on the way down, and continued the loop to a landing. This skilful performance earned the applause of the onlookers but it was an unauthorised manoeuvre which would never have been sanctioned by his commander. With just a small mistake he could have wrecked the Mustang or injured himself, and been subject to severe disciplinary action. Eventually, as time progressed, I learnt to identify those officers whose performance and conduct marked them as good examples of our profession, and to accept that there were others who did not impress me at all.

Mentioning 'good impressions' reminds me of an incident which left me with an uncomfortable feeling. During my early trainee days at Point Cook I was impressed with a fellow on 4 Course named Halley. For reasons unknown to me he was frequently assigned to act as parade commander for the entire school. Perhaps he had previous Army experience. In any case, in spite of his commanding appearance, big moustache and penetrating voice, he conducted himself with firmness, quiet authority and always in a dignified manner. On graduation towards the end of 1950 he was posted to Lincoln bombers and, as I recall, spent a short tour in Malaya. He arrived back at 'Willy' while I was learning to fly Vampires and, in his first few weeks, took me aside for a confidential chat, asking me a lot of questions about the aircraft and seeking my thoughts on the handling of jets, which seemed odd to me as I was then such a novice. He then confided to me that he really did not want to be there and was scared at the thought of being sent to Korea, but could not bring himself to admit this to his senior officers. I had mixed emotions about this conversation – my inability to tell him to be frank with his seniors, my realisation that people are not always what they seem, and my dismay that a person could not feel free to disclose such disturbing apprehensions. I felt worse some months later when we heard that Sergeant Halley had been killed in Korea. What a waste. If only he had been able to say, 'I am not happy or confident flying fighters. Whatever the effects on my future, please send me back to bombers or to transports'.

By mid-May I had logged about 40 hours on the Vampire and was waiting my posting to Japan and Korea. When I think of it, I realise that we were ill-prepared for combat. We knew nothing about tactics in air-to-air fighting, and had virtually no competence in flying in bad weather. Anyway, we were given a couple of weeks' leave which Joyce and I took in Warwick. On return to 'Willy' the unexpected happened rapidly. The RAF asked to send some of their pilots to 77 Squadron for combat experience, so four of us, ready and packed, were told to defer our departure for a month. Within that month I found myself headed in an entirely unexpected direction.

Early in 1952, with the Cold War fully developed and communist expansion a world-wide threat, the Australian Government agreed to a British request for Commonwealth countries to assist in the defence of the Suez Canal, a vital section of the strategic shipping route to the Middle East and Australasia. Our contribution was to be a fighter wing comprising two Vampire squadrons at half strength, with

domestic and maintenance support squadrons. The destination of the Wing was announced as Nicosia, capital of Cyprus, and not one of the numerous RAF Stations in the Suez Canal Zone. The unusual aspect was that we would not take Australian-built Vampires but fly British models on lease. Later I learned that Britain wanted to sell Australia new fighters but the offer was declined as the Government had by then made the decision to build Sabres in Australia.

During June 1952 Williamtown buzzed with extra activity as men were posted in to the re-formed 78 Wing, under command of Wing Commander Brian Eaton. Since 75 and 76 Squadrons transferred to 78 Wing, an Operational Training Unit was formed at Williamtown to continue the training of new pilots for Korea. The other two units in 78 Wing were 378 Squadron to provide all domestic support and 478 Squadron for maintenance and engineering needs. The organisers were hard pressed to find enough pilots, even though the number in each of the two flying squadrons was to be limited to about seven. The proposed tour in the Mediterranean, a two-year posting with families, looked like being an interesting experience so I volunteered and found myself posted into 75 Squadron. After receiving a stack of information and lectures about Cyprus, we were surprised late in June to learn that our destination was changed to Malta. So I did not get to Korea after all. Who knows, I might have become one of the 30 or more pilots lost in that war, in which case there would be no memoirs, family or career to write about!

After World War II thousands of migrants poured into Australia from Europe, the many ships then returning to England empty. Our Government arranged for 78 Wing to move to Malta on one of these vessels, the SS *Asturias* , and for the wives and families to join us at a later date. With all preparation behind us, 78 Wing personnel travelled by train from Newcastle to Sydney, marched down George Street to Circular Quay and embarked on the *Asturias* on 4 July 1952. After a tearful farewell Joyce went back to Queensland to await notification of her own travel.

That four-month spell at Williamtown was an important phase in my career. I developed a lot of confidence, was a participant in the early days of jets when we were learning how to use them, and came to that turning point in my life by being posted to Malta.

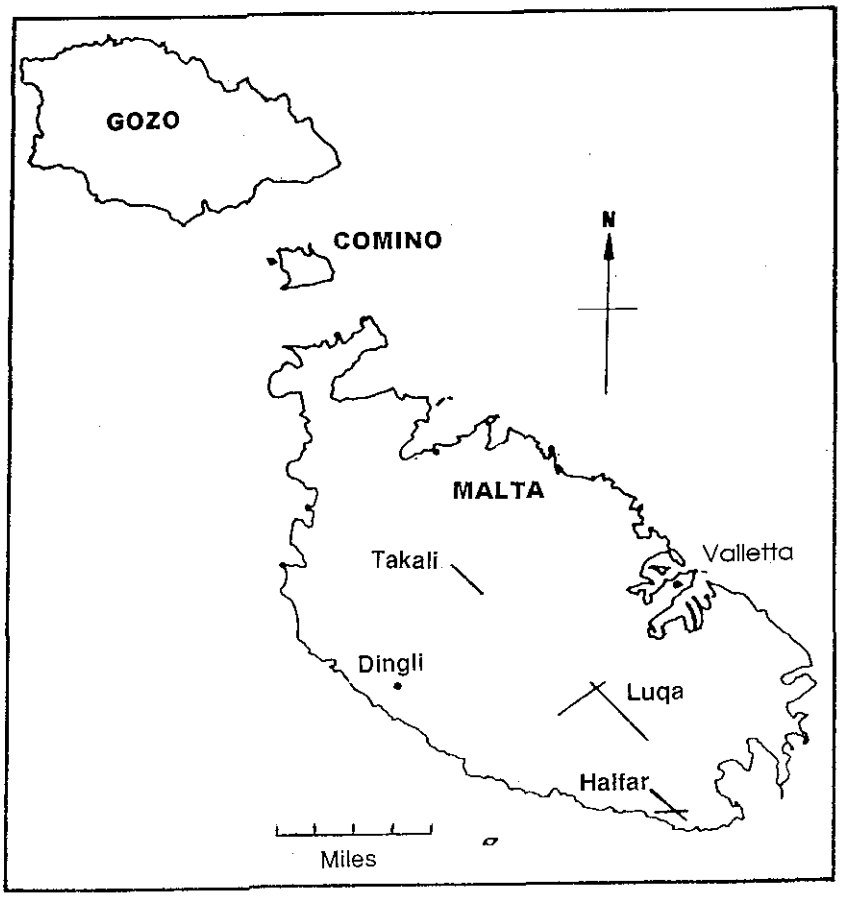
CHAPTER FOUR

Malta Days and Knights

Halfar Hijinks

As the *Asturias* plodded across the vast Indian Ocean the monotonous throb of the ship's engines almost mesmerised 300 fellows eager for a new exciting life. We had loads of time to make the acquaintance of those who would be working closely with us. Each day the Disciplinary Warrant Officer called a head-count parade to check if anybody had fallen overboard. Other than that we had frequent lectures and training films, an abundance of deck sports and plenty of time to laze or read in a deck chair. All the facilities of the ship were available to us, just as though we were paying passengers on a cruise. There was no shortage of service as the crew outnumbered the passengers. After leaving Sydney Heads on 4 July the airmen found that the bars stocked only English beer so one enterprising fellow organised a campaign to consume the entire supply during the three days we heaved across the Great Australian Bight, obliging the purser to re-stock with Australian beer during our brief call at Fremantle.

As a very junior Sergeant Pilot most of my associates were to be the officer pilots of 75 Squadron, and to some extent the pilots of 76 Squadron. I also got to know many of the Sergeants and Warrant Officers of 378 Base Squadron and 478 Maintenance Squadron. The Commanding Officers of these two units (Squadron Leaders Geoff Newstead and Jack Kane) did not accompany us on the ship as they had flown ahead by Qantas to Malta via Rome, with a small advance party to prepare for our arrival. Considering the short time available to assemble 78 Wing for its departure I believe that the posting people in Air Force Headquarters made wise choices in their selection of personnel. Many of the young airmen were on their first major posting but their relative inexperience was more than offset by the inclusion of veteran Flight Sergeants and Warrant Officers who proved to be the backbone of the support element. The same range of qualifications was evident among the pilots. OC Wing, Brian Eaton had distinguished himself flying in 3 Squadron in the Western Desert and Italy, and later with 77 Squadron in Korea. CO of 75 Squadron (Squadron Leader Ken Andrews) flew Boomerang fighters in New Guinea, and CO of 76 Squadron (Squadron Leader 'Bay' Adams) featured in Pierre Closterman's book 'The Big Show' about Typhoons attacking trains in Europe after D-Day. Most of the senior pilots were veterans of the Korean War where they flew Mustangs or Meteors or both. Only four of us were SNCOs — Barry Weymouth, Vern Pennefather and I fresh off 6 Course, and Flight Sergeant Cec Sly, who earned a Distinguished Flying Medal in Korea, had his Mustang shot down and was rescued by a United States Air Force helicopter.

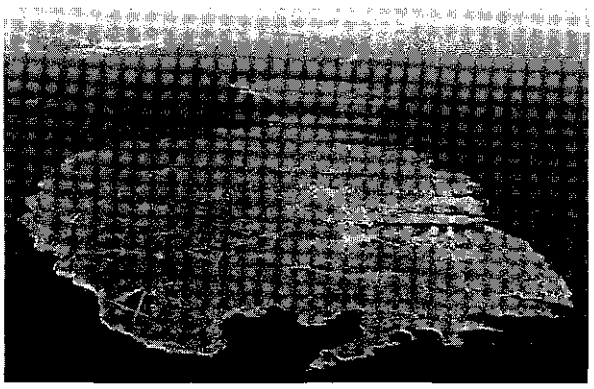


After 11 days on the Indian Ocean the *Asturias* made a one-day call at Aden — a welcome break from ship life and a chance for a bit of shopping. Our lasting sympathies went out to the British forces who were stationed in such a godforsaken place. Then up the Red Sea in oven-like heat and through the Suez Canal. As this transit occurred during the night we saw little of what it was we were being sent to defend although it was perfectly obvious from the volume of shipping that the closure of that bottleneck could be a strategic calamity. At Port Said several hundred British servicemen and families came aboard, returning to England. They were amazed to find Australians travelling all the way to the Mediterranean on duty.

Shortly after we left Port Said an airliner ditched off the Libyan coast. A British frigate rescued all aboard and then made a rendezvous with the *Asturias* for transfer of the survivors.

Before breakfast on 28 July 1952 we lined the rails to gaze at the yellow sandstone cliffs of Malta emerging through the morning haze. An hour later the *Asturias* entered Grand Harbour at Valletta and dropped anchor, to be greeted by a flypast of RAF Vampires in the formation 78. The stunning impression on me that first day remained for the next two years although, as we became accustomed to the fascination of Malta, we learned to accept the sights and sounds as our normal way of life.

Malta is a sandstone island, 17 miles long and 9 miles wide (28 kilometres by 15 kilometres), almost devoid of natural vegetation, situated like a yellow speck in the blue Mediterranean. The spread of its history is awesome. Readily accessible to the public are the underground temples of Neolithic man, preserved since 3,000 years BC. Some ruins are relics of the Roman occupation. St Paul was shipwrecked there on his way to Rome for trial. Arabs from North Africa occupied the island for two centuries, this episode being the basis for the modern Maltese language, unique in being the only Arabic idiom written in the Latin alphabet. The Normans annexed Malta and its neighbouring island Gozo in the 11th Century. It became the home of the Crusader Knights of St John after they were evicted from Rhodes in the 16th Century and was fortified to withstand the onslaught by the Ottoman Empire in the long struggle between Cross and Crescent. History records the Great Siege of 1565 as the most outstanding victory for Christianity against Islam in all the centuries of conflict. Valletta itself is a fortress city built by the Grand Masters after the Siege to defend the Order against further attack by the Ottomans. Fortunately for the island people there were no more Turkish invasions, but other powers have since recognised the strategic importance of Malta at the crossroads of Mediterranean trade and traffic. Napoleon captured and controlled the island during his Egyptian campaign until it was freed by the British Navy in 1815, after which it formally came under British protection. During World War II Malta was again subjected to a three-year siege by German and Italian Air Forces which tried to pound the British defenders into submission in order to assure the safety of the Axis supply lines to North Africa. Malta valiantly held on, always short of food and ammunition, the RAF courageously downing hundreds of German and Italian bombers and escorting fighters as well as sinking scores of ships carrying supplies to Rommel in the Western Desert. The gallant defence of this isolated garrison earned Malta, in April 1942, the award of the George Cross by King George VI who acknowledged 'a devotion and heroism that will long be famous in history'.



Looking down on Malta from 20,000 feet. (Photographed by Barry Weymouth)

Malta in 1952 looked much as it did in the centuries past when it was the fortress headquarters of the various orders of the Knights of St John. The towering walls of the fortified cities on either side of Grand Harbour stand testimony to the times when only stone walls and courage held off the Turkish invaders. The massive fortifications even withstood the pounding by the Axis bombers though many buildings were still in ruins when we arrived, typical being the bombed-out Opera House at the top end of Kingsway in Valletta. For strategic reasons the harbours and the airfields had been the main targets during the siege of the 1940s; these same

features remained as the reason Britain retained Malta as a garrison in the 1950s. The numerous harbours held ships, docks, stores and workshops for the Mediterranean Fleet commanded by Lord Louis Mountbatten from his headquarters in Admiralty House. Apart from the abandoned airstrips at Safi, three busy airfields continued to operate — the Royal Naval Air Station at Halfar, the civil airfield at Luqa which was also the RAF base for transport and maritime services, and the RAF fighter airfield at Takali.

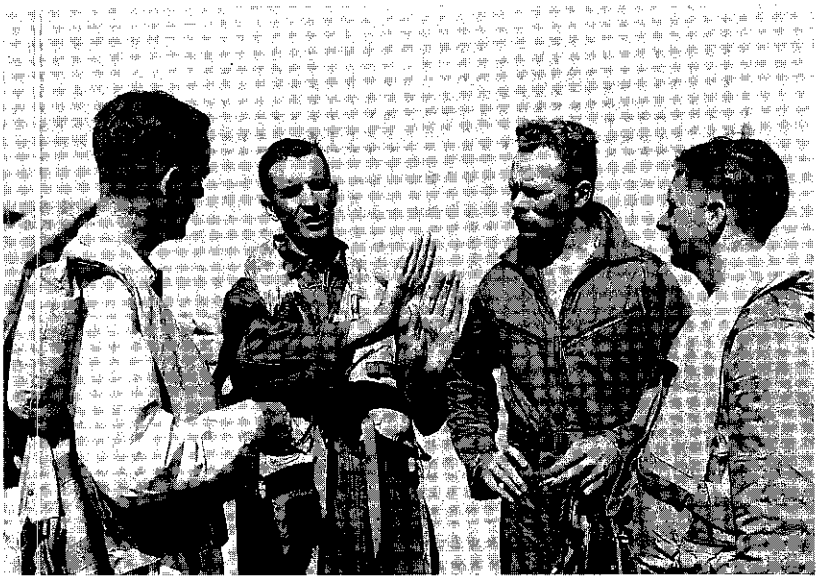
When we came ashore that day in 1952 and boarded various vehicles to carry us to our new home, it was like stepping back through the centuries. Our truck wound through narrow walled streets, along cobble-stoned laneways, in the shadow of towering battlements, palaces and churches, past shrapnel-marked houses of yellow sandstone, and out through the drab countryside baking in the glare of the summer sun. The whole island seemed a patchwork of small tilled fields bounded by dry-stone walls, boasting no natural vegetation except the occasional cactus plant or a gnarled and weather-beaten tree like a mulga. The only colours to relieve the monotonous yellow came from a dust-covered grove of olive trees, or a straggling hibiscus gasping for water, or a forlorn group of sagging palms. The stony fields seemed to challenge the efforts of the poor little donkeys dragging the same type of wooden ploughs that had no doubt been in use for centuries. Every little town or village looked the same — a maze of stone houses and stone walls, a stone-paved square and an immense Baroque-style stone church in which the bells rang out every quarter-hour. Black-haired children played and sang near their stone schools, while Maltese ladies, clad completely in black, did their marketing at stone shops or sat in their doorways feverishly tatting their lace as they gossiped. More little donkeys towed carts of vegetables for their street-vendor masters and a weary black horse stood submissively between the shafts of a black hansom cab (or carozzin). Church bells pealed incessantly, scores of military vehicles thundered along and gaily-painted buses careered through the narrow lanes with horns blaring to scatter the donkey carts and the straggling flocks of stringy-haired sheep. What an eye-opener it was to fellows coming from a country knowing fewer than 200 years of white civilisation!

Our first home was the Royal Naval Air station at Halfar. All Naval establishments are known as ships and this one was called HMS *Falcon*, a shore-base for the Fleet Air Arm. Apart from aircraft off the carriers occasionally landing there for repair or maintenance, the Royal Navy kept only a handful of Sturgeons for target-towing and a couple of Sea Hornets. The ready availability of space and facilities was no doubt the reason why we became tenants. I cannot say that settling in with the Royal Navy was affable or harmonious. They regarded us as a bunch of undisciplined cowboys; we saw them as stiff-necked Poms who were clearly contemptuous of 'colonials'.

We four Sergeant Pilots were quartered in the Petty Officers' Mess with all our other Sergeants, Flight Sergeants and Warrant Officers. The officers were in the Wardroom, and the airmen in wartime igloo huts in the Ratings area. We slept well enough but the meals were frightful. Whereas in Australia our Service caterers provided foodstuffs to meet necessary nutritional needs, the Royal Navy laid down a per-capita cost for 'victualling', a sum of two shillings and seven pence three farthings per day (about 27 cents). For breakfast we had thick porridge with reconstituted milk, and a kipper. Lunch was watery tomato soup and a morsel of saute kidneys on fried bread, and the regular fare for dinner was liver, tripe, brains or other offal, plus potato

cooked three ways. Our weekly treat was a pork chop. With the heat and the flies and the food preparation not exactly to our standards, it was inevitable that all of us suffered the customary dose of diarrhoea known as 'Malta dog'. It was all part of settling in.

After several weeks of working in the blazing morning heat after a miserable breakfast of a smelly kipper, many of our airmen came close to a mutiny. One representative took along his breakfast serving, laid the plate on Brian Eaton's desk and asked the Boss whether he thought the ration fitting sustenance for a day's hard work. Thanks to the splendid representation of the food situation back to Australia by Brian Eaton, Treasury graciously increased the airmen's daily allowance by a few shillings, enabling them to buy a decent meal off-base or to supplement their rations with food from the NAAFI (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute) wagon, a sort of mobile pie-cart that sold food, drinks and smokes during work breaks.



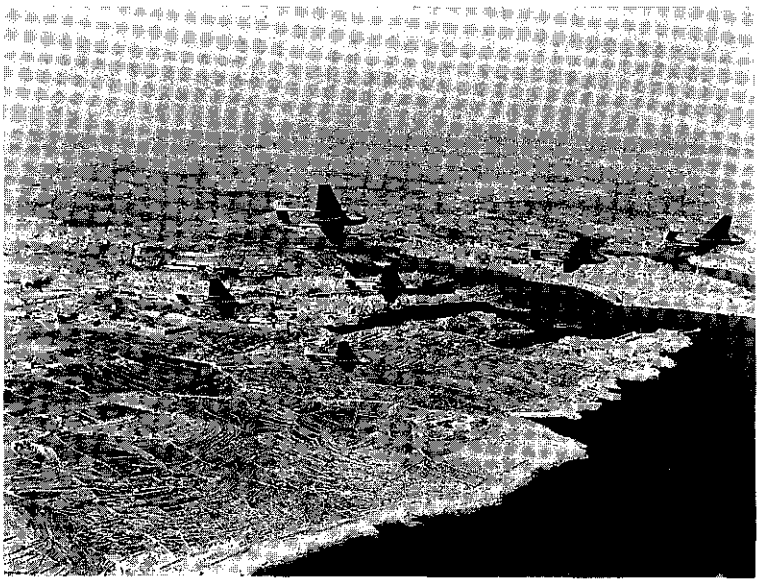
75 Squadron pilots during a Malta Defence Exercise: Bill Horsman, myself, Ken Andrews and Barry Weymouth.

While the groundstaff fellows toiled with setting up workshops, repair cells, offices and equipment stores, making best use of available space and facilities, the pilots' first job was to ferry our Vampires from Luqa. We took over eighteen of these Vamps plus two Meteor Mark 7 aircraft for target towing and instrument flying practice. The Mark 9 Vampire had not the power of our Australian-built variety (3,500 pounds static thrust instead of 5,000) but it was similar in most respects and none of us had any difficulties in familiarisation. The Vampire Mark 9 was actually the Mark 5 version fitted with a Godfrey cold-air unit in one of the wings. This kept the cockpit cool in the hot Middle East summers. Being light and agile our Vamp was a delight to fly, yet stable enough for comfortable weapons delivery. For big men like Bay Adams and Stormy Fairweather the tiny cockpit must have been extremely cramped. No wonder it was affectionately known as the 'kiddy cart'! This model also had no compressibility problem, to our immense relief. When the speed reached Mach .78

this Vampire merely bucked up and down vigorously then ultimately flicked upwards if we persisted in the dive. Compared with the light-weight Vampire our Meteor Trainers were cumbersome beasts, both taxiing and in flight. They were the dual-seat version of the Meteor Mark 8 fighter which our 77 Squadron used in Korea. However, the Trainer had no navigation aids, no ejection seats and very limited range unless external fuel tanks were attached. The canopy was the heavy glasshouse type, hinged along the right side and covering both front and rear cockpits. During our Malta tour a prominent RAF Air Vice-Marshal was killed in England when the Meteor canopy tore off during flight, striking him on the head. We were always careful about locking the canopy down.

Although we lived with the Navy, 78 Wing was generally regarded as being an element of the RAF — initially the Middle East Air Force then, more conveniently, Malta Command. To cope with the intense summer heat the Wing started work by 0700 hours (7 am) and finished early afternoon, six days a week. During the first few months we did a lot of squadron training and practice intercepts under control of the RAF ground-based radar station at Dingli, high on the western cliffs of Malta. There was no need for local area familiarisation since we had no local area — by the time the wheels were up after take-off we were out over the sea. In the event of an engine failure where we could not make it back to an airfield we were instructed to bail out, first because the island was laced with little fields bordered by high stone walls, and second because if we ditched in the sea the booms of the Vampire were expected to snap in half and the fuselage somersault upside down. Without an ejection seat, the recommended method of bailing out over the sea was to jettison the canopy, trim forward, roll on our back, let go the control column and be popped out of the cockpit before deploying our parachute. We practised inflating our rubber dinghy, carried in the seat pack, and how to climb into it and make ourselves cosy until rescued. Nobody wanted to face up to the undeniable fact that rescue services were virtually non-existent so we could possibly float around in the Mediterranean for ages until a suitable ship put to sea to look for the missing pilot. Fortunately we never had an engine failure, although I remember one emergency landing in 1954 when Les Reading was doing an air test. The rear engine bearing failed with such severe vibration that he had to shut down the engine and glide back to base for a forced landing. His only difficulty was fogging inside the cockpit through lack of heated air, but he was able to look out for a satisfactory landing by winding back the perspex canopy.

Life at Halfar was far from dull or routine as we developed closer cooperation with the local forces, particularly Naval ships and aircraft. The US 6th Fleet often passed by or came into harbour, giving us opportunity for liaison either in the air or socially. I recall having a wonderfully civilised meal on board the aircraft carrier *Wasp* in Grand Harbour — so delectable after liver and fried potato. We also spent an interesting day on the British carrier HMS *Glory*, watching Sea Furys and Fireflys making deck landings. One of our escorts commented that we should have been with them the previous day when a Sea Fury lost power right after take-off and plunged into the sea. When the pilot bobbed to the surface behind the ship he was rescued, returned to the carrier, dried out and catapulted off immediately in another Sea Fury — before he had time to reconsider the health risks of his calling!



78 Wing Vampires in formation over Grand Harbour in Malta.

Our working relationships with the British forces provided endless opportunities for educational liaisons and interesting visits to ships, operations rooms, radar stations, and control centres. Really the only sour aspect was the matter of our domestic arrangements at Halfar, particularly in the airmen's area with the primitive quarters, the disgusting food preparation conditions, the open drains and hordes of vermin. In the blazing heat our airmen on the flight line used to work wearing khaki shorts, a felt hat, sandals and sunglasses. As long as the job was done, observance of rank did not matter much and in typical Australian fashion the use of first names or nicknames among the lower ranks was a frequent practice. Being a rather small and close-knit unit we actually developed an esprit de corps more family oriented than traditionally structured. I don't think that the Royal Navy could accept the casual Australian attitude, the average airman's disdain for formality and the apparent absence of military demeanour. The Navy had a few surprises when we were visited by several VIPs, including the then Minister for Immigration, Harold Holt. When needs be, our airmen could turn on a spic and span guard of honour with smartly executed drill movements which astounded any Navy onlookers.

The commander of HMS *Falcon*, Captain H.P Sears RN, a rather snooty gent of the old school of pomposity, no doubt felt that the casual off-hand behaviour of the 'colonials' should not be tolerated on his ship. Consequently we had frequent orders passed down the line to the Wing, clearly indicating that we should conform to good old British custom. One thing that riled him was the average airman's cavalier attitude to saluting, more akin to waving off the flies. He used to drive around the 'ship' in his Humber staff car, his Captain's pennant flying on the bonnet, and we were supposed to give a salute as his car passed, whether he was aboard or not. One can imagine the Australian response to that piece of idiocy.

On those hot summer afternoons our favourite pastime was swimming in the beautifully clear sea at Kalafrana, down the hill a mile or so from Halfar. Many of us had our introduction to snorkelling and spear fishing in these rocky coves. One airman

was accidentally shot in the back with a spear, a sober lesson to all that safety measures had to be observed.

One day we nearly missed the truck returning up the hill to our quarters. Clutching towels, shoes and hat, we hopped off the truck not far from the Mess. Vern Pennefather, still wearing his swim trunks, knew that he should not be seen entering the Petty Officers' Mess in such a state so decided to do a quick change on the deserted roadside, shielded by the high stone wall. Having stepped out of his swim trunks, he was standing there, shorts in hand, clad only in sandals and felt hat, when the Captain's car swept round the bend, carrying the Captain and his wife. I wish I had been able to capture on camera the expression of shock on their faces. In due course Vern was matted, ticked off and told to use a bit more discretion. But behind the scenes our bosses must have had a darned good laugh.

We had good news during August — the wives and families would leave Australia in September. They arrived in the *Moreton Bay* on 30 October to an enthusiastic welcome from husbands and dads. Until she was married Joyce had never been out of Queensland so she looked forward to her overseas journey with a great deal of excitement. On the *Moreton Bay* the young wives shared four-berth cabins on a lower deck so it was not surprising that some of them had bouts of seasickness. However, the ship provided plenty of entertainment and dances every night, as well as shopping trips at Colombo, Aden and Port Said. Joyce's sharpest memories, other than the strange sounds and smells of the Orient, were of the young lads diving for coins thrown overboard at Aden and of the stark poverty of the beggars in Colombo where, she was told, children are intentionally mutilated to arouse more sympathy from tourists. The heat was so unbearable during their journey up the Red Sea that they took their mattresses up on deck at night, only to awake next morning covered in soot from the ship's funnel.

A few married quarters were available at RAF Station Luqa for our senior officers but the rest of us scouted around the neighbouring villages for somewhere respectable to rent. All Maltese houses are constructed of sandstone blocks dug from quarries and shaped by hand tools. Floors are concrete slabs covered in ceramic tiles and the flat roofs are used for drying the washing. I found a second-storey flat, rather austere but reasonably comfortable, in the village of Tarxien, halfway between Valletta and Halfar. Joyce's recollection of her arrival indicates how we lived for the first year:

'We stopped in this narrow street with its high stone walls, walked up two stone steps, through a coloured door and up a long stone staircase to a small landing which opened on to a living room and a bedroom. On the other side of the landing was a bathroom and a door leading out to a flat roof. My first question was, 'Where is the kitchen?' I had walked through the kitchen which was actually the small landing. On the bench stood a kerosene stove with a portable oven on top. We had no hot water and had to heat our bath and dish-washing water on a kerosene heater in the bathroom; if a draft of air caught the flame we had black soot everywhere. Once when John was away on a trip I had another wife staying with me. We shut the door to keep out the cool breeze but after a while noticed black specks floating around. On opening the bathroom door we found the walls blackened by the soot. Most of next day we spent scrubbing the walls, even right down the stairwell where the soot cloud had extended. The landlady who lived on the ground floor complained that we had ruined her beautiful flat.

I was not too popular with her as on another occasion she made a neighbourly gesture by cooking us a rabbit stew. Some days earlier I had been in her kitchen where she had five cats wandering over table, benches and cupboards. As I was unconvinced that the rabbit stew was not one of the cats, I put the lot in the rubbish bin — where she found it and sounded off at me in irate Maltese. It's a good thing I didn't know the language.'

While checking out our flat roof we met our neighbours, an English couple named Alan and Barbara Marsh who were spending two years in Malta as Alan's National Service with the RAF. We developed a close friendship which has lasted over 40 years. We are godparents to their first child and have visited them in England several times since our early years in Malta.

Malta has two seasons — nine months of blue skies and idyllic summer sunshine, and three months of gales, cloud and cold rain. By the end of October we had our introduction to winter with the arrival of miserable blustery days. Brian Eaton decided that before winter set in we should try our navigational skills by venturing a bit further afield. So we had fitted the underwing drop-tanks to give extra range and 12 Vampires headed east. Without the tanks we normally made sorties of 50 minutes to an hour; with drop tanks full, our range extended to about 600 nautical miles (1100 kilometres), flown in something shorter than 2 1/2 hours, provided we cruised at 30,000 feet. We had no navigation aids, arriving at our destination by map reading or good luck. Over the Mediterranean there was little point in carrying a map, so we just flew on flight plan and called up for a steer when in radio range of our destination. It seems fairly primitive by today's standards. The main element of the Cathode Ray Direction Finder was a screen in the control tower at each airfield; when a pilot transmitted on his radio his voice caused a long blip to appear on the screen, enabling the operator to read the direction the transmission came from and so give the pilot a heading to steer to the airfield.

The other risk which was accepted without question was that few of us had any real experience of flying on instruments. Most people who are not pilots have no appreciation of the hazards of vertigo. We humans naturally rely on visual appreciation of an horizon and perceived objects to tell us which way is up. Remove all visual contact by flying completely in cloud and the balance organs inside our ears take over, any head motion causing false or exaggerated impressions of our attitude in space. We were always taught to believe our instruments; if our artificial horizon told us that we were climbing with wings level, we should ignore any mental conviction that we were in a steep dive with 60 degrees of bank! In the 1950s the RAAF used a system of rating pilots according to their total experience of actual flight in non-visibility conditions and their ability to perform numerous manoeuvres on instruments within specified tolerances. New boys like me had virtually no Actual Instrument Flying time, so even if we flew the test absolutely precisely we were entitled only to a White Card which limited us to flying in restricted weather conditions. With much more experience and sufficient logged flying time in cloud a pilot could qualify for a Green Card which removed such restrictions and permitted him to fly in bad weather extending almost down to ground level.

The silly situation in Malta was that we all flew off together, whether we had a Green Card or a White Card or no card. Taking off in pairs on that first long-distance trip we soon entered forecast low cloud which was supposed to extend only 100 miles (185 kilometres). Instead we flew into an extensive band of bad weather full of

turbulent cumulo-nimbus cells that spread beyond 400 miles and well above 20,000 feet. Struggling with an unwieldy aircraft with heavy drop tanks, I was flying off Ken Andrews' wing when severe turbulence suddenly tossed me out of sight of his Vampire. This separation happened to most of the other pairs. We each immediately concentrated on flying individually by instruments, cursing the inaccurate meteorological forecast and concerned about the ice forming on the wings, eventually breaking out on top of the cloud at about 27,000 feet, scattered over the Mediterranean and making separate landfall over Cyrenaica in Libya. Some were able to join up for a very untidy arrival at El Adem, the airfield at Tobruk. After refuelling and a night stop at this remote desert location we made our second 500-mile (920 kilometres) hop next day across the sea to Nicosia in Cyprus, thankfully in clear weather. Another refuelling and on across Syria to the RAF Station of Habbaniyah, situated on the Euphrates River in Iraq. We were right back in the Cradle of Civilisation. That weekend the RAF planned to drive us the 75 miles (120 kilometres) east to visit Baghdad but when fierce riots broke out in the city, it was deemed wise that we stay well away from there and remain on the station at 'Hab'.

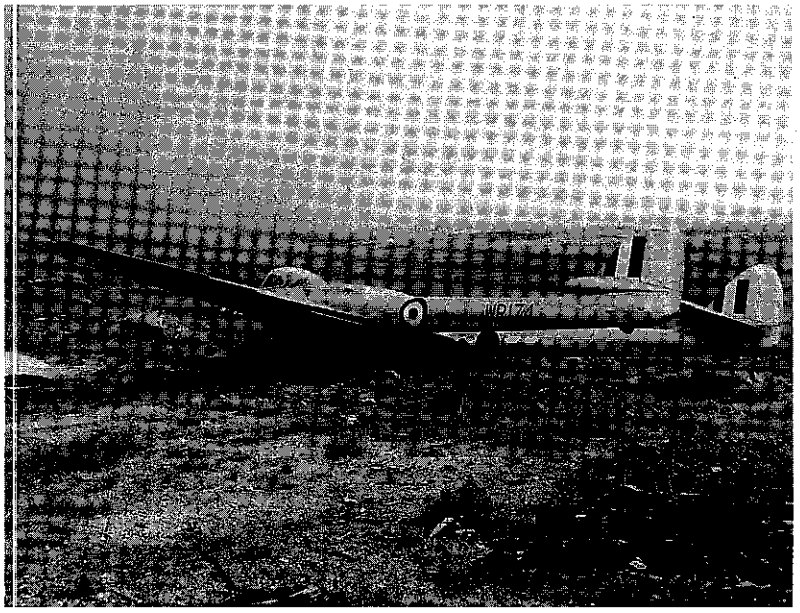
The return trip to Halfar, all three legs flown in one day, was extremely eventful, to say the least. The first drama occurred when we had no option but to penetrate some terrible weather near the Syrian coast about the time we descended blind towards Cyprus. Again we were tossed apart and in the thunder and lightning, and with hail pounding the canopy, lost radio contact, eventually coming out the bottom of the storm and sneaking in low level to the airfield at Nicosia, again in ones and twos instead of a tidy formation of 12. Finally all arrived and were marshalled to a disused airstrip for refuelling. One of the pilots had made arrangements for us to take back a large quantity of the local brandy, the main ingredient of brandy sours. The only storage space in a Vampire is in the ammunition bins behind the cockpit but these were full of ammunition to create the correct balance when carrying full drop tanks. No problem. We reefed out about fifty rounds of ammo, undid the links and threw it in the grass, each making room for about a dozen bottles of brandy in their straw jackets. I often wondered what happened to all that ammo left in the grass out in the middle of the airfield.

As we took off in pairs for El Adem, Barry Weymouth called out to his leader Lyall Klaffer that his ammo bin door had opened. Lyall had omitted to check the door fastened after the loading of the brandy. He aborted the take-off but the end of the runway was too close and he had to retract the wheels to avoid running over a cliff. As the drop tanks tore off and the spilt fuel caught alight, the Vampire skidded off into the dirt, completely wrecked. By the time the crash wagon reached the scene, Lyall was standing well away from the wreck, his personal clothing hastily spread out to conceal his stack of brandy bottles. If this had happened in Australia we might have expected a court martial but, after an official inquiry, it was all written off as bad luck, and a few months later we took possession of a replacement Vampire.

By November 1952 we were ready to start weapons training, first using a moored target in a bay near Kaura Point in the south east corner of Malta. This was suitable for dive-bombing but it proved too hazardous during rocketry and gun strafing. After zooming over the target the aircraft could be hit by ricochets off the water. The answer was to hop across to Libya to use the desert range at Tarhuna, not far from the RAF Station of Idris, near Tripoli. It was a 50-minute trip from Malta,

almost due south. This was, of course, in pre-Gaddafi days when Libya was a kingdom friendly to Britain and the USA.

RAF Station Idris, named after King Idris of Libya, had been called Castel Benito during the years when Libya was an Italian colony. For all his sins Mussolini was a beneficial developer of the desert country; the coastal strip near Tripoli was to us a welcoming spread of greenery, mainly the millions of eucalypts planted as windbreaks round the thriving citrus groves. That first trip to Idris started a regular traffic flow. My logbook shows that I went there 13 times during our years in Malta, either for armament work or to collect fresh citrus fruits and cheap liquor from the Officers' Mess.

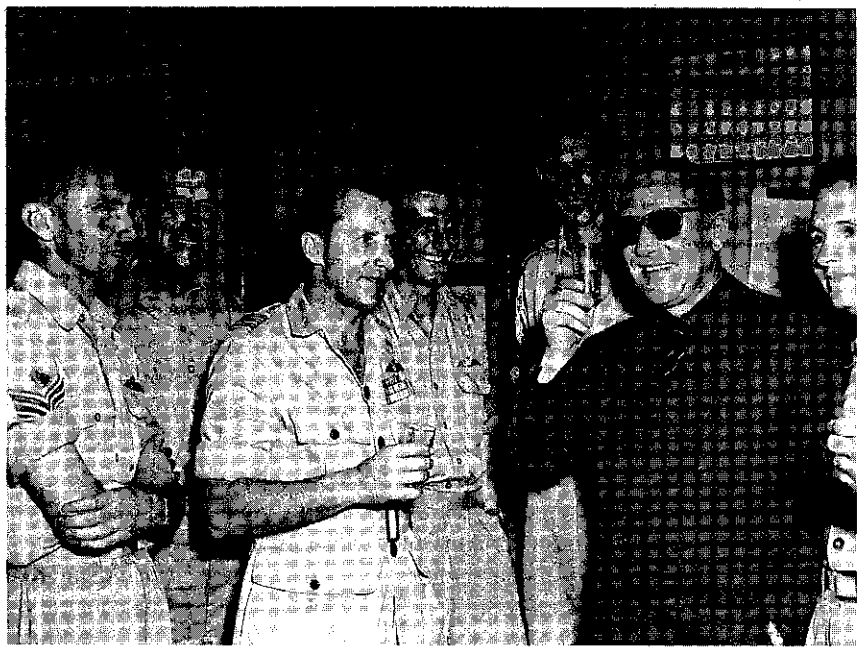


Our first Vampire lost after an aborted take-off at Nicosia, 24 November 1952.

The indelible memory of December was my conversion to the twin-engined Meteor Mark 7, the two-seat trainer version used for instrument flying practice and for target towing during aerial gunnery. Most of the pilots flew the Meteor Mark 7 and the Mark 8 fighter in Japan and Korea. The rest of us were given a short conversion by Geoff Thornton who, I found later, was a hotshot fighter pilot in Korea but not really an instructor. Handling a Meteor was similar to anything else except that, should one engine fail, we had to know how to deal with asymmetric flight. The trick is to maintain speed above a certain figure otherwise the pilot has insufficient rudder control to prevent the good engine yawing the nose and rolling the aircraft on its back.

Up at 10,000 feet with one engine throttled back, Blue Thornton showed me how I needed every ounce of leg strength to keep the nose from yawing. This was about the limit of my instruction on to a twin-engined aircraft. He told me to go off solo but after take-off to see for myself the effects of an engine failure by pulling back one throttle.

Our Navigation Officer Squadron Leader Doug Hurditch briefing Vern Pennefather, myself and Barry Weymouth at Halfar in 1952.



A famous aviator visiting Malta in 1952. L to R: Cec Sly, Jack Lovell, OC Brian Eaton, Vern Pennefather, myself, Jimmy Mollison, Barry Weymouth.

Without adequate instruction I was not prepared for near-disaster. With the wheels up on take-off I pulled one throttle back. The other engine at full power yawed the nose beyond my control and the Meteor rolled on its back, headed for the ground. Observers expected to see our first fatality within two seconds. For some instinctive reason I can never explain, I pulled the other throttle back to idle, rolled the right way up, and pushed both throttles forward, hoping not to hit the ground as I eased out of the descent. With heart pounding I completed the circuit, landed and taxied into the lines. Blue came out to ask what was the matter. When I told him what had happened he looked underneath and said something like 'No sweat'. I had only scraped the bushes, not hit the ground. Then he said to go off and do the solo period and not to bother again with the asymmetric exercise. Not Bother! I had just experienced the most dramatic and hair-raising lesson in asymmetric flight and he merely brushed it off as of no consequence.

I often marvel at how close I was on that occasion to wiping myself off. Clearly I was being kept for some worthwhile purpose. I do not remember whether I told Joyce of this close shave or any other that I experienced. Certainly I did not wish to alarm her even though she probably accepted by that stage that my lifestyle carried occasional risks. In any case I was still alive to enjoy our first Christmas in Malta. We married people were extremely fortunate to share domestic life with families. Since my fellow pilots continued to live in the Navy Mess, Joyce and I made them welcome in our flat. Barry and Cec joined us on Christmas Day but Vern, as I recall, was by then pursuing a young blonde English girl who worked in Barclay's Bank in Valletta. Courtship continued and Vern and Val were married late in 1953. Barry and Cec were still single when they returned to Australia. Perhaps that is why each of them was sufficiently financial to buy a car in England, drive it to Malta and ship it back home.

That particular Christmas took on a special importance. Although we were half a world away from our loved ones in Australia, we were delighted to announce that Joyce was expecting our first offspring. Despite Jennifer's trepidation many years later, she was not adopted from a Maltese orphanage.

The next trip away for 78 Wing was our detachment to the RAF Armament Practice School at Nicosia. We flew off on New Years Day 1953 for six weeks of lectures, flights and tests to improve our proficiency in gunnery (air and ground targets), rocketry and dive bombing. Also at Nicosia the Royal New Zealand Air Force had a Vampire squadron which joined with us on the occasional air defence exercise.

Cyprus is a lovely island, rugged and heavily timbered, famous for its citrus fruits, olives, figs and wines, timber and minerals, as well as its pretty swimming beaches and resorts. Paphos on the south coast is the legendary birthplace of Venus; Christianity was introduced by St Paul and St Barnabus in 45 AD; at Famagusta are the ruins of the Roman city Salamis, also Othello's Tower; in Limassol we visited Kolossi Castle where Richard the Lionheart married his Queen Berengaria; on the north coast stands the ancient port of Kyrenia guarded by its massive medieval castle; on the craggy range inland are the ruins of Bellapais Abbey and St Hilarion Castle in fairytale surroundings. We juniors took every opportunity to explore the wonders of Cyprus. Wintry conditions were not entirely suitable for sight-seeing but several of us hired a car at weekends to explore the famous places of interest. As a young fellow fascinated by the charm of a strange land I could never understand why our older officers preferred to visit the nightclubs or prop up the bar in the Mess.

The day the OC was promoted to Group Captain, Halfar 1953. Reg Jones, John Jacobs, Brian Eaton, Keith Meggs, Geoff Newstead, Lyall Klaffer.

One weekend we spent at an RAF chalet in the snowfields up on Mt Troodos in the centre of the island. The only time I ever tried skiing, I ventured down a slope much too fast, finished in a heap at the bottom of the hill yelling for help, and ended up in the Station hospital for three days with strained ligaments in both knees. My CO was not pleased that I missed some of the scheduled flying.

On the way home from Cyprus we routed through Fayid, an RAF Station on the Bitter Lake in the Canal Zone. After being compelled to stay there overnight by a severe dust storm we were extremely glad that our Government had insisted that we not be based in the Canal Zone.

Back in Malta my good news was notification of the award of a Short Service Commission as from 1 January, meaning that I was now a Pilot Officer. In fact, all four of us were commissioned, the other three moving their belongings to the Wardroom. There we found that the officers did not eat much better than in the Petty Officers' Mess, but at least the crockery was crested and, if you paid extra for it, you could have a boiled egg for breakfast. We four were not the only ones promoted. Promotions arrived for numerous officers and airmen during our tour, just as would have happened if they had been home in Australia. Brian Eaton became a Group Captain, no doubt enhancing his status among the British forces. We four juniors found ourselves doing rostered duty as Orderly Officer, responsible for discipline, good order, problems and inquiries during a 24-hour period or a weekend. I remember Brian Nicholls mentioning one evening in the Wardroom that he was leaving for the Airmen's Mess to ask if they had any complaints, a regular duty of an Orderly Officer. One of the Navy officers was aghast. 'Of course they have complaints,' he declared. 'But we don't go and ask them!'

In March Joyce and I took a fascinating holiday to Italy. We flew to Catania in Sicily in the shadow of Mt Etna, boarded a train for the ferry trip across the Strait of Messina then up the shin of Italy, and stayed a few days in Naples. The highlight was a coach trip south past Mt Vesuvius to visit Pompeii, then on through Amalphi and Sorrento. Then we had five days on the Isle of Capri, followed by a week wandering around Rome with a tourist guidebook. We saw everything of popular interest, from the ancient Forum and Colosseum to St Peter's and the Vatican, and were even lucky enough to assemble with a large group of people for a public audience with Pope Paul VI. What a memorable holiday that was!

On return to Malta we learned that the RAF was vacating Takali, allowing 78 Wing to move in to what would virtually be an RAAF station. As Takali is in the northern end of the island and we had flats down in the southern part near Halfar, it was clearly time to move. We found a flat in a new block in Balzan, right opposite San Anton Gardens, the only public botanic gardens on the island, and made the change in April. Our new flat was only a mile from Takali so I could ride my bicycle there easily via the back lanes. It was quite imperative that we did move at that time. Joyce was by then well advanced in pregnancy and needed to be settled in at the new neighbourhood because the word was out that 78 Wing was to represent the RAAF in England for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Our flying program through April and May was busy and varied. My log book shows a few exercises with and against the Royal Navy, an occasional trip to Idris, and another week away in Cyprus for a defence exercise in the Canal Zone. The circumstances of this exercise were unusual as our 78 Wing Vampires simulated high level and low level attacks on airfields in the Canal Zone, providing targets for the RAF air defence systems in the theatre. The distance from Cyprus to the Canal and return necessitated our carrying full drop tanks which limited our manoeuvrability and prevented rapid evasive action when intercepted by defending Meteors.

Anzac Day that year was reason for a flurry of official and social events. HMAS *Sydney* was visiting at the time, carrying the contingent of Australian Army and Navy personnel to the United Kingdom for the Coronation. I vaguely recall that *Sydney* was accompanied by the RNZNS *Black Prince* carrying the New Zealand contingent. On the way to Malta the contingent called at Tobruk to participate in a special commemoration ceremony at the war cemetery, attended by Field Marshal Lord Montgomery. We provided a flight of airmen for the Guard of Honour and a flypast of Vampires. Anzac Day in Malta again saw 78 Wing personnel at a wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph, and that evening all officers were invited to a cocktail party at Admiralty House. While we stood in the throng of guests, empty glass in hand, waiting for a steward with some food or drink, one of our number noticed Lord and Lady Mountbatten enter and made the comment, 'Look at the fruit salad', referring in Service vernacular to Lord Louis' eleven or so colourful rows of medal ribbons. Joyce overheard this comment and said loudly, 'Fruit salad. Yes, I'll have some!'.

Well, after all, it takes quite a while for a Service wife to learn the ropes. In fact, I was often out of my depth, not having been given any guidance about the responsibilities of commissioned rank. One day I was a Sergeant with all the other Wing Non-commissioned Officers, the next day a Pilot Officer and they my subordinates. All very confusing, embarrassing at times but part of the learning process.

Coronation Capers

On 18 May 1953 most of 78 Wing flew to England. After a refuelling stop at the French Air Force base at Istres (Marseilles), our 16 Vampires flew to Tangmere, just in from England's south coast, and what a wonderful sight after the drabness of Malta. Lush green fields, hedgerows and woods, streams and picturesque villages, just as films always depict the English countryside. Refuelled again, we did the final leg low level across Kent and north over Essex to our new home at Horsham St Faith, an RAF station near Norwich in Norfolk. This was our base for the next two months while we prepared for our participation in the Queen's Review of Commonwealth Air Forces. Some of the Wing wives flew over for short spells but Joyce was unable to make it as she and Marge Meggs were then in an advanced stage of pregnancy.

About to set out on a practice for formation leaders at Odiham are the Wing CO, Group Captain B.A. Eaton and the CO of 76 Squadron, Squadron Leader J. Adams.

A few days after the Coronation on 2 June, Queen Elizabeth reviewed the Navies at Spithead. The Review of the Air Forces was scheduled for 15 July at RAF Station Odium, south-west of London. On that day a static display of 350 aircraft was on show on the airfield, including our two Meteors. After reviewing the display and Guard of Honour, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh watched the flypast of 641 aircraft comprising 49 elements which passed in front of the Royal dais at 30-second intervals. Some elements consisted of only one aircraft, such as the Sycamore helicopter which led the procession at a speed of 75 knots. Successive elements flew at increasingly faster speeds, finishing with the first Supermarine Swift doing 580 knots. Most of the elements consisted of formations of 12 or 24 aircraft. We represented the RAAF with our 12 Vampires led by Brian Eaton.

Each element had a designated height to fly (700 feet or 1,200 feet) and a certain speed to maintain. As each element flew a little faster than the one ahead, we all had to feed in for the final run through a 'gate' at a place called Leavesden. If any formation arrived over the gate more than ten seconds early or ten seconds late, it had to pull out of the flypast immediately, otherwise it would overtake the element in front or be overtaken by the one behind. This indicates how precise was the planning and how critical the timing of the operation. We had no radar control; all navigation was by map reading and stopwatch.

I was lucky to be in the leading box of four, on Brian Eaton's left wing. Deputy Leader Bay Adams flew on Lead's right wing. They had to change to a special radio frequency approaching Leavesden, leaving the rest of us out of radio contact. If

we had to reduce or increase speed to meet our 'gate' time, the leader would give me an appropriate hand signal and I would then relay the instruction to the rest of our formation.

With a Vampire 9 are (back row, left to right): SQNLDR K. Andrews, PLTOFF V. Pennefather, PLTOFF J. Jacobs, PLTOFF B. Weymouth, PLTOFF V. Oborn, PLTOFF C. Sly, PLTOFF K. Meggs. (front row, left to right): FLTLT S. Bradford, FLTLT 'Blue' Thornton, FLGOFF L. Reading, FLGOFF R. Hunt, FLGOFF R. Jones.

The day after arrival at Horsham St Faith about 100 of our groundstaff fellows flew in by RAF transport aircraft. These included clerks, cooks and various trades other than just the aircraft servicing crews. In short time we started formation practice but were also introduced to radar control for Ground Controlled Approaches which helped pilots approach and land in bad weather. Although it was then summer in England, misty rain and low cloud were far more frequent than sunshine. One week we did almost no flying as it rained for five days. Occasionally we teamed with RAF Meteor squadrons, playing the role of intruder in 'Rats and Terriers' defence exercises, but generally were not worked hard and enjoyed many a free day for exploring. Five of us were keen on seeing as much as we could (Barry, Cec, Reg Jones, Keith Meggs and myself) so took every opportunity to visit places such as Sandringham, Ipswich, Cambridge, the Norfolk Broads and, of course, London. Every spare weekend we took a train to London where we found bed and breakfast lodging for £1 in the heart of Kensington, enabling us easily to reach all the famous tourist spots. London was a wonderful sight, being gaily decorated for the Coronation and teeming with visitors from all over the world. One evening all Commonwealth Air Force officers attended a cocktail party at the House of Commons, hosted by Lord de Lisle and Dudley, Secretary of State for Air (and later Governor General of Australia). Such an event would have been beyond my imagination when I joined the RAAF.

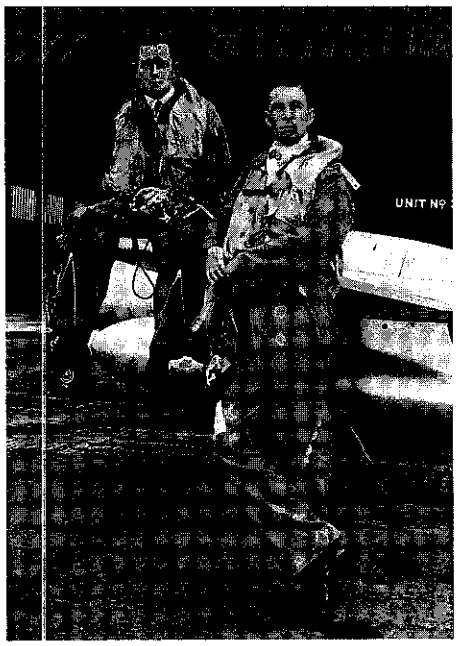
My sister Amy arrived in London about the same time on a working holiday. She joined our group on many of our excursions, and when Australia House obtained for us grandstand tickets for the Mall on Coronation Day, I was fortunate to get one for Amy. The Coronation procession was a brilliant and stirring spectacle, a panoply of colourful uniforms, bands, mounted troops, contingents from all Commonwealth nations, gold coaches and royal guards — truly a memorable event, even though we sat huddled in rain coats most of the day, unable to escape the drips from the trees above our stand which was opposite the gate to St James' Palace.

Back at Horsham St Faith we settled down to further training, weather permitting, with occasional variations from formation practice. One Sunday the RAF staged an Open Day for visitors, putting on static and flying displays of various aircraft from our own and nearby airfields. We did a demonstration flypast then one of our team peeled off to await his turn for a solo aerobatic display. To conserve fuel he climbed a few thousand feet but found himself above a complete cloud layer and soon became lost. Radio calls to start his act were not answered, and eventually we all knew from the time elapsed that he could not be still airborne. Anxiety increased until at last a message arrived that he had drifted south, found a small gap in the cloud and landed on an old abandoned wartime strip in Essex, just before exhausting all his fuel. After telephoning his predicament he had to wait for the RAF to send a fuel tanker and battery cart to enable him to take-off and return to our base. What an embarrassment!

78 Wing Vampires at RAF Horsham St Faith, Norfolk, England.

One day all the aircrew made an interesting excursion by bus to RAF Stradishall in Suffolk where the RAF kept a Martin-Baker ejection seat trainer. Although we did not have the benefit of an ejection seat in the Vampire, this safety device was becoming a standard fitment to modern aircraft so we appreciated the opportunity to sample an ejection, even if a modified one. Strapped into the seat

within a dummy cockpit, we practised the drill of jettisoning the canopy, reaching up and pulling the blind down over our face, thus firing the charge which shot us up an inclined ramp. As the practice charge was only half strength, we shot up only about ten metres where a ratchet device secured the seat until it was manually lowered for the next participant. In the many years that followed when I flew strapped into ejection seats, I was grateful for knowing how it would operate if I really had to 'bang out'.



Les Reading and me at Horsham St Faith in England.

The route from our base to Odiham and return took on average one and a half hours at our designated speed of 250 knots. At low level we had insufficient fuel in internal tanks so had to carry the drop tanks. These made the aircraft more unwieldy and added to the difficulty of keeping close formation in bumpy conditions. Every one of our nine trips (eight rehearsals plus the real thing) was an ordeal in concentration as we had to fly our tight formation of three boxes of four without risking a collision.

On one rehearsal the weather was marginal with visibility less than a mile and the ragged cloud base often below our designated route height of 1,200 feet. I am sure all the others were in a sweat that day but we pressed on, in and out of cloud, struggling to hold position in the turbulence, until passing over Odiham and turning left for the home run. After maybe a minute, with our 12 Vampires bouncing around in wispy cloud, holding a 30-degree bank turn, a formation of 12 Meteors slid over us about fifty feet above. They were so close that we on the inside of the turn, looking inwards and up, could see the pilots' heads and note the colour flashes along the fuselages. Such a heart-stopping moment certainly accentuated the tension. Later, safely back on the ground at Horsham St Faith, we checked up on the squadron markings, to find that the Meteors were the formation behind us also at 1,200 feet, but flying 40 knots faster. Only 50 feet of space had saved us from what would surely have been the most horrendous mid-air collision since the beginning of aviation.

On the big day the weather, probably by Royal Command, was better, still overcast but above the flypast heights and not so hazy. By all accounts the Royal Review was an outstanding success. It remains in my mind as one of the highlights of my flying days.

With the detachment to England completed, the Wing flew across to Wahn (close to Cologne in Germany) to participate in a week-long exercise with NATO forces. Keith Meggs and I were allowed to return to England, take a train to Inverness in the north of Scotland, and fly out to Malta in a York transport with an RAF Reserve

squadron support crew. By this time the remainder of 78 Wing had moved from Halfar to Takali and were awaiting the return of our aircraft from Germany.

Takali Titbits

August 1953 represents a milestone in this chronicle. On Saturday 1 August Joyce said it was time to go into King George V Hospital at Floriana. Joyce recalls the details more vividly than I. 'John was Orderly Officer at the base for that weekend and came home on his bicycle to check on my condition, to find me making suggestions about going to hospital. After saying to me calmly, "You are not in a hurry, are you?" he went off searching for a taxi, a problem at weekends. Assuring him that I could wait, I was packed to go when he returned about an hour later. I had a long night in the hospital, not that it was a painful labour but I just couldn't get on with the job. I remember a lovely old nun who sat with me all night saying, 'You poor little dear' over and over. Next morning I had an instrument delivery so Jennifer arrived looking like a battered child, somewhat bruised about the head. This soon disappeared and she was just beautiful, a joy and delight.'

So began the tribe. We really became a family now that we had a little person to share and care for. Though far from affluent we felt privileged to be living happily and safely in a foreign country, residing in a new flat and raising a child. Jennifer Ann was christened on 29 August at St Gregory's Church, Sliema, John and Clair Myers being her godparents. Sixteen years later John was tragically lost in a Mirage crash in Malacca Strait when on a night training exercise out of Singapore.

On reflection, domestic life in Malta was a challenge but we accepted it all as the norm. The flats had no hot water; we heated our washing and bath water in a large galvanised tub over a Primus stove, boiled the nappies this way and rinsed them in the bath. In the kitchen we had no electric or gas stove; cooking was done on a paraffin burner which frequently polluted the house with greasy soot if the wick was set too high. We eased the situation a little by buying a pressure cooker and a few electrical appliances as well as a small paraffin-burning refrigerator. As our small mantel radio could pick up only one English-speaking station, the only means of hearing any news or music was to connect to Rediffusion, which broadcast news and music throughout the Island via a landline to every household. All we needed was a speaker and an on/off switch. Most of our groceries came from England through the NAAFI stores though we bought fresh vegetables and paraffin from the local vendors who sold their wares from donkey-drawn carts. Joyce used to have amusing exchanges with Joe the vegetable man. Neither could speak the other's language but managed to conduct their sale and purchase with lots of tolerance and laughter. We could never bring ourselves to buy meat from the local butchers where the carcases of shoats (cross between sheep and goat) hung grotesquely in the open, inviting myriads of flies. Strangely the pork on the island was the best we have ever known. Malta had no grazing land so the pigs were raised and hand-fed indoors.

Though I was not particularly conscious of it at the time, one aspect of that Malta tour seems odd to me in retrospect. Except for exchanges in shops for goods and services, we rarely had any direct association with Maltese people. Maybe our OC and senior officers did, but certainly not we juniors. Being an element of the RAF Command, all our working and social contacts were with the British. We could not converse with the Maltese in their difficult language so relied on them to speak

English, not easy for many of the less educated. In any case they probably regarded us as just another temporary occupying force on their island. After all, their history over thousands of years reflects invasions and occupations by a miscellany of foreign nations, so there was no reason why our Australian force should attract any special interest. More than 40 Australian pilots flew with the RAF in the defence of Malta during World War II, the names of the 14 who lost their lives being engraved on the Commonwealth Memorial. Australia was therefore not unknown to the Maltese yet most of us found it awkward trying to relate to them.

Our single airmen looked for female company but soon realised with a shock that strict family control prohibited dates without a chaperone, and if you appeared to be getting too serious with a local girl, Mama and Papa were organising a wedding — a convenient way to marry off a daughter and so start a family migration to Australia. The Catholic Church exerted a very firm guidance on Maltese life, the church being the centrepiece of every town and village, and the black-robed clerics laying down the law as to standards of morality, social obligations and religious observances. Being Catholic, we first attended the local church in Tarxien, quite astounded on our first few Sundays to note the strange behaviour of the Maltese parishioners. We had to pay a penny to hire a chair which we then carried to where we wanted to sit. This brought glares of disapproval from numerous people as it was customary for women and children to sit on one side and men on the other. Worshippers milled around during the Mass, some saying their own prayers, others grouped together reciting the Rosary, and nobody taking much notice of the priest saying the Mass. On moving our residence to Balzan we obtained permission to attend Mass in the chapel of a nearby convent where traditionally the nuns sat close to the altar, separated from the common people by a massive ironwork grill. I recall that the privilege for we Australians to attend was arranged by a huge New Zealand priest called Father Klimeck, a member of the Dominican Order which maintained a Priory up in Mdina, the ancient walled capital of Malta surmounting the hill which overlooked Takali. Several times he came to us for dinner, really appreciating a good Australian-style meal after the surfeit of tomatoes, garlic and olives, the mainstay of Maltese meals in the Priory. Although 78 Wing had its own padre Chaplain Jim Payne, an Anglican minister, we had no priest to say Mass for the Catholics until Tom Markowski, a former Pole and one of our Engineering Officers, arranged for Father Klimeck to be appointed as Honorary Chaplain to say Sunday Mass in our small chapel, one of the numerous Nissen huts on base.

Jim Payne led a very busy life in the Wing. Apart from his regular chaplaincy duties on Sundays, he found his days taken up with social worker/counsellor assistance to the airmen, many of whom were young and far away from home for the first time. Being a sportsman and a prominent member of the 78 Wing cricket team, he was highly respected and extremely approachable to anybody with a problem. He was the first to hear from some of the airmen that a certain female 'entertainer', known for her crude and unmentionable stage act in one of the bars in the notorious Strait Street, had been approved by Immigration officials for migration to Australia. Through Jim's intervention the person's application was re-examined and Australia was saved from another undesirable alien. Jim can tell interesting stories about the times he spent as a surrogate parent, trying to reason with young single airmen whose hormonal compulsions were to get married as soon as possible. He did officiate at about 30 weddings, or liaised with local clergy for marriages in Catholic churches. On

one occasion a bride-to-be arrived on the island (from Australia, I think) suffering from appendicitis and in urgent need of surgery. As the Military Hospital at Mtarfa accepted only military personnel and their dependants, Jim performed a quick five-minute wedding and the bride had her operation legally, then after recuperation she appeared weeks later in her bridal finery for a 'proper' wedding ceremony, much to the bewilderment of the Maltese in the neighbourhood.

Nowhere in Malta was further than nine miles (15 km) from Valletta and Grand Harbour by road. Yet we knew of people who lived in their villages all their lives and never went by bus into Valletta. I wonder how thousands of Maltese regarded our vastness and distance when they arrived in Australia as migrants after World War II. From an island population of about 320,000 after the war, more than 40,000 migrated to Australia before 1960, settling in as 'New Australians' far easier than many other nationalities did. In years that followed I have met several former Maltese who were surprised that I knew more details about their homeland than they did, mainly because they migrated as small children with only vague memories of their own villages. I have kept regular contact with Mike Azzopardi, a Maltese gunner during the war, and our records clerk in the crew room. Thanks to his correspondence he has kept me abreast of the changes in Malta since our years there, including the effects of the withdrawal of the British forces, the island's independence and its venture into socialism.

Having no car, Joyce and I used the island's antiquated bus service for our journeys to Valletta and other parts. In the front near the driver hung the mandatory religious statue, usually of the Virgin Mary and acknowledged by all Maltese passengers blessing themselves as soon as they found a seat. And no wonder! The drivers hurled their derelict vehicles at crazy speeds along the narrow stone-walled lanes, blowing their horns and yelling abuse at any unfortunate pedestrian or donkey-cart that appeared in view. Many a time I dismounted from my bicycle to cringe against the wall while a gaily-painted Madonna-protected juggernaut thundered past.

When 78 Wing took over the airfield at Takali we conducted it as a standard RAAF station. It was not entirely Australian-manned as numerous Maltese were employed as stores hands, clerks, kitchen hands, firemen, cleaners and security guards. At least the messes served proper food, we administered the daily routine our way, and nobody had to salute a pennant on the bonnet of a car. The British forces still regarded us as 'colonials' yet we were regularly treated to visits by staff officers or VIPs who probably appreciated the decent meals we served. Our contact with the resident British units widened through the many sporting fixtures although , I suspect, they were probably relieved when we eventually went home. Our cricketers won the Governor's Cup three years running, which had never happened before. The Rugby team was top dog, our swimmers scooped the pool, and our tennis players won cups. Rifle shooting was popular with all British forces. As Officer-in-charge of Rifle Shooting I was elated that our 78 Wing team cleaned up a stack of trophies. Hardly a week elapsed without a match, indoors with the smallbore .22 or out on the main range with the standard .303 rifle.

As well as taking over a fully-operational base at Takali and keeping the numerous civilian employees, we inherited the resident dog, a sloppy old Boxer cross called Marcus. We were probably the only RAAF unit where, when the Warrant Officer (Disciplinary) 'Tiger' Lyons, called 'Markers' on our infrequent parades, out trotted an old brown dog. It was fairly difficult to keep a straight face. Marcus's teeth

had worn down considerably, no doubt caused by his habit of chomping on stones and bringing them into the Officers' Mess where he ceremoniously deposited them near somebody's feet. I suppose his worn teeth contributed to poor digestion of his food as he was responsible for the most offensive flatulence imaginable, and often when lying silently under or near a table where we were entertaining visiting officers.

The 78 Wing rifle shooters who scored many bulls-eyes in competition with British Forces in Malta.

During our 18 months at Takali we continued with regular squadron training, interspersed with frequent air defence exercises with or against British or American naval units or RAF squadrons detached to Malta for summer camps. I do not know how it was arranged, but for a month or so we flew groups of four across to Bizerte in Tunisia to operate with the French Air Force for a week at a time. They flew their own version of the Vampire, called a Mistral, from a base at Sidi Ahmed. In NATO forces the standard language used was English so we had no insurmountable problems working with the French, allowing for pronunciation differences. Social habits were far from similar. Where we never drank alcohol before flying, for lunch the French downed copious amounts of red wine which they did not regard as alcoholic. There was no mistaking their other favourite drink as alcoholic — Pernod nearly took my head off!

I befriended a young pilot named Henri Dumortier. Some months later when a detachment of the French Air Force came to Takali for a defence exercise I invited Henri to our flat for dinner. We obviously had a small communication breakdown as all four French pilots turned up at our front door, bringing bottles of wine. Somehow Joyce managed to concoct an adequate meal to satisfy the extra number — a sort of loaves and fishes job — and we enjoyed a happy night with our visitors. For them it was their first time in an Australian household.

French Air Force pilots from Bizerte in Tunisia being greeted by 78 Wing pilots at Takali, January 1954.
L to R: Reg Jones, a French pilot, Brian Nicolls, Brick Bradford, Vern Pennefather (almost hidden), John Myers, Bob Hunt, John Jacobs, Cec Sly, Les Reading, a visiting RAF officer, Stormy Fairweather, Jake Newham, Henri Dumortier (a French pilot), and Rod Hanstein.

On another occasion we participated in a NATO exercise called 'Shield One', the defence of Rome against intruders from the US 6th Fleet and RAF bombers from UK. We took four Vampires north over Sicily, past the smoking Stromboli volcano, to a temporary base at the then main airport for Rome called Ciampino. Conditions were comfortable at night in a motel, but working with Italian and French pilots out of a tented operations room at the far end of the airport inevitably brought on some hilarious incidents. As all spoken instructions in NATO were in English we should have had an advantage. However, the pronunciation by the Italian controllers made intercepts virtually hopeless. By the time we eventually understood the instructions to 'make Angels Two Zero, steer one six zero degrees', the target was long gone. Anyway, it was all good fun, and a spice in flying that was not available in Australia.

Mentioning 'good fun' reminds me that much of our flying, treated seriously for safety sake, was a joyful experience. Many a day we took off in a pair and climbed out in the brilliant sunshine over a sparkling blue Mediterranean, then separated to engage in a mock battle or a tailchase, zooming over, around or through the towering white cumulus clouds. I am unsure what we achieved but know that it was a great way to improve our handling of the Vampire and that it was an invigorating way of life for a young pilot finding out what he was capable of doing. It's all very well being audacious but a fighter pilot is of little value unless he is skilful and competent. To get the right balance you sometimes learn from your mistakes as well as from the example set by others. Which brings me to tell of one of my 'close shaves'.

Our many detachments to Idris in Libya were very popular as we tried to improve our rocketry and gunnery scores. The range at Tarhuna was about 15 miles (25 km) out in the desert, manned each day by a party of our groundstaff. After the Range Officer cleared us individually on to the range by radio we fired the four rockets on separate passes, being given the assessed error over the radio. Then we began the gunnery passes, firing bursts of one or two seconds at the hessian-type targets which were strung up between poles. When the guns stopped firing we made one more pass to check that all the hundred rounds had fired, then were cleared to return to base. Though not authorised, our favourite route home was to roar back along the main road at about 100 feet, encouraging the oncoming caravans of Bedouins, camels and donkeys to leap off into the roadside ditches, no doubt in sheer panic or rage.

One day my good sense was overwhelmed by absolute stupidity. On my 'Guns Clear' pass over the targets I rashly decided to do a roll but mishandled the manoeuvre. Coming out of the inverted stage of the roll I found myself pointed down at the desert instead of up at the sky. Somehow I pulled out at the bottom of the roll, missing the ground by inches and raising a huge cloud of dust with my jet efflux. With heart pounding I gingerly made my way back to base but at a very safe 1,000 feet. Later the Range Officer (Dogger Banks) wagged his finger at me for being so foolhardy and stupid. He had seen a crash about to happen and bent to pick up his first aid satchel, then decided that I would be long past needing first aid so just waited for the thump which, fortunately for me, did not happen.

One day two of us were sent from Takali to Idris to collect a supply of liquor for a Mess party. In those days we could buy Scotch for nine shillings sterling (about 90 cents Australian in today's currency) and gin or brandy for six shillings a bottle. I purchased the listed stock from the Officers' Mess, transported it to the tarmac and was loading it into the nooks and crannies of our Vampires when along drove the

recently-arrived RAF Wing Commander to ask what I was doing. He was enraged to find that the bloody Australians were stocking up on grog from his station and he refused to let me take it away. As a Pilot Officer I could hardly decline his instruction. When I returned to Takali empty-handed, so to speak, our Group Captain Brian Eaton was livid. He called Brian Nicholls to come with him, leapt into his Vampire, flew across to Idris and confronted the new Officer Commanding with a lecture on maintaining proper Commonwealth relations. He brought back all the bottles we had paid for and we had no further trouble after that.

The end of 1953 again brought the wintry gales and storms, making life difficult and flying hazardous. However, we survived the frights and all the festive season social functions and launched into 1954 which left some indelible memories. Our one disaster during the years in Malta occurred in January. For air-to-air gunnery we fired at a banner target towed by one of our Meteors, The banner was of nylon mesh like shadecloth, about the length and width of a cricket pitch, and was hooked to the Meteor by a line several hundred yards (metres) long. Sometimes the banner tow line parted on take-off so the trick was to lift the Meteor off the ground and climb steeply to minimise the distance the banner dragged along the runway. As the towing pilot used the front seat, the OC had given permission for any airman who wanted a ride to go along as passenger in the rear seat. On 18 January Bob Hunt flew off the tow aircraft with passenger LAC Max Hennessy, an airman from the messing staff who was not really keen to fly but went along more or less after a dare by his mates.

The Meteor lifted off, started the usual steep climb to maybe 200 feet, dropped one wing then the other, and mushed rapidly to the ground with a horrifying thump. It skidded across the airfield towards the perimeter, until stopped by a pile of dirt alongside a ditch and flipped on to its back, spilt fuel burning like a bonfire. As it was customary not to start up our Vampires until the Meteor and banner were safely away, a group of us standing on the flight line witnessed every second of the disaster. We ran across the airfield, reaching the blazing wreck even before the arrival of the crash wagon which had to go the long way round to bypass the piles of rubble. It is amazing how humans in times of saving life can respond with unknown energy and resourcefulness. One wing had burnt away, enabling about six of us to lift up the other wingtip high enough to roll the fuselage over, allowing the crash crew to extract the pilot who was hanging upside down in the shattered cockpit. The station photographer managed to take a graphic shot of the rescue, recording a remarkable act of desperation. Then the wing root burnt through, the fuselage rolled down and there was nothing more we could do to maintain access to the cockpit area. After the fire was extinguished and a crane lifted the wreck, it was found that the passenger had died on impact. Bob Hunt was dragged out with his wrist almost severed. Thanks to the skill of our doctor Tim Downey, and a lot of surgery later, Bob eventually regained use of his hand and transferred to the Air Defence category. As far as I can recall, the crash was attributed to the passenger being alarmed by the steepness of the initial climb, grabbing the rear control column and stalling the aircraft. In the Air Force one has to accept that we have an occasional crash with possible loss of life. After the initial shock you think, 'It could have been me'.

78 Wing pilots at Takali in 1954.

Standing: Bob Hunt, Vic Oborn, Frank Jordan, Brian Nicholls, John Myers, John Jacobs, Vern Pennefather, Reg Jones, Cec Sly, Barry Weymouth, Keith Meggs.
Seated: Stormy Fairweather, Brick Bradford, Doug Hurditch, Bay Adams, OC Brian Eaton, Geoff Newstead, Ken Andrews, Bill Horsman, Les Reading

Our one other loss during the tour was Squadron Leader Ron Sharkie, Senior Equipment Officer in Base Squadron. After developing a terminal illness he eventually left for Australia with his family on an RAF Hastings transport but unfortunately died in hospital at Singapore on the way home. I did not know him very well but the 'grocers' and 'box packers' in Equipment Section had great respect for him. On the invitation of his subordinates he attended the Section Christmas party in 1953 at one of the 'night clubs' in the almost sleazy part of Valletta known as 'The Ghut' to sailors from all over the world. After dancing with a most attractive young lass, he was terribly embarrassed when his airmen disclosed to him that his dancing partner was a transvestite.

Base photographer Garry Sebastian took this dramatic shot of the attempt to rescue the occupants of the crashed Meteor at Takali on 18 January 1954.

We may have been allotted a replacement Meteor, but I certainly recall the arrival of a Vampire T11, the first side-by-side trainer version. The fuselage of the fighter version had been widened a little — but not enough — and two seats jammed in. It was a very tight squeeze for two pilots, but at least was more useful than the Meteor for practising instrument flying and being tested for a rating. Years later we built the trainer version of the Vampire in Australia, first with fixed seats, then with ejection seats, as the Mark 35A.

The important festive event of 1954 was the visit by Queen Elizabeth, the Duke of Edinburgh and their two small children. Our boss led a flypast of 56 aircraft (RN, RNZAF and us) over the Royal Yacht Britannia as it arrived in Grand Harbour so we pilots in the formation did not, as usual, see anything of the event. In close formations such as this, with wingtips not far apart, all pilots have their attention

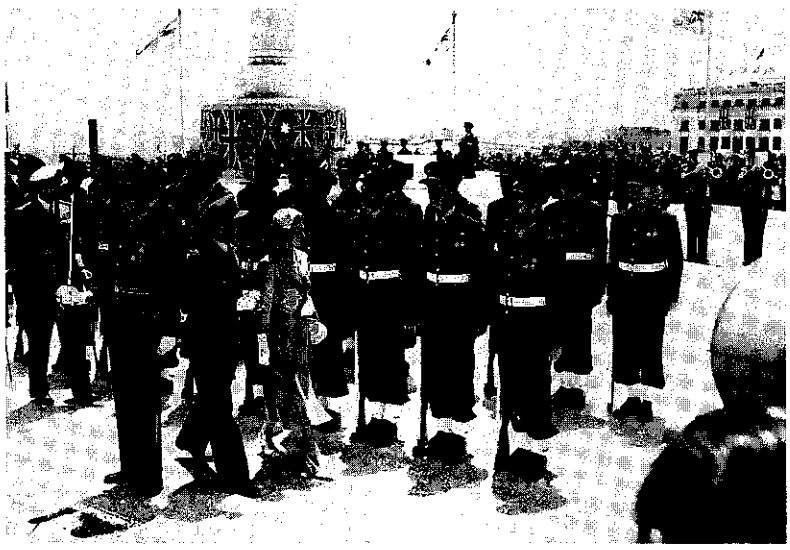
totally fixed on the leader. It is neither safe nor wise (nor permitted) to look away at the scenery. The highlight of Her Majesty's visit was the Combined Services Parade at Floriana in which 78 Wing participated with a large contingent. In those days we were still wearing the original RAAF dark blue uniform. With their white belts, rifle slings and gaiters, our airmen on parade created an admirable impression on the thousands of viewers and, we heard later, earned favourable comment from Her Majesty. Joyce and I had our own glimpse of the Royal party when they drove to the Governor's Palace in San Anton Gardens across the road from our flat.

Lady Mountbatten and Her Majesty with the Royal Children, in Malta, 4 May 1954.

Mentioning formation flypasts reminds me of the many occasions that we were tasked to put up four, eight or 12 Vamps, usually to mark the arrival of a prominent personage. Our first in 1954 was a difficult one, throttled right back to stay alongside an Ambassador aircraft of British European Airways carrying the Duke of Edinburgh. Most formations we flew at our normal speed of 250 knots, as on the day we made a low pass over the *Himalaya* which was carrying home to UK Air Marshal Hardman at the end of his tour as Chief of Air Staff of the RAAF. I can still hear the reassuring voice of our leader Brian Eaton as we battled blustery conditions and struggled to hold tight formation, 'Hang in there, chaps. She'll be apples'.

We were glad to have San Anton Gardens so close. Not only an oasis of greenery on the drab rocky island, the Gardens were a convenient protected area for pushing Jennifer's stroller on our daily walks. By mid-year she was standing and trying to walk, about the same time that Amy and a friend visited us for a week during their hitch-hiking tour round Europe. As I was one of the few junior officers married, our home was popular with the 'singlies' who frequently came for meals as a change from the Mess. Vern was married by this time. Cec Sly and Barry Weymouth were regular visitors, and we were very grateful to Cec for the many times he drove us to social events or on picnics in his new Vauxhall Velox.

Having been to England for the Coronation, most of us were eager to revisit in the time remaining. Some flew across to Britain, bought cars and drove back through Europe, shipping the car on the *Star of Malta* for the final leg from the Sicilian port of Syracuse. Joyce and I decided to have a holiday in England in July, after the return of the Wing from our second detachment to Cyprus for Armament training. At the Armament Practice School we repeated all the training sorties for improving our gunnery, rocketry and bombing. This time we had Meteors instead of Beaufighters to tow the banner targets, as well as a quota of towed target gliders. My log book shows two gliders damaged, two shot down.



Her Majesty inspecting the RAAF Guard of Honour at the unveiling of the Commonwealth Air Force Memorial in Malta, May 1954. The RAAF officer in the Guard is Pilot Officer Jake Newham who became our Chief of the Air Staff in 1985.

Cyprus in Summer was a lovely place to visit, the swimming beaches being our favourite destinations at weekends. We knew that two cultures comprised the Cypriot community, Greek and Turkish, but we found all people friendly and obliging and we never once detected the undercurrent of unrest which led to the turbulent years that followed. In our time there who could have envisaged the upheaval which was to mark the next two decades? Although Cyprus had been officially a British Crown Colony since 1925, the authorities were continually bothered by a disruptive element advocating Enosis (union with Greece). In 1955 violence erupted with the emergence of a pro-Enosis terrorist organisation called EOKA, supported by a powerful anti-British popular movement led by Archbishop Makarios, head of the Cypriot Orthodox Church. Britain deported Makarios to the Seychelles but could not prevent further hostilities, eventually granting independence to Cyprus in 1959 and allowing Makarios to return as the first president. Unfortunately the growing inter-communal conflict between the Greek and Turkish cultures eventually brought about the collapse of the Government. A coup led by one of the Enosis hardliners alarmed Turkey which leapt in to assure the rights of Turkish Cypriots by landing an invasion force on the north coast in 1974 and securing the northern third of the island which they call The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Only the southern part (occupied by the Greek

Cypriots) is recognised internationally as the Republic of Cyprus. The standoff continues between north and south, with frequent violence and loss of life, all efforts by United Nations to resolve the dispute having failed. I appreciate how privileged we were to know that lovely island in peaceful times.

Within the Wing we developed a scheme for married people holidaying in England to leave their children with other families. Jennifer stayed with the Ramsays while we were away. Later on we minded the Jones children and Jane Ramsay while the two sets of parents took their holiday. Our England trip in July 1954 had a mixed-up start. I arranged a flight in a Hastings with an RAF pilot friend, and Joyce flew across in an Elizabethan of British European Airways. Unfortunately the Hastings was delayed a day through an unserviceability so I actually arrived in London after Joyce instead of ahead of her. She had the awkward situation of not being met at London Airport, having to find her way to Nuffield House (a hostel for junior officers in Victoria near Buckingham Palace) and then convincing the manager that she was a legitimate guest. We had an action-packed week in London, exploring all the tourist sights and seeing a different type of show each night — drama, musical, vaudeville, etc. For the second week we elected to bus to Exeter from where we made daily excursions through Devon and Cornwall. We enjoyed that week, finding lovely old historical places such as Clovelly, Ilfracombe, Lynmouth, Tintagel and Dartmouth, the only flaw being that we had to wear our raincoats the whole time. And this in mid-summer!

78 Wing pilots examining air-to-air cine film after a training sortie at the RAF Armament Practice School at Nicosia in Cyprus. L to R: John Myers, John Jacobs, Reg Jones, Cec Sly.

Our remaining six months in Malta seemed to pass very quickly, particularly after being advised that the Wing would return to Australia the following January. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1954 called for the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez Canal so we also were no longer needed in the theatre. This no doubt suited the

authorities in Australia who were planning for RAAF participation in the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve in Malaya/Singapore.

Nevertheless, our training continued at normal pace throughout the rest of the year. Our biggest exercise was a three-day DXM (Defence Exercise Malta) when we defended against United States Navy Neptunes, Banshees, Cougars and Skyraiders, and even made simulated attacks on the US Marines landing a force at St Paul's Bay. Our program of practice intercepts with the RAF defence radar continued at frequent intervals, but the interesting and unusual missions were the Navy Co-op exercises with cruisers of the Royal Navy, such as HMS *Glasgow*. These ships carried their own surveillance radar and controllers. A pair of Vampires would be detailed to fly a patrol over the ship which then vectored us to intercept an incoming target — other Vampires or maybe Naval aircraft. At the time the Royal Navy also employed the Guppy version of the Skyraider, with its large radome slung beneath the fuselage. Usually operating at very low level, the controller in the rear seat of the Skyraider would direct us on to targets approaching low over the sea. Sometimes these missions became a little hazardous on account of the thick haze over the glassy sea, often caused by dust blown north from the Libyan desert. It took every bit of concentration to fly accurate headings, look ahead for the target and not fly into the sea in such restricted visibility when even the horizon was indistinct.

Mdina – silent city on the hill.

Our flying program included further detachments to Idris for weapons training, mainly for the purpose of our attaining an armament categorisation before we departed for Australia. I was pleased to reach an Above Average standard in Gunnery and Bombing, and had even scored Exceptional in these phases at the Armament Practice School at Nicosia. On the other hand I could never score better than Average in Rocketry. Considering the regularity of our training we must have been the best-prepared day fighter units in the Commonwealth. The emphasis was certainly on the 'day' factor as we had no night capability at all. Night flying, in fact, was strictly

avoided as being too risky, the Vampire having no navigation aids and our training area being totally out to sea. We did try night flying a few times, once at Halfar and twice at Idris. On the occasion at Halfar the senior pilots flew off first, in the last of the daylight, returning in the dark, landing too far down the runway and too fast, and burning out the brakes. After repair and refuelling the juniors went off in the total blackness but managed to return without incident, though ensuring during the 40 minutes that we never lost sight of the island's lights. Flying out of Idris at night, over the absolute blackness of the desert, did nothing for one's peace of mind either. We were flight-planned to do a sort of three-legged route out into the desert and back to Idris. Vic Oborn confessed many years later that he had no intention of heading off into the desert blackness at 20,000 feet at night, so he climbed to 25,000 feet and circled above Idris for the programmed 40 minutes, then landed — and nobody was any wiser. Night flying at Takali was never even suggested. Our single runway was narrow and bumpy with a hill half way along, though after a while we resident users became accustomed to it. We always found it amusing to watch visiting aircraft arrive, such as an RAF Meteor squadron from England. Shortly after touch-down the visiting pilot suddenly realised that he could not see much more runway ahead so jammed on the brakes, only to find when he reached the crest that there was still half a runway remaining down the far slope of our hill.

I always enjoyed the detachments to Libya, such a pleasant change after the glare of the bare rocky Maltese countryside. Although most of the population were Arabs, the owners of the prosperous citrus orchards were Italian families, several of whom I met while travelling around in a Landrover with our 'mad major', the British Army Major attached to 78 Wing as Ground Liaison Officer. Tripoli was a modern city with white-painted buildings, the Royal Palace and the Casino, but the fascinating section was the Old Town with its turbaned vendors selling their wares and foodstuffs in the market place. Occasionally we went out to the USAF base at Wheelus Field to have a look at a Sabre or to buy goods at their Post Exchange (PX). About an hour's drive to the south the road wound up into the mountains to a place called Garian, a summer retreat favoured by Mussolini. There I saw troglodytes for the first time, a tribe of people living in caves in the mountain. West from Tripoli along the coast we visited the ruins of ancient Sobratha, once a thriving Roman port but now an archaeological attraction in even better condition than the ruins of Pompeii. The RAF Station at Idris had more than enough tarmac facilities and hangar space for our needs, as well as comfortable amenities. I remember finding a small chameleon one day near the swimming pool and later taking him back to Malta where he lived for some time in our weed-covered back yard. He was a fascinating fellow, able to change his skin colour to blend in with leaves or soil, having prehensile toes, and eyes like tapioca which moved independently as he searched for prey. When he spied an insect he stalked it slowly and silently, then darted out a coiled tongue as long as his body, and quicker than a flash he had a meal.

The desert was not always dry and dusty. In winter months the coastal area had its share of storms, a line of severe weather hitting us one day towards the end of a session on the Tarhuna range. When I landed in heavy rain I taxied in and shut down the engine but could not open the canopy while the rain poured down. Brian Nicholls landed behind me, by which time the deluge had flooded the runway several inches deep. The spray from his nose wheel deflected into his air intakes, extinguishing the fire in his jet engine and leaving him sitting powerless in the middle of the runway

until an airman took out a tractor to tow him back to the tarmac. While in Libya we engaged in an Army Co-op exercise with a British Cavalry unit (14/20 Kings Hussars) out in the desert but with little effectiveness as their camouflaged Comet tanks, dug into the desert floor, were rather difficult to locate. This particular unit also had the better of us when we visited their headquarters at Zavia — not only were they seasoned drinkers but they beat us soundly on the hockey field; they called it a sports ground but it was just an expanse of desert cleared of stones! I remember on our final departure from Idris as a squadron we made a low pass over Zavia, several miles along the coast, and on the command of Les Reading lowered our flaps to release rolls and rolls of toilet paper which we had loaded into place before start-up.

Towards the end of 1954 Brian Eaton left on posting to London, Geoff Newstead became OC Wing and Bay Adams (grounded for medical reasons) took command of 378 Squadron. By this time Ken Andrews had returned to Australia, Bill Horsman was CO 75 Squadron, and Brick Bradford appointed CO 76 Squadron. While we were at Takali a few new pilots arrived, most having served with 77 Squadron during its final months in Korea. Bill Horsman had the distinction of forming the first jet aerobatic team in the RAAF when four of us performed a few basic manoeuvres in formation as a display. Bill and Bay Adams earned even greater distinction, the pair winning the Imshi Mason Trophy as the champion air-to-air gunners in the Middle East Air Force. At a parade at Takali one day the trophy was presented personally to the two aces by the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Air Force, Air Marshal Sir Claude Pelly.

Towards the end of 1954 we entered the 78 Wing team in the annual rifle shooting competition run by the RAF. We won the team event and our fellows collected 14 cups. I was delighted to take out the trophy for highest-scoring officer.

Wing activities wound down by December as we had to return the aircraft to the RAF and pack all RAAF equipment for shipment to Australia. Our final official event was the Wing parade and flypast reviewed by Governor Sir Robert Laycock, although we found plenty of excuses for Mess socials and farewells to our many British friends. As an Australian contingent we had enlarged considerably since our arrival in July 1952. Approximately 60 Wing fellows were married during the tour, to English, Maltese and Australian lasses, and about 40 children were born there, providing our authorities with a major problem getting us home.

When our postings arrived I was surprised to learn that I was headed for No. 1 Air Trials Unit at Woomera. Some of the other pilots were off to become instructors or to be staff officers but I expected that, with over 900 flying hours, mostly on jets, I would stay in the fighter world. I should have known by then that obvious conclusions do not apply in the RAAF. Anyway, going home was something definite to look forward to, especially as Jennifer was then 17 months old, still unseen by her grandparents. After another chilly damp Christmas we packed up and departed Malta on the *Stratheden* on 4 January 1955. Most of the married SNCOs followed a few days later on the *Strathaird,* and the bulk of the single men on the *New Australia.* Months later I heard that one of our young replacement pilots Flight Sergeant Evan Rees was lost off the *New Australia,* apparently having fallen overboard unnoticed one night.

So this wonderful posting came to an end. During the years some of our people were posted home and replaced by others, but on the whole most of us were there for the entire tour. That situation generated a sense of esprit de corps within the

Wing that I have never since experienced. I believe that it was because we felt we were an outpost of Australia, eager to show that the RAAF was a top force in all respects, not to be written off as 'those colonials'. There is no doubt that Brian Eaton inspired a tremendous loyalty within the Wing. He was a real leader in the air and on the ground. I saw him annoyed at events or people, but never knew him to exhibit bad temper or dither around for want of a decision. A very positive man in every respect, he set an example to all of us on how to conduct ourselves as ambassadors of Australia. The armed services of Britain and the other nations with whom we exercised came to recognise our efficiency, in the air and on the ground. A major reason for our airborne successes was the high level of aircraft serviceability maintained throughout our tour. At about 70 per cent it was by far the best in the theatre, a great credit to Jack Kane's squadron of technical tradesmen — the 'framies, greasers and queer trades'. Our numerous vehicles with their distinctive 78 Wing badge were well known all over the island, even though Transport Officer Ray Tindall preferred to see them nicely lined up and polished. He used to say that it would be a great Air Force if it weren't for aircrew who were always requisitioning his vehicles. However, the performance of these aircrew during all our exercises and deployments certainly earned the respect of our Pommie friends, many probably still thinking as we left Malta that we were a wild and unorthodox bunch of cowboys. That may have been so but I, for one, having begun the tour as a naive and inexperienced young Sergeant, derived immense benefit from the broad range of training, exchanges and deployments impossible to replicate back in Australia. As our first taste of overseas travel, that tour for Joyce and me was one of the most memorable episodes of our lives. We made friendships then which continue to this day, even if we see one another only at the 78 Wing Reunions held every two or three years. It was a good time to be a junior pilot and a young married.

In 1952 we were sent to the Mediterranean to train for defence of the Suez Canal against a perceived Communist threat. I sometimes wonder what would have been our fate if something similar to the events of 1956 had occurred during our tour of Malta. In mid-1956 when Britain and France declined to assist Egypt with the construction of the Aswan Dam, Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. Britain and France waged a four-day attack on Egypt, halted only after condemnation by United Nations and criticism by the United States. Egypt retaliated by sinking 40 ships in the Canal. Would we have been deployed to Cyprus to assist British forces attacking Egyptian targets in the Canal Zone, or would the Australian Government have refused to allow 78 Wing involvement in such altered circumstances?

CHAPTER FIVE

Desert Secrecy

Our voyage from Malta to Australia on the *Stratheden*, a cruise liner not a migrant ship, occupied all of January 1955. Many passengers paid handsomely for this cruise but we found shipboard life rather monotonous and boring, and were glad of the short stops at Aden, Bombay, Colombo and Fremantle. My main recollection of Fremantle was seeing an FJ Holden for the first time. As I was posted to Woomera in South Australia, the Air Force expected us to disembark at the nearest port of call, Melbourne. Our household possessions were unloaded there and put into storage but we paid to travel on to Brisbane by ship. On arrival at Sydney the *Stratheden* was unable to proceed further on account of a waterfront strike so we packed our bags in a hurry and carried on to Brisbane by train, arriving in early February, glad to meet our families and friends again and to show off our Jennifer. I must have accumulated a lot of leave as we spent the next six weeks either at Sandgate with Joyce's folks or in Toowoomba helping my parents settle in to a rented house. My school-principal father had just been transferred from Warwick to start a new high school at Harristown.

Unexpectedly, during the leave period, I received a telegram directing me to report to No. 2 Squadron at Amberley, near Ipswich, to do a conversion on to the Canberra bomber before heading off on my posting to Woomera. On arrival at Amberley I found that 2 Squadron (commanded by Peter Raw) was away in Darwin for a month on tropical trials of the newly-acquired Canberras, so I wasted the next three weeks waiting for them to return. Apart from some Lincoln flights and a few passenger trips in Canberras of 6 Squadron, I had little to fill my time. One sad task was as a pallbearer at a funeral after a tragic crash on Good Friday. A Lincoln from Townsville flew all night to bring a nurse and a seriously ill baby to Brisbane. They apparently erred in navigation as in the pre-dawn darkness the aircraft slammed into Mt Superbus, on the Great Dividing Range, killing all six. As I recall, the explanation was that the crew saw the lights of a city, mistook it for Toowoomba and turned east to descend towards Brisbane, when they were actually over Warwick, 50 miles further south.

My allotted time was fast running out when 2 Squadron returned to Amberley. The RAF exchange officer, Flight Lieutenant Tony Caillard, gave me as much tuition as possible in the remaining time. In those days we had no trainer version so I did three rides sitting in the jump seat watching how Tony flew the Canberra, then we swapped seats while he watched me do the flying. The pilot in the cockpit of a Canberra and the navigator in his compartment behind both have ejection seats. A passenger or observer could be carried on a metal fold-down seat to the right of the pilot and blocking the aisle used by the navigator to move forward to his prone bomb-aiming position in the nose. In an emergency the passenger was supposed to clip on

his parachute, jettison the small entrance door and dive out before the two crew members ejected. Hence the term 'jump seat'. In the 25 years that the RAAF operated the Canberra I do not remember that any passenger had to abandon the aircraft this way. My Canberra conversion therefore comprised 12 hours, four of them watching, eight of them actually piloting, hardly enough to qualify as 'complete'. However, Tony was a competent instructor who ensured that I fully appreciated the factors in flying safely with one engine out. (After my Meteor experience at Halfar I certainly was familiar with the hazards of incorrect asymmetric flight). The people at Amberley were very mindful of proper single-engine handling after a tragic crash some months earlier when a pilot practising one-engine circuits lost control at low speed, the Canberra rolling inverted and exploding in the middle of the airfield.

The time came to head off to Woomera, leaving Joyce and Jennifer to spend time with her parents or mine until I obtained a married quarter. It was a long, tiring journey in those days. I had to sit up in the train all night to Sydney, wait all day, sit up overnight again to Melbourne, wait another day, then sit up another night in the Overland to Adelaide, and find my way to the base at Edinburgh Field, near Salisbury, north of Adelaide. After waiting there the weekend I picked up a ride in an Avro Anson to Woomera, about 220 miles north in the South Australian desert, arriving on 2 May in time for a miserable winter. There is no scenic landscape at Woomera, just an endless flat horizon, red earth, stunted scrub and dried-up salt lakes.

In those days everything about Woomera was extremely hush-hush. The British and Australian Governments were actively engaged in dozens of trials and testing programs on bombs, missiles, rockets, and other items of armament, and we were never told anything unless we had a 'need to know'. Even if we asked questions out of sheer interest or curiosity, the response was often a stony glare meaning, 'How dare you ask!' On arrival at Woomera every one's personal camera was confiscated and locked away, so I have no photographs of our various aircraft or of the specialised equipment on trial. Woomera Village was a complete township with houses, shops, churches, sporting complexes, clubs and messes for the single men. Service people were in the minority as most of the working population consisted of engineers, scientists and various other boffins and technicians, engaged in the development of weapons and their subsequent trials. Air Trials Unit provided the crews to fly the airborne trials, Army officers were associated with the testing of missiles which might eventually come into Army service, and a few Navy types monitored the development of weapons for ships. Although Australians administered the village affairs and provided the work force at the airfield and out on the various ranges, it was obvious on my arrival that the managers and directors of the numerous trials programs had come from British defence establishments.

My first disappointment was being told that no married quarters would be available in the foreseeable future. As everything at Woomera was government-owned, there were no privately owned houses to rent. I had left my two girls in Toowoomba with my parents, fully expecting that they could join me in a short while. As Joyce was pregnant my anxiety increased as weeks passed without prospect of a house. The second blow was to find that there was so little to do. We had probably 15 pilots in ATU, most sitting around the crew room day after day, waiting for a task or for the weather to improve to permit tasks to be flown. In spite of being diverted specifically to Amberley to learn to fly the Canberra, I found other Canberra pilots with much more experience than I. In my four months of winter at Woomera I flew

only fourteen hours on the Canberra, half of that on difficult bomb-dropping trials and the rest on ferry jobs. 'Ferrying' meant taking aircraft to other bases for special servicing or modification, or carrying senior officers on official duty, a much faster service for them than travelling by civil airline.

ATU employed a variety of Australian and British aircraft on trials of equipment or for launching of weapons or for searching the range for expended rockets after test launches. Having a little Meteor experience in Malta I was fortunate to log a few hours in the Mark 7 and the Mark 11 night-fighter version, but do not recall making any real contribution to the trials program. An emergency flight to Edinburgh for some oxygen equipment for the hospital was the only time my Meteor hours were useful. We had a Sabre which was solely flown by Viv Shearn on trials of new air-to-air missiles, and a couple of rarely-flown Mustangs which I wanted to check out again but to no avail. Occasionally I was detailed as second pilot in a Lincoln although my duties rarely extended past retracting the undercarriage or lowering the flaps when told by the captain. One day I accompanied the CO, Wing Commander Frank Schaaf, to Emu, the site of the first atom bomb test in Australia. It was a weird feeling to look down on a the wide blackened circle in the vast empty desert, knowing that something like the Hiroshima bomb had been detonated there. Another time Viv Shearn was flying a Lincoln on a photographic task over 'E' Range, with me as second pilot. When the job was completed he amused himself by returning to Woomera airfield along the main road below telephone pole height! I think that low flying is fun when I am in control but I get a bit twitchy when others indulge.

For some specialised trials ATU used a few RAF aircraft flown out from UK. One I was glad not to fly in was an old black Lincoln fitted with Mamba turbo-prop engines to enable it to climb above 30,000 feet for bomb-drop trials. The specially-trained crews did not like it as they were not fitted out with appropriate protective clothing for an un-pressurised aircraft at high altitude. In my time at ATU the Canberras took over the bomb trials at 30,000 feet and above. Even these missions were fraught with difficulties as we had to crab along the line of 'A' Range with a jet stream of 200 knots on our beam. We had special cameras fitted to the Canberra to record any undesirable performance by the bomb when it was released from the bomb bay — whether it rotated or tumbled, or even bounced back on a cushion of air into the bomb bay. At 48,000 feet, carrying a full load of 1,000-pound bombs, the Canberra was wallowing along at the lower limit of its performance, almost at stalling speed, not a very comfortable situation. I have no idea whether the particular equipment we were testing was ever used in RAF bombers. Certainly we had no such bomb-release gear in our RAAF Canberra force at Amberley during the 1950s.

In July I was fortunate to get a weekend in Toowoomba with my family when we took a Lincoln engine to Amberley for an overhaul. When the engine was hoisted up into the bomb bay of one of the old RAF Lincolns we could not close the bomb doors, so took them off. I remember the startled expressions on the faces of the marshalling crew at Amberley when we taxied in this faded battered black Lincoln with an engine protruding from its belly like a ghastly hernia. As Joyce was well advanced in pregnancy by this time it was too late for her to travel even if I had been allocated a house at Woomera. She had booked into Toowoomba Hospital and I counted on getting leave to join her in September when the baby was due. She and Jennifer were both well, but not happy about the enforced separation at this important

time. Maybe I would willingly have accepted the situation if I felt that my presence at Woomera was essential.

The Auster was the only other type of aircraft that I flew there. It was a small cabin aircraft with a performance similar to that of a Tiger Moth. Usually my task was to take the Paymaster out to Evetts Field, about 20 miles away at the Range Head where missiles were fired in a north-westerly direction into the empty centre of Australia. Actually it was not really empty at all, as I found out one day. I was detailed to take the Range Safety Officer, Tony Jay, to visit four homesteads in the vast range area. This was the first time I had to land an aircraft (and one still strange to me) in a small paddock instead of an airstrip. At one property the landing strip was a cattle race between two fences. With my inexperience in the Auster, my hairy landings must have petrified my passenger. I was embarrassed later to find that Tony Jay was a former RAF Wing Commander fighter pilot.

Some of the pilots at ATU comprised Target Flight which operated out at Evetts Field on the development of Jindivik, the Australian-designed and -built pilotless target aircraft. I believe that eventually Jindivik evolved into a reliable and exportable product, but the early model in the 1950s must have tried the patience and determination of all those involved in its development. Jindy had no undercarriage. It rested on a trolley until it attained flying speed, one pilot trying by radio control to keep it heading straight down the runway, another out to the side responsible for lift-off. If it actually achieved lift-off without careering off into the scrub in a cloud of dust, the next problem was to keep it aloft despite the vagaries of the remote-control system which tried to turn it into an air-to-surface missile. I remember a few (but rare) celebrations in the Mess by members of Target Flight when Jindy's technical defects were conquered, sufficiently long enough to bring it back to land on its skid.

At Woomera that winter I renewed friendship with Eric Kluukeri, another Queenslander who started on our initial course at Point Cook but went off to East Sale to become a navigator. Although he was married to a nursing sister in the hospital he was also waiting for allocation of a married quarter. We started a 'keep fit' program together and he also taught me the rudiments of driving in his car. It may seem strange that I had logged 1,000 flying hours, most in jets, yet had never learned to drive, mainly because I could not afford to buy a car, and none of the few people I knew who owned one had offered to teach me. Some folk who knew that we were flying bomb trials up to 48,000 feet would ask, 'What's it like being so far up?' Eric pretended to consider the question for a few moments then replied with a profound observation, 'You know — the Earth IS round!' When asked what it was like to fly as a navigator in a Canberra, Eric defined it as thrilling as riding in the boot of a Holden. Which was a reasonable assessment as the navigator's cramped compartment behind the pilot offered no view of the world except through a tiny window in the left wall, about the size of a sheet of note paper.

Apart from sporting activities, most of my spare time I spent studying in my Single Officers quarters. As a Flying Officer I had to pass the B Exam to qualify for further promotion and this was the appropriate time to do the necessary preparation on the five subjects. Those of our unit sitting for promotion exams had to fly down to Mallala, the nearest RAAF station, for the scheduled week early in September. The old runways at Mallala, about 50 miles (80 kilometres) north of Adelaide, are used these days as a car-racing circuit. In the midst of my exam week Wing Commander Schaaf phoned from Woomera to inquire if I would take a posting to Amberley. He

had been asked if he could release any Canberra pilots to fill vacancies in 2 Squadron and he very thoughtfully nominated me, knowing how unsettling it was for me to have no accommodation for my family in Woomera. Of course I accepted the proposal in a flash but had to set aside my elation to concentrate on the remaining exams. As soon as that week ended I returned to Woomera, packed my belongings and headed off on 12 September on the long, reverse three-day train trip back to Queensland.

Imagine my surprise and delight to hear, on arrival in Brisbane on 16 September, that Christopher Allerton had been born in Toowoomba Hospital on 13th. Joyce was grateful that my Dad substituted for me in driving her to hospital at 2 am, when she felt she could not wait until daylight. In those days, new mothers were very strictly controlled in the maternity wards. Bed-rest for eight-to-ten days, and the baby brought in from the nursery for a feed only when the nursing staff permitted. On the day we brought Christopher home, I was late arriving with his clothing. Joyce was very upset as the sister-in-charge, declaring that we should have checked out by 10 am, callously moved him out of the nursery, leaving him bundled up in an old bunny rug in a corner of the bench like some unwanted goods. He did not settle down well, slept all day and cried all night, causing tension in the Grandparents' household, until Joyce found that he was in need of bottled milk as a supplement.

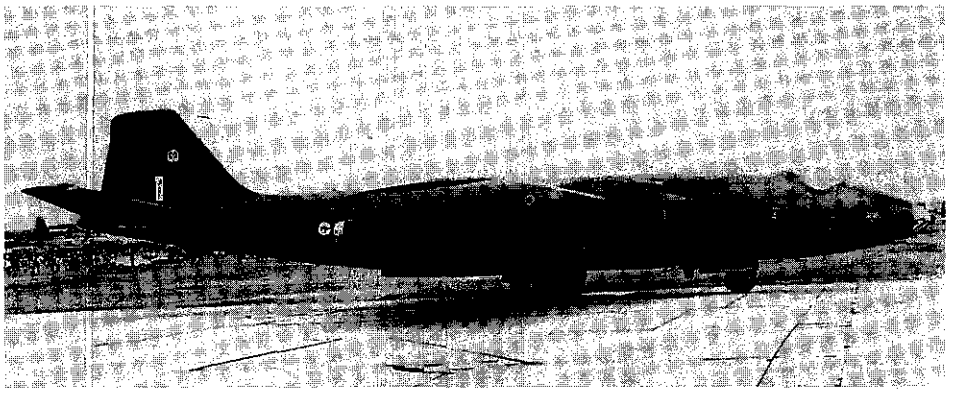
We were very thankful to be welcomed in my parents' home but felt an urgent need to establish ourselves as a family as soon as we could manage it. Soon after Christopher's baptism on 24 September, with my Aunt Joan and my brother Bruce as godparents, we purchased our first car, a new Ford Prefect, from the Ford dealer in Toowoomba. After I paid over the money (saved thanks to my enforced exile at Woomera), the salesman asked if I had a licence. 'No', I replied, 'Not yet'. 'That's OK', he said. 'We'll pop up to the police station and get one'. Though unfamiliar with the clutch and accelerator, I managed to drive my new Prefect to the police station without any catastrophes. 'Gooday, Jack', said the sergeant of police. 'What can I do for you?' 'This young fellow needs a drivers licence', said Jack. 'Can he drive?' asked the sergeant. 'Well, he drove here OK', replied Jack. 'Good enough', was the sergeant's response. 'Here's your licence. That'll be £5.' That no doubt sounds scandalous, but I wasn't a completely ignorant driver and potential road menace as I had my first driver's licence back in 1949 when I used to ride my Harley Davidson motor cycle from East Brisbane out to Oxley to do my courting.

Now equipped with our own brand-new transport, we drove to Ipswich to look for a house to rent, aiming to be installed before I reported to Amberley. We found a flat, actually half of an old Queenslander (a weather-board house on high stilts), and arranged for our few possessions to be delivered from storage in Melbourne. I was glad to leave Woomera behind, regarding that posting as generally a waste of time and an irritation to be away from Joyce when I was needed. I always considered that the trials that Joyce endured during those four months were more stressful than any trials I flew at Woomera.

CHAPTER SIX

The Bombs Away Years

On my arrival at Amberley on 10 October 1955 the 2 Squadron people were amused to see me back so soon after my short spell there in April. As the Canberra had not long been introduced into the RAAF, I felt very privileged to become one of the early pilots in 2 Squadron, not appreciating for some time that I had joined a squadron with a very distinguished record. 2 Squadron was the second squadron of the Australian Flying Corps during World War I, operating with great distinction in France by destroying nearly 200 German aircraft in aerial combat. During World War II the squadron again performed continuously in the South West Pacific theatre, equipped with Avro Anson, Lockheed Hudson, Bristol Beaufort and North American Mitchell aircraft. After the war, 2 Squadron became an element of 82 Wing, operating Lincoln bombers from Amberley until the gradual introduction of the Australian-built Canberra during 1954. In Singapore 1 Squadron continued to fly the Lincolns as bombers, and later a number of them were lengthened and used in the maritime reconnaissance role by 10 Squadron in Townsville. As crew conversions and operational familiarisation exercises in the Canberra were under way during 1954 and into the beginning of 1955, 2 Squadron was not long beyond the trials stage when I joined in October.



A Canberra B20 flown by 2 Squadron.

I was crewed with another new-arrival Barry Kerr, a navigator from my initial Point Cook course. We worked happily as a crew, the only inconvenience being his rank. He had not then been commissioned, the consequences being that on our frequent overnight stops at other bases, he went to the Sergeants' Mess and I to the Officers' Mess. My Commanding Officer at that time was Wing Commander Bryan Fitzgerald who welcomed me with the statement that I was henceforth the Adjutant of the Squadron. Suddenly becoming a part-time administrative officer was a bit bewildering at first, but it turned out not to be very onerous as we had several competent clerks in our Orderly Room to handle most of the paper work. Apart from six or seven crews (pilot and navigator), we had probably no more than 30 SNCOs and airmen to do the daily servicing. All the major repair and servicing jobs were the responsibility of 482 Maintenance Squadron.

During the rest of that year we quickly settled into the routine training program of a bomber squadron. In air-defence exercises I found it strange, after years as a fighter pilot, to be the intruder instead of the defender. All the same, the main requirement was to become proficient in handling one's aircraft. In our case that meant navigating to a target and accurately dropping a practice bomb weighing 22 pounds (10 kilograms). In the 1950s the Cold War had reached its height so we were genuinely training to defend Australia against any possible communist threat. Consequently, most of our training comprised navigation trips or bombing sorties to the range at Evans Head in northern NSW. In many respects the long navigation trips were useful training only for the navigator. After the pilot made the take-off and climbed to the route altitude, his only job was to fly accurately the headings given by the nav, then at the end of the trip, to descend through whatever weather conditions prevailed and to make a good landing. It became rather boring at times so I began the habit of taking my own maps and map reading along the way. If the nav got himself lost I could then inform him of our position — much to his chagrin. The navigators persisted in quoting an ancient saying — 'A navigator is never lost. He is merely unsure of his position'. I remember one day over outback NSW telling my nav, 'We are abeam Wellington, now!' Back came the reply, 'We can't be. We're nowhere near Wellington'. Twenty minutes later, after a deal of muttering and the sort of noises made by a nav who is unsure of his position, he asked me the question, 'What time did we pass Wellington?'

In most of the defence exercises ordered by Headquarters Operational Command, our bombing target was a particular feature in Sydney, perhaps the Harbour bridge, or the Clyde railway yards or an oil refinery. Naturally we could not drop a bomb but we simulated the attack, maybe at 35,000 feet, and took a vertical photograph of the target to prove that we had actually identified it. In a rear compartment of the fuselage, behind the bomb bay, we carried special reconnaissance cameras which were directed vertically downwards through a glass hatch, enabling us to photograph anything on the ground below. As a former fighter pilot I found it rather frustrating to be intercepted by Sabres from Williamtown, often flown by pilots I knew very well. I often wished for a chance to fly a Sabre but there was no hope of that unless one were posted to a Williamtown squadron — and I was now the 'enemy' at Amberley!

Practice bombing runs in a Canberra certainly did not offer the pilot the challenge or the personal satisfaction of dive bombing or rocketry in a fighter. I would turn towards the target at Evans Head, usually at 20,000 feet, open bomb-bay doors,

and listen intently to the nav who lay prone in the plexiglass nose, holding the bomb-release button in his hand while peering through his bombsight and giving me steering instructions like, 'Left, left. Further left. Left, steady. Left, left again, steady, steady, steady. Bomb gone!' Then I would close the bomb doors and go round in a wide arc for the next run as we waited for the Range Officer to observe the bomb burst and plot its distance from the target. How exciting! It showed great teamwork when we scored well but if the bomb dropped wide and the Range Officer called a large error, it was always the other fellow's fault.

Cynicism aside, I found the Canberra a most satisfying aircraft to fly. It was reliable, stable and surprisingly manoeuvrable, and had no vices provided the speed was kept above a critical point when on one engine. I learnt to handle the Canberra with confidence and after Tony Caillard returned to England at the end of his exchange tour, I flew the solo demonstrations at air shows. We were not permitted to do aerobatics but could put on a good performance with zooms, wingovers and tight turns over the airfield. I practised beginning my performance with a 'crowd stopper', approaching the airfield fast in a shallow dive to about 200 feet, pushing both throttles fully open, and with a thunderous roar zooming steeply up to about 1,000 feet, at which point snapping both throttles closed and making a silent wing-over back down to a few hundred feet for some steep turns. Years later I noticed that Canberra demonstrations did include rolls, but whether the rules had officially been relaxed I do not know. At air shows at Laverton, Milton Cottee used to make two rolls in a Canberra immediately after take-off, but as test pilots at Aircraft Research and Development Unit were a law unto themselves, I am not surprised that they did not conform with rules as observed in Operational Command.

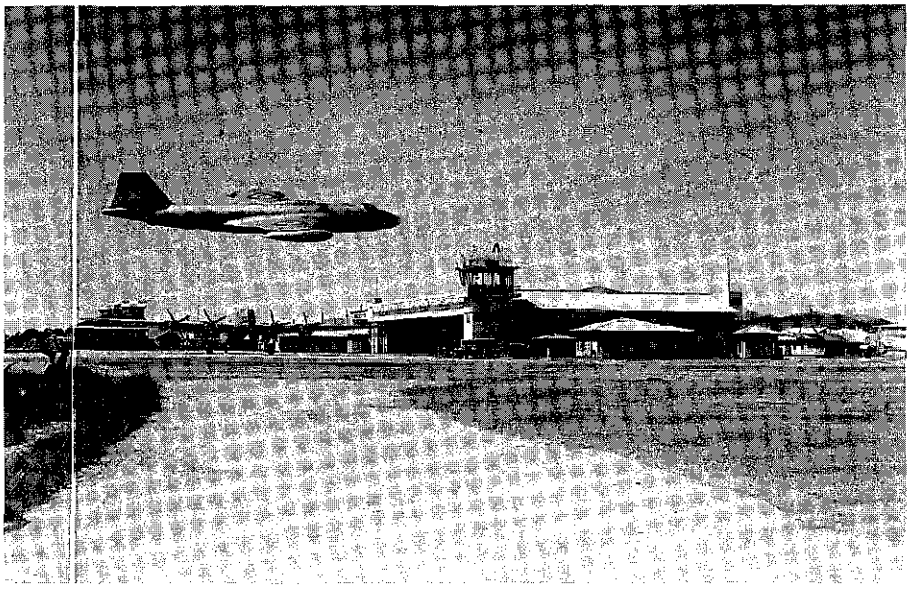
Although a comfortable aircraft to fly, the Canberra did have a few shortcomings. Having no automatic pilot, it had to be hand-flown every minute of the trip, often three and four hours, and this could be very tiring, the boredom relieved only by fuel monitoring and regular trim adjustment as fuel in the fuselage tanks was consumed. Also it lacked efficient heating at high altitudes. On one long trip Russ Law flew for hours on instruments, believing he was in cloud, until he realised that the opaqueness surrounding him was a complete coating of frost on the inside surface of the cockpit canopy. In the earlier models the Avon Mark 1 engines required very careful handling. We were warned that harsh opening of the throttle might stall the compressor blades, possibly causing a flame-out. I never had any mishaps but always found throttle control at low speeds a bit of a nuisance. A row of movable swirl vanes positioned immediately in front of the compressor directed the incoming air flow on to the leading blades of the compressor. Excess incoming air was led away through bleed valves in the casing of the compressor. As the engine accelerated past about 5,200 rpm the compressor blades were no longer at risk of stalling, so the swirl vanes snapped fully open and the bleed valves suddenly closed, clearly noticeable to the pilot by the little kick as the engine abruptly generated extra thrust. The nuisance factor occurred during the long approach to land under radar control; at our approach speed of 110 knots the throttle setting was right on the 5,200 rpm mark, just the right situation for the swirl vanes and bleed valves to alternate between open and shut, varying thrust and speed and causing an uncomfortable ride. Of course, the situation worsened if the engines were not properly adjusted to ensure synchronisation of bleed valve closing on both sides.

82 Wing, made up of 2 and 6 Squadrons and 482 Maintenance Squadron, suffered a critical setback towards the end of 1955 when potentially dangerous cracks were found in the area of the Canberra's wing root. The Government Aircraft Factory in Melbourne came to the rescue by devising a metal cleat to reinforce the weak spot, but fitting these devices occupied nearly three months, during which time we occupied ourselves with lectures, training films and courses in Escape and Evasion at the Army Jungle Training Centre at Canungra. On one of these exercises each Canberra crew was out in the rain forest for three days and nights, trying to avoid capture by the Army, and aiming to arrive at a point on the bank of the Canungra Creek by noon on the last day. There we were to construct a coracle, strip off and float our gear across the creek to the finish line. On the third morning, with a squad of infantry in pursuit, I evaded by plunging into the creek and hiding under cover of a grassy overhang. For the next hour I floated quietly down the creek, occasionally hiding under logs and ferns when searching soldiers passed near, eventually arriving at the finish point without being captured. When I climbed up the bank after an hour being submerged to my nostrils, expecting to be complimented for showing initiative, all I received was a rebuke for not making my coracle.

Fortunately by February 1956 sufficient Canberras were modified to allow us to take five to Tasmania for the Hobart Regatta — on direction from the Minister for Defence, Hon Athol Townley, a Tasmanian. I recall the 'show the flag' flights around the State as well as the official flypast over the Regatta, in appalling weather conditions which made formation flying extremely difficult. After my considerable experience of tight formation in the light-weight Vampire, I found it much more difficult to hold a close station with a cumbersome Canberra, especially in blustery weather. Two months later, with all aircraft operational again, 2 Squadron was enjoying the tropics during a detachment to Townsville for bombing practice on Rattlesnake Island. At Evans Head only practice bombs of 22 pounds (10 kilograms) were permitted. On the sorties from Townsville we loaded with 500-pound high explosive bombs. While we were at Townsville, rumours were confirmed about a proposed trip to the United States and, shortly after, I was delighted to learn that I was one of the six pilots from 2 and 6 Squadrons selected to go. I had only 100 hours on Canberras but more jet experience than other pilots, which may have been in my favour.

Operation *Bala Lagin* (I believe that was Aboriginal for 'Friendly Greeting') was the highlight of that Amberley posting, a thrilling pioneering experience, the first time the RAAF sent jet aircraft further overseas than to New Zealand. For some years the USAF exercised their mobility by sending flights to Australia, usually fighter aircraft from their bases in Japan. In 1956 the United States invited Australia to send a representative flight to their Armed Forces Day celebration at Washington DC on 20 May. Eighty-two Wing was tasked to send five Canberras on this goodwill mission.

The story of *Bala Lagin* is a saga itself. We had problems galore and made many mistakes but learnt much about long-distance travel. The planned route across the Pacific necessitated legs of up to six hours of flight. We had insufficient fuel in the fuselage and wingtip tanks so, to give us the extra range, the Government Aircraft Factory installed integral tanks within the wings of the next five Canberras on the production line in Melbourne, beginning with A84-221. Delivery to Amberley of the last of the five was achieved only days before we left on 5 May. Each of the crews had to do a 'dummy run' trip of at least six hours at 45,000 feet, just to experience the cold and discomfort which we would face on the long legs across the Pacific. With my assigned navigator for *Bala Lagin*, Tom Wright, I flew a long, boring trip almost to the tip of Cape York and return, feeling extremely cramped and cold at the end of it, but proving that there were no unusual problems apart from nearly freezing.



A 2 Squadron Canberra at RAAF Townsville in May 1956.

The next hiccup in the planning was advice of American nuclear weapon testing in the Marshall Islands which prevented our transit through that airspace or making a refuelling stop at Kwajalein. The alternative was to refuel at Anderson Air Force Base at Guam in the Marianas but the next leg to Hawaii was beyond our range, so special arrangements were made for us to refuel on Wake Island, an isolated cay in the vast Pacific, famous for its heroic defence against the Japanese invaders in December 1941. However, Wake was a civil airline stop having no jet fuel. To solve that problem the USAF flew in KB29 tankers from Japan to refuel us at Wake on the outward journey and again on the way home. At that time the RAAF transport force consisted solely of Dakotas. As we had no aircraft which could carry the support crews and spare parts for such a long operation, the USAF again came to our aid by providing a massive cargo aircraft called a Globemaster.

Our flying team was led by OC 82 Wing, Group Captain Des Douglas. He carried with him the Wing Navigation Officer Kev Parker and the Wing Signals Officer Keith McCarthy. The other crews were pilots and navigators selected from 2 and 6 Squadrons. Travelling in the Globemaster were our Air Officer Commanding, Air Vice-Marshal Wally Walters, his staff officer Dave Colquhoun, our Amberley medical officer John Craig, engineering officer Rod Noble, public relations man Frank Marshall, and about 30 of our technical SNCOs and airmen who kept us serviced and flying during that month away.

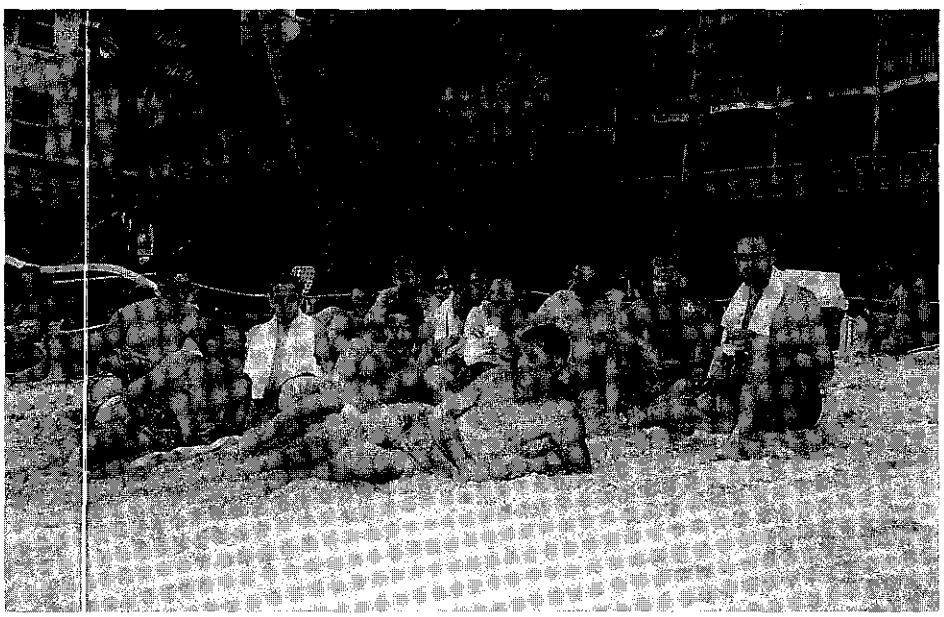
The USAF Lockheed Globemaster which supported the 82 Wing Canberras during Operation *Bala Lagin*, May-June 1956.

The first snag on leaving Australia to transit through American bases was the matter of radio frequencies. The USAF used Ultra High Frequency, whereas we were still fitted with the older Very High Frequency (VHF) radios. Communication was therefore extremely limited, our only means of talking to the USAF controllers being via their one emergency VHF channel.

As the junior members and the spare crew, Tom Wright and I travelled more of the trip in the lumbering Globemaster than on Canberra flights. However, I managed to log 20 hours, mostly on the trans-Pacific legs, as well as five hours as co-pilot in the Globemaster. Our route across was by way of Townsville, Guam, Wake Island, Honolulu, San Francisco, Omaha, to Washington DC. At most stops we stayed an extra day, mainly to allow a catch-up by the Globemaster which took 11 hours to fly a leg which the Canberras did in five hours.

My one tense experience occurred in the take-off from Wake Island, heavily laden with fuel for the six-hour leg to Hickham Air Force Base at Honolulu. In those days it was our practice to line up all five aircraft in stagger at the end of the runway, open throttles fully, then release brakes at six-second intervals. Being the junior, I was always last off. On that take-off I headed down the runway, encountering all the turbulence and jetwash from the four aircraft ahead, unable to accelerate to lift-off

speed. Just as I used up all the runway I at last made it off the ground, crossed the beach and staggered along only feet above the Pacific Ocean as we gradually accelerated to climbing speed. I had plenty of time to calm my nerves as the landing at Honolulu was nearly six hours away.



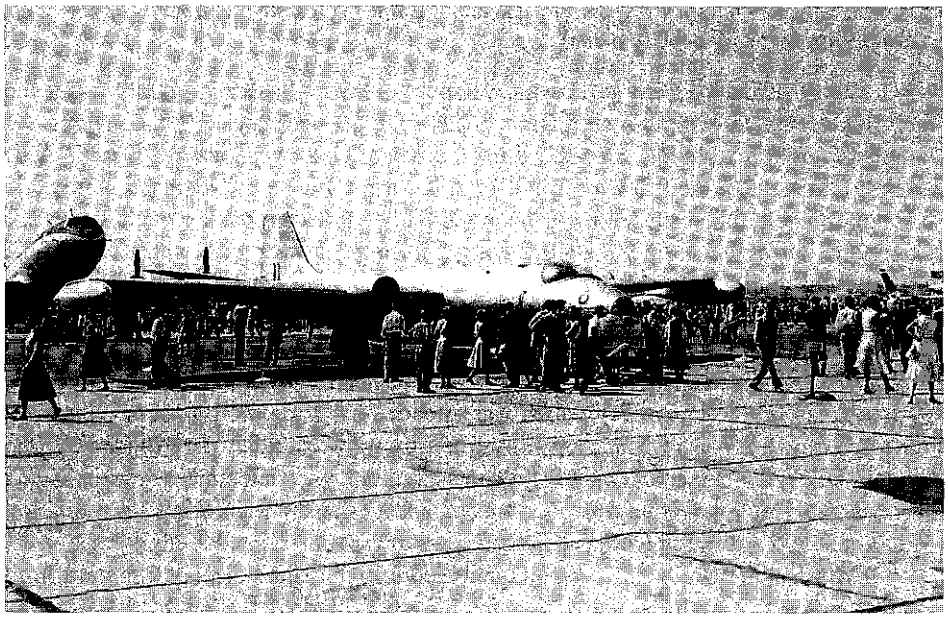
Canberra crews relaxing on Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, on the way to Washington DC during Operation *Bala Lagin*, May 1956. Group Captain Des Douglas, our flight leader, is on the right. (Photo from Frank Marshall's album)

Most of our rest day at Hawaii we spent on Waikiki Beach, gladly using the facilities of the US Army's recreation hostel at Fort DeRussy, right alongside the famous international hotels. On arrival in continental USA we stopped at Travis AFB near San Francisco, then flew on to Offut AFB, near Omaha in Nebraska, where we were guests at a dinner hosted by General Curtis LeMay, commander of Strategic Air Command. Offut was formerly a US Cavalry fort in the last century; on the wall of the old barracks building a notice preserved from those early days read, 'Officers are requested not to shoot buffalo through the windows'.

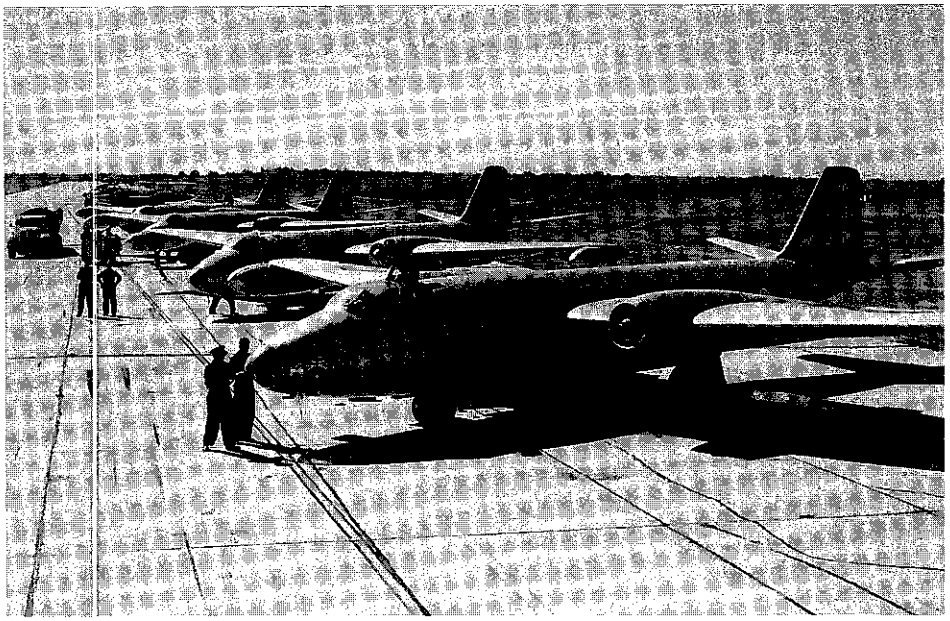
At Washington DC we landed at Andrews AFB but ferried one Canberra to Bolling Field (adjacent to the Potomac River in the heart of Washington) as part of the static display on the Open Day which was attended by many thousands of people. In our three days in Washington we were hosted by the Australian Air Attache, Group Captain Dixie Chapman, and his staff who ensured that we visited all the tourist sights such as the Capitol, White House, Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials, Washington Monument and Arlington National Cemetery, and were entertained at night.

Our leader detailed Tom Wright and me to fly our static display Canberra from Bolling across to Andrews AFB to join the others parked there. On the Monday morning after the air show, we reported to the Operations Office at Bolling, where I explained that we were the crew of the visiting Australian Canberra. This meant nothing to the duty NCO who probably did not know what a Canberra was or where

Australia was. He merely asked, 'Where's your flight plan?' As our flight time would have been about ten minutes, similar to flying from Essendon to Tullamarine, or Bankstown to Mascot, I pointed out to him that we were not intending to fly inter-State or halfway across the USA, as were most of the visiting display aircraft, but only a short hop over to Andrews. 'You'll still need a flight plan, buddy', he insisted. So Tom and I quickly drew up a flight plan for the ten minute trip, a journey we could have accomplished without even retracting the undercarriage. When I presented the paperwork to the duty desk, the duty officer looked at it in disgust, saying, 'Where's your weather forecast?' 'What forecast? I'm only going over to Andrews, 12 miles away', said I in amazement. 'You'll need a weather forecast before I accept this', was his abrupt retort. So off we went to the meteorological office, joined the queue of pilots waiting for weather details for the homeward flights to distant States, and finally got a written report on the weather conditions prevailing outside the window. Eventually our flight plan was accepted, we moved to the tarmac area, started up our Canberra, and joined the queue of aircraft waiting for clearance to take-off from Bolling. It took 40 minutes before our turn to take-off, and another ten minutes of flight to Andrews. When I told Captain Fouty, captain of the Globemaster, of my frustrating experience, he laughed and said, 'That's normal for those operations guys. When the weight of the paperwork equals the payload of the aircraft, you'll be cleared to go!'



An Australian Canberra on static display at Bolling Field, Washington DC, 19 May 1956.



Australian Canberras at Andrews AFB near Washington DC.

Our plan called for a stop at Maxwell AFB in Alabama but we had to bypass that one owing to violent racial rioting in Alabama at that time. We revised our start homeward by plotting a leg direct from Washington to Randolph AFB near San Antonio in Texas. This section nearly became a disaster although it all seems hilarious when one recalls the events from this distance in time. The basic cause was an electrical fault. Thanks to inadequate instruction before leaving Amberley, the pilots were selecting the fuel in the integral tanks but leaving the electrically-operated fuel pumps running to ensure all fuel had transferred into the fuselage tank. Consequently, one by one the pumps burnt out and replacements had to be flown over by Qantas to San Francisco before our return across the Pacific.

On the leg to Randolph our lead navigator (Kev Parker) erred in starting our descent from 30,000 feet too soon. Down at 1,000 feet, bouncing around in formation over an empty shimmering Texas plain, we could not see Randolph, were out of radio contact through not having the correct USAF frequencies — and were just plain lost! In the nick of time somebody spotted sunlight glinting off San Antonio skyscrapers in the far distance and we shot off towards Randolph, trying to restore order for a formation arrival. Our leader then misunderstood the landing instructions by lining us up on Initial for the wrong runway. By this time Jack Boast, having started the trip with empty integral tanks, was fast running out of fuel, more so than the rest of us. Jack declared an emergency, pulled out of our formation and landed on the first available runway. On taxiing in he was met by the commanding General who found only a Flying Officer, not our Group Captain.

Meanwhile our four remaining Canberras made a long cross-country tour to line up on Initial for the correct runway, and pitched out to land in sequence. As our leader rounded out for touch down, the air traffic controller screamed out at him to 'go round' as, with all the consternation of the messed-up arrival, he had forgotten to lower his undercarriage. He rammed his throttles open with barely seconds to spare,

went round for another circuit, and landed last. The General finally found our leader in the last aircraft to taxi in. I will never forget the tension of that notorious arrival in Texas. Being always a gentleman, Des Douglas apologised that night for his lapses in airmanship and bought us all a beer.

Next stop was Nellis AFB in Nevada where the USAF operated the new F-100 Super Sabre fighters. A RAAF pilot on exchange (Gordon Harvey, I think) arranged for our party to be guests at a dinner and show at the Desert Inn, on The Strip at Las Vegas. Later we saw another show at El Rancho Vegas and wandered along the sidewalks, marvelling at the lights, glitter and gambling of Las Vegas at night. Next day we visited Hoover Dam out in the Nevada desert.

Our final stop at Travis AFB lasted longer than planned while our fitters changed the fuel pumps which Qantas flew over from Melbourne. On arrival at Travis I developed severe hay fever so took every opportunity to escape the rural environment by travelling about an hour in to San Francisco by bus with Frank Marshall, the pair of us acting as tourists as we ascended to the Top of the Mark Hotel, explored Chinatown and ate at DiMaggios Restaurant at Fisherman's Wharf. On 29 May Group Captain Colquhoun and I and several airmen attended a wreath-laying ceremony at Oaklands Airport, at a memorial commemorating the departure of the 'Southern Cross', flown by Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith on the first trans-Pacific flight in 1928. The wreath was laid by John Ulm, son of Charles Ulm, the co-pilot on that famous flight.

A few days later we set off on the homeward journey across the Pacific, most of which Tom and I endured in the Globemaster. On 2 June, the day we left Hickham AFB at Honolulu, Ward Rayner's Canberra developed a control problem with the elevator trim so he stayed behind for repairs. At Wake Island we waited a day for him to catch up but he had an engine failure during take-off at Hickham, had to retract his undercarriage and skidded to a stop in a cloud of dust just short of the beach. Our engineer officer Rod Noble flew back to Honolulu to supervise the dismantling of the wreck which was later returned to Australia by ship and rebuilt as a Canberra two-seat trainer.

At Oaklands Airport near San Francisco on 29 May 1956 John Ulm laid a wreath at the memorial commemorating the departure of the 'Southern Cross' on the first air crossing of the Pacific Ocean in 1928.

So that was *Bala Lagin*, one of the most memorable episodes of my flying days. As a junior I was extremely lucky to have been selected for a tour which, for the RAAF, was a 'first' in many respects. I certainly appreciated the chance of the shopfront view of the USA, never even imagining that we might see that country in detail in later years.

Back at Amberley we settled into the weekly routine, a rather tame existence after the excitement of a foreign visit. At that time the Government had introduced National Service for 18-year-old males. In the Army these lads probably learnt something useful about the basics of infantry training, but six months as an National Service Trainee (NST) in the RAAF was not long enough to become proficient in any of the Air Force technical trades. Generally regarded as a nuisance around the base, these national service trainees had to be employed as labourers or on menial tasks in the kitchens whenever they had a break from drill or simulated aerodrome-defence exercises. I am sure that most of them were thoroughly bored with their stint at Amberley where their instructors were hard pressed to keep them busily occupied and out of mischief. One evening when I was Orderly Officer doing the rounds I had occasion to call at the collection of old huts which housed the NSTs, mainly to check why they had not settled down to bed with the lights out. Moving through the darkness to investigate some hilarity in one hut, I could see a large loud-mouthed lad prancing around in the nude and jumping in and out of beds occupied by others boys. As he yelled mischievously, 'What if an officer could see me now!', I moved out of the darkness into the light of the doorway and said sternly, 'An officer can see you now'. There was a deathly hush. I am sure that this fellow wished that the earth would swallow him out of sight. 'Put your pyjamas on, turn out the light and get to sleep', I ordered. I could almost feel the quaking in the hut as the culprit and his mates obeyed in quick time. Apparently the word got round the NST area about unexpected Orderly Officer visits as there were no further incidents in the huts at 'Lights Out' time.

About that time I had a surprise meeting with an old acquaintance, a medical officer on the Air Force Reserve who happened to be doing a weekend of duty at Amberley. When I was a medical student in 1946-1948 at the University of Queensland, Herb Copeman and I had been in the same six-man group that worked together in the laboratories and dissecting room. I always had a silent admiration for Herb who was a few years my senior, having joined the RAAF during the War and served in Europe after D-Day flying rocket-firing Typhoons against trains and other Axis targets. I could not then imagine anyone having enjoyed a more thrilling existence. Then of course I dropped out of the University and Herb went on to graduate. When we met again in 1956 at Amberley I was astounded to find that Herb, who had logged only a few hundred flying hours during the War, actually envied me being a current jet pilot on Canberras. What a strange situation! I wanted to be a surgeon and Herb wished he were a jet pilot. The last I heard of Herb, he was a prominent physician in Perth.

Within the squadron we resumed our nav trips, night flying and bombing. Occasionally some variation in tasking relieved the sameness of our training, such as Air Force Week formation flights or taxi jobs. Once I took the Flying Doctor back to Cloncurry, low-level all the way across outback Queensland. I believe that he had cracked several ribs during a turbulent flight to Brisbane with a patient in his light aircraft. To avoid pressurisation and any possible deep-breathing problems for his chest, I was instructed to stay low to give him a comfortable ride back to Cloncurry.

Aircrews of 2 Squadron at Amberley in 1956. L to R: Mike Fletcher (RAF), Tom Wright, Jack Boast, Keith McCarthy, Bruce Martin, Maurice Fenner (RAF), Tony Caillard (RAF), Russ Anderson, Bob Black, John Jacobs, Arthur Cross (CO), Murray Henzell, Norm Kilduff, Barry Kerr. (RAAF photo)

The AOC of Operational Command, Air Vice-Marshal Wally Walters, making his annual inspection of Amberley in 1957, when Dixie Chapman (behind the AOC) was OC Amberley and Charles Read was OC 82 Wing.

On another occasion I took the incoming OC (Dixie Chapman) down to Williamtown where he was to do a jet refresher course following his previous posting as Australian Air Attache in Washington DC. I was very familiar with the Canberra by this time and greased in the landing at Willy so smoothly that Dixie did not realise we were on the ground until we slowed down to turn off the runway.

During 1956 a new CO of 2 Squadron arrived, Wing Commander Arthur Cross. Being keen to prove that we could deploy at short notice, he organised some long distance flights to test our reliability. The whole squadron flew off in August 1956, round Australia in three days, via Townsville, Darwin, Pearce (near Perth) and East Sale (in Gippsland, Victoria). The plan called for a bomb drop on the nearby armament range on arrival at Pearce and East Sale but the bad weather at both destinations curtailed the bombing tasks. We flew the final leg at night, from East Sale to Amberley, dropping a bomb on the Evans Head range along the way. At night the bombing target was illuminated by a light. Russ Anderson's nav targeted the wrong light that night and dropped his bomb on the sand-mining camp a few miles south of Evans Head. There was hell to pay over that, although we all claimed that the miners were quite safe as Russ and his nav never hit anything they aimed at!

By the second half of 1956 our small family had settled comfortably in Ipswich. When Jack Boast was posted away to become an instructor we moved into the house he vacated, just down the road from our flat. Christopher was confidently walking by this time but we had to monitor his ramblings as I killed a brown snake in the garage one evening. Since infancy Jennifer had developed the habit of going down to sleep sucking her thumb while shredding a small 'security' blanket with the other hand. We had no hope of breaking her out of this ritual. Then one day while she stood in her cot, the sash window fell on her thumb, causing swelling but no break, and prompting loud screaming. Joyce applied a big bandage on the 'poor thumb', too large for Jennifer to fit into her mouth. That was the end of the thumb-sucking. That period was also the beginning of Joyce's driving. She was too nervous with me trying to teach her to drive, so a navigator friend Ted Cheney took over the task of helping her get a licence. He claimed that she established a record of 14 attempts at a hill start. Anyway, she passed her test and got her licence and ever since has wanted a car of her own, preferably a low red Porsche.

I remember receiving a rude shock in 1956 when I reported to the Senior Medical Officer, Squadron Leader John Craig, for my annual aircrew medical examination, something all aircrew had to undergo in order to qualify for flying pay and to be found fit to continue flying. When it came to the eye testing there was nothing amiss with my visual acuity, but when the Medical Officer produced a new device which checked on the capacity of the external eye muscles to focus the eyes quickly at close range, I repeatedly failed to meet the standards. I do not recall the exact nature of this device but I was continually registering a '7', to the consternation of the MO who said that aircrew had to register a '4' or lower. He was all set to ground me, which would have been a drastic interruption or end to my flying career, but instead decided to start me on a program of eye exercises. Fortunately these had the desired effect as I was able to pass the test a few months later. It seems that the experts considered that a pilot staring out into the distance with eye muscles relaxed should have no hesitation in focusing on the instruments during a quick glance into the cockpit. Apparently my eye muscles were not handling the focusing action quickly enough, even though I had never noticed any difficulty reading the instruments in the

cockpit. However, it did explain why I had been such a blob at school playing cricket or trying to watch a tennis ball on to my racquet. My father was always critical of me for not being an accomplished cricketer like my cousin Peter Burge who later represented Australia as a Test player. It was no use my trying to tell him that the ball leaving the bowler's hand became a blur as it approached me so I just played a stroke where I thought the ball was moving — and therefore usually missed it. Thank goodness a golf ball isn't moving when you hit it! Anyway, I was lucky to avoid being grounded and the eye exercises proved effective.

Some time in 1956 the first two Canberra trainers arrived, the T4 version, both flown out from UK. They had side-by-side seats and dual controls for the pilot and the instructor but these seats were cramped and uncomfortable, the 'blind flying' instruments were central rather than in front of the pilot, and we much preferred flying the bomber version, the B20. In our time they were used mainly for testing for an instrument rating, although I am aware that some years later an Operational Conversion Unit was formed at Amberley with a number of Australian-built trainers to convert new pilots on to the Canberra.

The major national event in November 1956 was the Olympic Games in Melbourne which involved all the armed services one way or another. The Duke of Edinburgh came to Australia to open the Games and for other official functions, being transported around the country by 34 VIP Squadron at Fairbairn. Somebody must have had the jitters that he might be stranded in a remote place should his VIP transport become unserviceable, so Barry Kerr and I had to sit at Fairbairn with our Canberra, ready to rush a spare part to wherever in Australia it might be needed. Fortunately the plan was reviewed after a week and we took our Canberra home to Amberley.

We all had a good chuckle at one incident associated with the Games. The Olympic Flame, lit by the sun's rays at a traditional ceremony in Greece, was flown out by Qantas to Darwin in a miner's safety lamp. 6 Squadron had the task of flying the flame from Darwin to Cairns where it would light the torch to be carried by a relay of runners all the way down the east coast to Melbourne. Specific instructions were to fly low-level to keep the flame alight. I do not know the reason for this, since the lamp came out from Greece at high altitude in a pressurised airliner.

Anyway, two Canberras of 6 Squadron, flown by Norm Nixon and George Turnnidge, left Darwin after Norm received the lamp with all due ceremony. The high fuel consumption at low level required them to refuel at Cloncurry where tarmac conditions were fairly primitive. Impatient to get away from Cloncurry, Norm revved his engines, swung the tail around without thought, and blasted clouds of dirt, gravel and tarmac debris straight into the intakes of George's engines. Both engines were ruined and he had to stay there for days waiting for the arrival of a support team to do a double engine change. In the meantime, Norm roared off to Cairns low level. Despite all precautions the precious flame went out. While taxiing in at Cairns to meet the Mayor and the reception party who would start the relay to Melbourne, Norm's navigator, Johnno Johnson, simply relit the lamp with his Zippo lighter and nobody else was the wiser.

Mentioning Norm Nixon, who unfortunately died in a traffic accident in Singapore a few years later, reminds me that we had a few 'characters' at Amberley — people whose habits or mannerisms marked them as different from the average fellow. The officer I remember clearly for his distinctive behaviour was Maurice

Onions, a former Englishman who had a nice wife and family, as well as a herd of goats and numerous hives of bees. Morrie had his own absolute views on everything, from flying techniques to vegetarianism, which he preached with deadly seriousness. He was an affable chap, but certainly not jovial; I never remember him being humorous about anything. He even looked and sounded an intense person — stern expression, piercing dark eyes, black military moustache and clipped Oxford accent. A posting for the Onions family became a major logistics exercise with the added problem of transferring the goats, the hives of bees and the honey-extraction cabin mounted on a trailer. Most people knew Morrie by the name 'Onions' as we Australians call the vegetable of the same name. Occasionally, for a lark, somebody would list him on the daily flying program as Flight Lieutenant O'Nions, using a pseudo Irish version of his name. As far as Morrie was concerned, his pronunciation of his surname was Oonyuns, expressed with a short sharp guttural grunt, very clipped and almost unrecognisable as a word.

One afternoon Morrie was about to drive out through the guard gate on his way home. The RAAF had a most unpopular practice in those times of using airmen on rostered guard duty throughout the night, an imposition on their time after already spending their day at their normal trade as aircraft worker or stores hand or clerk. One of their exasperating tasks was to stand at the exit gates, recording the name of each departing driver against the car registration number. I suppose it was regarded as a security measure to log the time of departure of every driver and vehicle. Anyway, on this day as Morrie approached the gate, the guard recorded his registration number then leaned down towards the window to hear the driver give his name. 'Oonyuns!' said Morrie. The guard hesitated, unable to translate this grunt into any name he knew. 'Pardon, sir', he said. 'Oonyuns!', replied Morrie. The guard looked perplexed and asked again. 'Oonyuns!' snapped Morrie, his irritation showing. Most embarrassed, the unfortunate guard said, 'I'm sorry, sir, I didn't understand you', at which Morrie yelled, 'SMITH', let out his clutch and roared out through the gate, leaving an open-mouthed guard to recover his composure.

The lighter side of Air Force life revealed itself often during Dining-in Nights, formal functions in the Officers' Mess when we presented ourselves in mess dress, short jacket with black tie and miniature medals. Although the meal normally proceeded with due formality, under the eagle eye of the President of the Mess Committee (PMC), rarely did the function conclude without some measure of frivolity or mischief. The funniest dining-in I recall occurred during the time when Wing Commander 'Spike' Marsh was PMC, and also CO of 6 Squadron. He was what I label an intense, no-nonsense person. When he was really riled about something or somebody, his anger was revealed by his twitching eyebrow, a good warning to keep clear. On this particular dining-in the PMC was accompanied at the top table by a number of high-ranking Army officers from Victoria Barracks in Brisbane. During the meal the PMC noted some hilarity further down one of the tables, his frown obviously indicating his disapproval of whatever was happening, actually a group of 6 Squadron officers busy knotting together the linen serviettes to make a long rope, under cover of the table cloth. At the end of the meal the Port is passed, each officer filling his port glass then passing the carafe to the diner on his left. When all glasses are primed, the PMC calls on 'Mr Vice', the most junior officer of the 100 or more present, for the Loyal Toast. Mr Vice stands, followed by all present, and he calls the toast to 'The Queen', followed by a toast to 'The President of the United States' and to other Heads

of State, depending on the nationalities represented among the guests and diners. At this particular dining-in, those same 6 Squadron officers plied Mr Vice with so much wine during the meal that, when called on by the PMC for the Loyal Toast, he was unable to stand, let alone speak coherently. To save the situation, one of the mischief makers appointed himself 'stand-in Mr Vice' and rose to do the honours, making a short apologetic speech on behalf of the incapacitated Mr Vice. By this time the PMC could hardly contain his anger and embarrassment, his face red and his eyebrow twitching violently. He ordered several officers by name to leave the dining room and to take Mr Vice with them. At this, three other officers of 6 Squadron, including the USAF Major on exchange, rose, declared that, 'If they go, we go too!', and took their leave with the nominated offenders. The situation had been fairly hilarious up to that point but with the PMC about to explode, a deathly hush descended in the room, mainly as we knew not what might follow. Knowing Spike Marsh's deadly seriousness, we could understand his distress at the performance of his officers, yet were sure that those Army guests had seen (or been involved in) far worse frolics during dining-in nights than on this occasion. The remainder of the dining-in passed in virtual silence. All I remember later was a line-up next morning of all the 'offenders' on the mat in Spike's office.

That summer of Christmas 1956 was a real scorcher, with temperatures over 100 degrees Fahrenheit day after day. Starting a Canberra sortie became a hazardous business. We would climb into an aircraft too hot to touch after baking on the tarmac, do the pre-start and after-start checks, and taxi out to the end of the runway, by which time we were wringing-wet with perspiration, the sun beating down through the broad canopy. One hot afternoon Brian McCabe collapsed as he waited for take-off clearance. When the ambulance crew got him to the hospital with heat exhaustion, the Medical Officer measured the cockpit temperature at 142 degrees Fahrenheit (61 degrees Celsius).

Early in 1957 it became clear that I should review my prospects. I was a Flight Lieutenant by then, with no guarantee of employment at the end of my six-year Short Service Commission. The airlines looked attractive so I set about obtaining a Commercial Licence which was a simple procedure as I was then in current flying practice with nearly 1,500 hours logged. Then I wrote to all airlines, large and small, at the same time tendering my resignation from the RAAF. Back came the replies, all negative! They had no vacancies, or needed single men only, or I was too old! Prospects looked dismal until Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne sent me an offer — would I accept a Permanent Commission? 'Yes, yes', said I — and stayed on for a further 24 years. I wonder where I would be now if Qantas or Ansett or even Connellan had realised what they missed by declining to employ me.

Although my stories refer mainly to flying, the Air Force required much more of its aircrew than just operating aircraft. The General Duties Branch included all aircrew whose primary role, of course, was to be a pilot, navigator or signaller. However, we were also expected to do generally everything else and had to be prepared for all sorts of unusual tasks or appointments. I once carried out an Inquiry on a fire in a RAAF building at Archerfield. Other officers were posted to command Air Training Corps units. At different times Lyall Klaffer and John McNeill were aide-de-camp to the Governor General for two years. Senior pilots commanded base squadrons, and many Headquarters posts were occupied by experienced aircrew.

Junior officers thus had a lot to learn, apart from flying. Unfortunately, in my time, we received no official instruction in these additional duties so learned by observing how others performed and by making our own mistakes. All my seniors had wartime experience but that did not necessarily make them the best officers. Most were good, honest fellows who set the right example and offered sound advice. Others I classified right down the scale, usually for one of two reasons — some were unprincipled villains who thought only of themselves, and many were virtually alcoholics.

This matter of drinking to excess was disturbing to me, even as a newly-commissioned officer in Malta. Often we juniors were coerced into sessions at the Mess bar because it was presented to us that this sort of socialising was a necessary part of officer behaviour. The irksome aspect was that juniors were assessed in annual Officer Evaluation Reports by certain officers whose personal conduct was, in my opinion, degraded by their drinking habits and their disdain for those who did not share their pastime. It was just something we had to live with.

Frequently on Fridays, and particularly when Derek Kingwell was OC Amberley, VIPs used to visit the base, enjoy a nice lunch in the Mess, then inspect the Canberras and watch a flypast staged for their benefit. That was customarily followed by drinks in the Mess, a session which we were all directed to attend. On the day of the visit by the Minister for Air, Hon F.M. Osborne, our PMC, Squadron Leader Keith McCarthy, instructed us that we would provide entertainment by playing 'Dead Ants' during the bar session. When he called 'Dead Ants' all officers were to drop to the floor with hands and legs extended in the air. Unknown to the PMC, our Wing OC, Des Douglas, subsequently (and with mischievous intent) passed the word to ignore the expected call. During the drinks session the PMC called 'Dead Ants' and fell to the floor, not realising for several moments that he was the sole performer, the Minister staring incredulously down at him.

As he lived in Single Quarters in the Mess, that same Keith McCarthy was a regular contributor to Mess profits across the bar. His nightly consumption usually guaranteed very sound sleep indeed. One winter's night several junior officers somehow managed to carry Keith's bed out of his room and quarters without waking him, and then to lower the bed on to the floor of the empty swimming pool. I do not remember Keith's remarks when he was wakened by the Mess steward with his cup of tea next morning, at the bottom of the swimming pool, but Amberley certainly had a laugh when news of the event spread around the base.

Squadron training continued throughout 1957 with another new Commanding Officer of 2 Squadron, Ron Hosking, and a new OC of 82 Wing, Group Captain Charles Read. My logbook shows a succession of long navigation exercises, a week operating out of Pearce, night flying, bombing sorties, defence exercises, formation demonstrations, air pageants, and numerous taxi runs for senior officers. I remember a 'Defence of Sydney' exercise when we as attackers approached the target area from somewhere out Dubbo way. Trying to make interception difficult for the defending Sabres we struggled up to 52,000 feet, at which altitude the Avon engines were gasping for air and we were limping along at just above minimum controllable airspeed. One Sabre did manage to pull up alongside us and the pilot make a rude gesture (a sort of a wave), so I suppose we had to accept that we had theoretically been downed by an air-to-air missile.

We had another setback in May when a major electrical fault appeared — the elevator trim would suddenly go haywire, pitching the nose up or down uncontrollably. Engineers inserted a safety switch in the trim circuit, but even with this modification we were restricted to an indicated speed of 250 knots. Thank goodness we were not needed for war! Which brings me to the question of how we would have performed in those days in a genuine defence of Australia. *Bala Lagin* showed up our limitations of operating away without adequate transport support. None of us had any realistic experience of dropping high-explosive bombs. Furthermore, to drop a bomb the navigator had to visually track the target through his bomb sight in the nose and therefore relied on an unobstructed view of the target. Even with the extra fuel in the integral tanks of our Canberras just off the production line, our effective operational range out of any Australian base was extremely limited. Apart from a radio compass the Canberra had no reliable navigation aids. The navs practised astro-navigation using a type of sextant which projected through the roof of the nav compartment, theoretically allowing them to plot a position using the sun or certain stars — but it was not suitable for pinpoint accuracy. We were fitted with LORAN, a long-range navigation aid which was supposed to enable the nav to find his position relative to stations located around the world — but our over-water legs during *Bala Lagin* proved that we could not depend on it. After I left Amberley the Canberras were fitted with Green Satin, a device using the Doppler principle for plotting movement over the ground, a great aid to keeping track of the aircraft's progress and knowing exactly where you were. Years later, in Vietnam, 2 Squadron was directed to their targets by ground-based radar, but how in 1957 would we have found enemy targets other than by map reading in clear weather?

On the home front our family enjoyed our life at the house in Harlin Road, Ipswich. Joyce's parents and her young sister Judy rented a house in the same street for some months before they headed west again to work on an outback sheep station. My parents in Toowoomba were only an hour's drive away, enabling closer contact with their grandchildren than at any other time of my Air Force career. Our big family event was the arrival of Susan Patricia at Ipswich Hospital on 2 June 1957. We had our hands full then. How did we manage more? Susan was a placid baby, never any problem as an infant. We celebrated her christening a fortnight later at St Patrick's in Ipswich, her godparents being my brother Geoffrey and our cousin Helen Burge. Also, about mid-year, we were given a pup, a Boxer/Labrador cross which we named Patrick. We had to return him after a couple of months as he chewed everything in sight, was too unruly, and terrified Christopher by hanging on to the seat of his pants — hardly the ideal family pet.

Two special events during the remainder of 1957 are worth recounting. The first involved a flight of six 82 Wing Canberras to Tengah in Singapore to participate in the Merdeka celebration, the independence of Singapore/Malaysia on 1 September. My first time in Asia, I was astounded by the oppressive humidity in Singapore and wondered how people could withstand the discomfort. With aircraft of other Commonwealth nations we made several practice flypasts over the parade ground at Kuala Lumpur, having to fit in these rehearsals when the bad weather permitted. I thought it strange that the big independence celebration at Kuala Lumpur was timed for 0800 hours (8 am), unusually early for a public gathering, but realised how necessary it was in the tropics to program such events early in the day, before the drenching rain and storms arrived to ruin proceedings. Of course, being in the flypast,

we in the air saw nothing of the spectacular parade below, when the Union Jack was lowered and another British colony joined the Commonwealth as an equal partner. Apart from being a member of the RAAF contingent, I appreciated that trip for giving me a close look at the exotic attractions of Singapore, a place which became very familiar to me in later years.

OC 82 Wing Group Captain Charles Read farewells Norm Rodgers and I before our departure from Amberley for Singapore, to participate in Malayan Independence Celebrations, August 1957.

In September Barry Kerr was posted out, leaving me to fly with different navigators for the rest of that year. On one trip I came close to losing Bernie Johnson, and for that matter nearly lost myself. I plotted a different sort of low-level nav trip which was accepted for squadron training — a climb out west to Roma then north-east, descending to sea level by Sandy Cape at the north end of Fraser Island. Our route took us south across Hervey Bay, along the Sunshine Coast, across to Tangalooma on Moreton Island, along the beaches of the Gold Coast, past Point Danger, all by map reading, aiming to drop our practice bomb at Evans Head range right on a pre-determined time.

On the day of this particular flight, Bernie sat beside me on the jump seat, nursing his thick head after a Mess dining-in the night before. As I started south along Fraser Island the weather ahead looked threatening but I pressed on. Off the Noosa area it really developed into something frightening — complete overcast, blackish green cloud, lashing waves and waterspouts. Being down at 200 feet and bouncing like a rubber ball, I decided it was time to get out of the hazardous situation so gingerly made a right turn above the raging white caps and poured on the power to climb out of this squall. As Bernie moved back to strap into his ejection seat in the

nav compartment we entered cloud in the climb. I have never experienced such violent turbulence before or since. We obviously entered a severe cumulo-nimbus storm cell which thrashed the aircraft up and down, like flicking a feather duster. All I could do was try to keep wings level, hold full power and, as near as I could, maintain climbing speed of 250 knots.

The punishment was so severe that I fully expected the wings to tear off and actually considered the possibility of ejecting, before realising that a parachute might not stay deployed in that storm cell, and second that Bernie was not in his ejection seat since the turbulence hit before he strapped in. His parachute flipped out of his seat and he was being tossed around the nav compartment, trying to gain a hand hold, vomiting up his previous night's dinner, and bleeding from a gashed scalp. This nightmare climb seemed to take hours but it must have been less than ten minutes before we broke out on top of the cloud. Trying to keep my voice steady I radioed Brisbane Control to stop the other squadron pilots behind me from continuing with the exercise. That must have been the most petrifying ordeal I have ever known and I am sure I owe my life to the people who made the Canberra such a strong and robust flying machine.

After two and a half years at Amberley a posting was inevitable. Considering that I was a Flight Lieutenant with two long tours on jet aircraft, the posting to East Sale to be trained as an instructor was not unexpected. We enjoyed a happy Christmas with Joyce's folks, plus my brothers Bruce and Geoffrey, then traded in our Ford Prefect for something bigger, a second-hand FE Holden sedan, and prepared for a drive to Gippsland in Victoria in January 1958. The four-month Instructors Course was a B Grade posting, meaning that the RAAF would not pay costs of family removal and relocation for short terms. However, we decided that Joyce and the three children would come with me in the hope of finding accommodation in Sale, rather than stay behind in Ipswich.

I still look back at that posting at Amberley with great satisfaction. The Canberra was a great aircraft to fly and, although our training missions became repetitious, my nav and I tried constantly to improve our skills and proficiency. As well, we flew all over and round Australia. I got so used to the back blocks of Queensland and New South Wales that I could recognise where we were without a map. But how would we have fared in a war? Although I appreciated being a pioneer in those early years of Canberra operation, I wish that I had flown this aircraft in one of the later three phases of its life – eight years in Butterworth, four years in Vietnam, and eleven years back at Amberley in the photographic survey role, before retirement in 1982, and the disbandment of 2 Squadron. Nevertheless, I had the satisfaction of leaving 2 Squadron with a glowing report as a competent and reliable pilot. And, of course, I was lucky to do those two exciting trips to USA and Singapore. Those were the days!

CHAPTER SEVEN

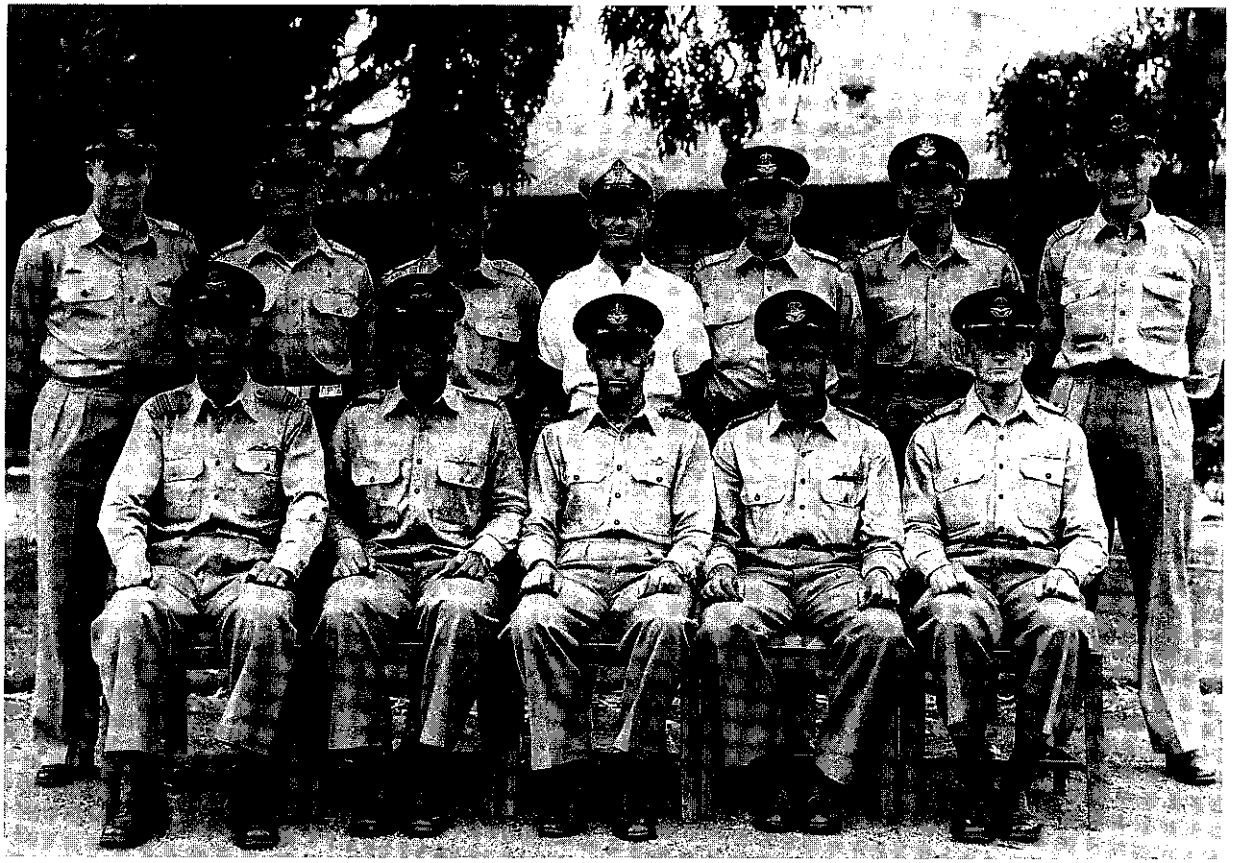
Instructing — The Other End of the Stick

The drive south from Queensland to Victoria in our newly-acquired Holden took five days, although this included a rest day at Bathurst at my Uncle Frank's house. We arrived in Sale on Australia Day weekend, a most inappropriate time to look for a house, so booked into the Star Hotel. Even the hotel was short of space. The best we could get was a bedroom without a cot; Susan slept in the bottom drawer of a chest-of-drawers. The following week, after tramping the town, Joyce found a small flat, fairly primitive but far better than living in the hotel. In those days Sale was not sewered so running out to the 'little house' in the rain was a new experience, and not a pleasant one. Luckily a rental house close to Lake Guthridge became available after seven weeks, enabling family life to regain some measure of comfort. For most of the 20 weeks of the course I had to stay Monday to Friday at the base in single quarters, mainly to concentrate on the necessary study and preparation for tests and exams. At weekends we could link up again as a family.

I had 11 classmates doing No. 19 Flying Instructors Course, all agreeing that it was very demanding in time and application. We were all trained as instructors in two types, the propeller-driven Winjeel and the Vampire jet trainer. As well as having to operate each aircraft proficiently, we had to learn the techniques for instructing the many teaching sequences while still flying accurately and safely. Having logged 1,700 flying hours by that time, I adapted more easily to the flying aspects than some others my junior, but nevertheless found landing the tail-wheeled Winjeel a challenge after all my jet time in aircraft with nose wheels.

Ground training occupied the other half of the course. We attended seemingly endless lectures on every aspect of aircraft operation, engines, systems, navigation, meteorology and armament, all subjects ending with an exam. Soon after the course began we started the main subject, Instructional Technique, which taught us how to prepare and deliver briefings before and after flight, and how to give a lecture. It really was a valuable course in Public Speaking. With the emphasis on classroom presentations, that particular element of the course also trained us in making short speeches, introducing guests, giving impromptu votes of thanks, and so on. As I had previously been nervous about speaking up, this course gave me valuable self-confidence which served me well in later years.

George Turnnidge, from 6 Squadron at Amberley, was also posted at the same time to the staff of A Flight at Central Flying School (CFS). To my surprise he was my staff instructor, his other student being John Paule whose path and mine crossed often in years that followed.



Pilots on 19 Flying Instructors Course at Central Flying School, East Sale, in 1958.
Standing: Rex Ramsey, Peter Reed, Tom Meehan, Benny Matthews, Jim North, Sam Todhunter, John Cooney. Seated: John Jacobs, Peter Larard, Alec Young, Don McKinlay, John Paule (RAAF Photo).

We first flew 60 hours in the Winjeel. George gave each of us a dual instruction ride then John and I flew together (the term was 'crashmates') to practise the lesson on each other. I remember that the character of 'Bloggs' was introduced by the RAF exchange officer. When a pilot is trying to teach a lesson in the air, the other pilot assumes the identity of a novice called Bloggs. This makes for a little more realism in the teaching situation. Even during our instructor-category tests the Chief Flying Instructor or the CO would pretend to be a 'dumb pupil' called Bloggs, sometimes deliberately making mistakes to gauge the response of the student instructor.

Our second phase was another 60 hours on the Vampire Trainer Mark 35. De Havilland took the old single-seater fighter, widened the cockpit a bit but not enough, and jammed in two seats side by side. In the Mark 35A they replaced the fixed seats with Martin-Baker ejection seats which were actually unsuitable for the Vampire, as the line of the pilot's spine was 11 degrees forward of the line of ejection. With tall people like me the harness straps pulled my shoulders down into a permanent hunch; after four years on Vampire trainers I developed a backache which stays with me to this day. On this second phase of the course we covered all the usual training sequences including handling at 35,000 feet, recognition of compressibility, and upper- level aerobatics and long-range navigation. As well, we did a little instruction on air-to-ground gunnery and dive bombing.

In 1958 RAAF pilots were issued for the first time with crash helmets. Sabre pilots at Williamtown already had a special issue of American helmets usually known as 'hard hats', but the rest of us received the British version, a blue cloth inner helmet to which was clipped the oxygen mask/microphone, and an outer hard shell which we called the 'bone dome'. It was a rather cumbersome arrangement but at least an advance in head protection. As some more years passed before we were issued with improved flying overalls, boots and warm jacket, operating out of Sale in winter was frequently a very chilling experience.

Graduates of the course were posted either to Basic Flying Training School at Point Cook to instruct on Winjeels, or to Advanced Flying Training School which started operating Vampire Trainers at RAAF Pearce in Western Australia in June that year. With my jet background I felt I was almost a certainty to go to Pearce, and this is where I was posted. My results helped in that regard as I Passed with Distinction, won the trophy for the best pilot, and also qualified as Instrument Rating Examiner.

Family life in Sale was far from settled. With me away at the base all week, Joyce bore the hardships of dealing with temporary housing, chicken pox, German measles and Sale's miserable weather. In February the temperature was 98 degrees Fahrenheit one day, then 58 the next. In March we collected wood for the open fire, and by April the sleety gales arrived. All the same, Gippsland boasts some pretty countryside which we often enjoyed on picnics to mountains or beach. We reached the first milestone in family education that year — Jennifer started kindergarten at East Sale.

Towards the end of the course we devised a plan for relocating the family. I was entitled to free transport from East Sale to Pearce, but as far as the Air Force was concerned, my family still resided in Ipswich, from where they would be moved at public expense whenever I found a house in the region of my new posting. So I drove Joyce and the children round the coast to Sydney and saw them onto the train to Queensland where they stayed again with my parents in Toowoomba. I returned to

East Sale, packed my belongings into the Holden, and drove through Victoria to Port Pirie in South Australia where I put the car on the Trans-Continental for the rail journey across the Nullarbor to Kalgoorlie. After another half-day drive to Perth, I reported to RAAF Pearce for duty as an Instructor, Category C.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Going West

July 1958 began a new era for the RAAF. Following a feasibility trial a few years earlier which proved that trainee pilots could successfully be trained in jet aircraft, the time had come to graduate entire courses on jets. No. 1 Advanced Flying Training School, equipped with brand new Vampire Mark 35A Trainers, started operations at RAAF Base Pearce, this move to the West soon proving to be a wise decision. We needed a wide area to range over, and clear airspace up to 35,000 feet for jet operation. These were no longer available near our training bases in eastern States whereas the skies surrounding Perth were relatively free of civil traffic. As well, Pearce needed an active flying tenant, the only resident unit until our arrival being No. 25 (Citizen Air Force) Squadron with single-seat Vampires.

With plenty of hangar space and accommodation available, our School staff quickly prepared classrooms, briefing cubicles, offices and workshops, ready for the arrival of No. 31 Course from Point Cook. Settling in to a new base, a new unit and a new organisation was not without problems, but under the direction of the CO Wing Commander Bill Coombes, we seemed to resolve everything fairly quickly. I think that all the staff felt privileged to be part of something new and therefore applied themselves very seriously to the job. Initially, as we had only one course of student pilots who had done their basic phase at Point Cook, all the instructors squeezed into A Flight, led by Bernie Reynolds. Three months later I was appointed flight commander of B Flight, so took about ten of the instructor staff with me to prepare for the next intake of students.

Settling in domestically was another matter. Pearce is 15 miles (25 kilometres) north of Midland Junction, then the most northern suburb of Perth and itself 15 miles from the city centre. The base had insufficient married quarters for all the AFTS staff, so those fellows with only a small number of qualifying points were obliged to find housing in the northern suburbs of Perth. Points were allotted for seniority, years of service and size of family. The disadvantage of living in Perth was the long drive to work each day, but at least those fellows lived in civilisation. Pearce was a lonely outpost in the bush near the village of Bullsbrook, alongside the Great Northern Highway to Darwin.

Expecting to be granted a married quarter, I took leave, flew back to Queensland, collected Joyce and three small children from Toowoomba, and brought them across to Perth on a day which they would be pleased to forget. In those times the airlines flew the DC6B piston-engined airliner, much slower than today's jet liners. Our trip from Brisbane to Perth became a long ordeal. After leaving Eagle Farm at 7am we had breakfast en route, but Christopher lost his during the descent into Sydney. There we waited an hour or so for the next flight to Adelaide. On this leg

we encountered violent turbulence just after the lunch of salmon mornay was served. Almost all of the passengers were ill and the hostesses were hard pressed to cope with the smelly mess, let alone stay on their feet. After another wait at Adelaide our pale and washed-out tribe were not keen on boarding for the third time. However, this flight was smooth, there were only ten passengers aboard, and the children received personal attention from the cabin staff, so all managed to endure the long flight which finished at Guildford Airport near midnight.

For our first three weeks we rented a house in a Perth suburb, then moved into a married quarter on base. Like most military bases, Pearce had its post-war share of imported pre-fabricated timber dwellings. Ours was a Riley-Newson three-bedroom house, small and basic, but we felt elated to have a married quarter at last and joyfully put in a lot of effort making it comfortable. Our first five weeks were rather makeshift as our furniture in storage in Ipswich took that long to reach us. Our neighbours were Brian and Margaret Spilsbury, Brian being the unit instructor in 25 Squadron. Although Brian left the RAAF a few years later, our friendship has lasted and we never visit South Australia without seeing them at Victor Harbor.

As a brand-new instructor I was feeling my way during the first few months. If a student makes good progress, the instructor's confidence is boosted as well. My first student was Tom Trinder who became a proficient pilot and later CO of a maritime squadron. The only accident in all my years of flying occurred on a take-off with Tom — actually an error of judgment on my part rather than a mishandling mistake.

During instrument take-offs Tom had difficulty keeping straight down the centre line and usually veered off to one side. (So did everybody else — owing to acceleration error in the compass). One day I decide not to take control but to see if he could make it into the air without crossing the edge of the runway. He didn't! As we lifted off, the right wheel struck three runway lights. I reported this to the control tower then continued with our period of instruction. Suspecting a deflated tyre, I made a very careful emergency landing, easing the weight on to the wheel rim without any further damage. My log book records an admonishment for allowing the student to swing off the runway, but a commendation for a fine landing. I should be grateful for my safety record over the years, but regret that particular blot on my copybook.

The Vampire proved to be a reliable and robust trainer, despite its cramped cockpit. The only mechanical defect which interfered with the training program for some months was the anti-skid device in the braking system. Our early Australian single-seat Vampires had a pneumatic airbag system for applying the brakes. In the trainer version we had a hydraulic system, similar to the one I knew on the Canberra, in which the Maxaret unit prevented the brakes locking the wheel during braking on wet surfaces. In those early months at Pearce our braking problems were numerous, the main effects being severe shuddering and vicious grabbing. Fortunately de Havilland engineers solved the problem promptly by re-positioning the caliper unit further round the rim of the brake disc.

On these courses we failed very few students as most handled all sequences with surprising skill. We covered general handling (day and night), instrument flying, formation, navigation, plus the rudiments of armament delivery. As instructors, we were all pleasantly surprised at the high level of handling ability achieved by most of the students by the time they finished the Vampire phase. In their final handling test (known as the Wings Test) I required each student to climb to 30,000 feet, show that he could deal with compressibility, perform numerous aerobatic manoeuvres, descend

and fly safely in the low flying area, then return to the airfield to make several types of circuits and landings. I recall one young naval airman named Hodgson who amazed me with his competent handling and performance. He had even composed his own sequence of aerobatics, swinging smoothly from a loop into a roll, a steep turn, a vertical climb, and so on. I complimented him on his skilful handling, and marked his test accordingly, but refrained from telling him that I would have been hard-pressed to do better myself. Despite his obvious natural aptitude, he was perhaps over-confident of his own ability after such a short time as a pilot. Several months later he botched a landing in a Sea Venom at the Naval Air Station at Nowra and killed himself.

Everyone enjoyed the low flying exercises, either in the designated area a few miles north of Pearce or on the authorised low-level navigation routes which taught the student to find his way round the countryside at only 200 feet above the ground. Although we probably annoyed some of the farmers in the district, our only casualty occurred in the low flying area. One day we had a frantic but garbled radio call from a student who had been cleared for some solo experience at 200 feet in the approved area. Suddenly he encountered a flock of birds and was unable to avoid a birdstrike which, in the worst of circumstances, can disable an aircraft or put the jet engine out of action. Fortunately he made it safely back to base where we were astounded to see the extent and evidence of the damage. A large sea bird had smashed through the small triangular window on the left side of the windscreen and shattered into a spray of blood and feathers throughout the cockpit, a ghastly sight. Although hit by the bird projectile, the student's head was fortunately protected by his hard helmet and visor. Though bruised and shaken, and spattered by bits of disintegrated bird, he did a fine job in retaining control and returning safely to base.

By far the worst problem was the weather. In the eastern States the meteorologists forecast fairly reliably by watching the weather patterns moving east across the continent. In Perth the weather comes out of the Indian and Southern Oceans where the only reporting stations are ships and Kerguelen Island. Consequently our meteorological forecasts were frequently wrong, and we could be caught out by foul weather moving in rapidly, a worrying problem if we had students up solo and unable to cope with flying in cloud. During my time we were just plain lucky but the School's luck ran out in 1960 when we lost a Vampire. Dense cloud rolled in suddenly, obscuring the airfield before all aircraft were safely on the ground. Peter Larard leapt into a Vampire and climbed to 20,000 feet to meet up with two solo students who were circling in the clear on top. Even though they were still quite inexperienced, he encouraged them to formate on his wings while he led them down through the bad weather. During the descent through turbulent cloud, one student became detached then disoriented so had no choice but to eject. He parachuted down safely but the Vampire crashed with a bang near the local primary school.

The workload continued heavily throughout my posting. As well as having the supervisory responsibilities as flight commander I always kept at least one student. Then I had to do check rides with all students and, as the School's only Instrument Rating Examiner, do the instrument tests of all students and staff. Consequently I was flying three, and sometimes four, periods a day — bad enough for my backache but very exhausting in summer months. Daily temperatures start climbing in the West by October and can reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit day after day from November onwards. Joyce found the heat extremely debilitating by Christmas that year as she was well advanced in pregnancy again. One day in January the temperature in Perth climbed to

111 degrees (44 degrees Celsius). Even though we drove to the beach whenever possible, there was no escaping the heat.

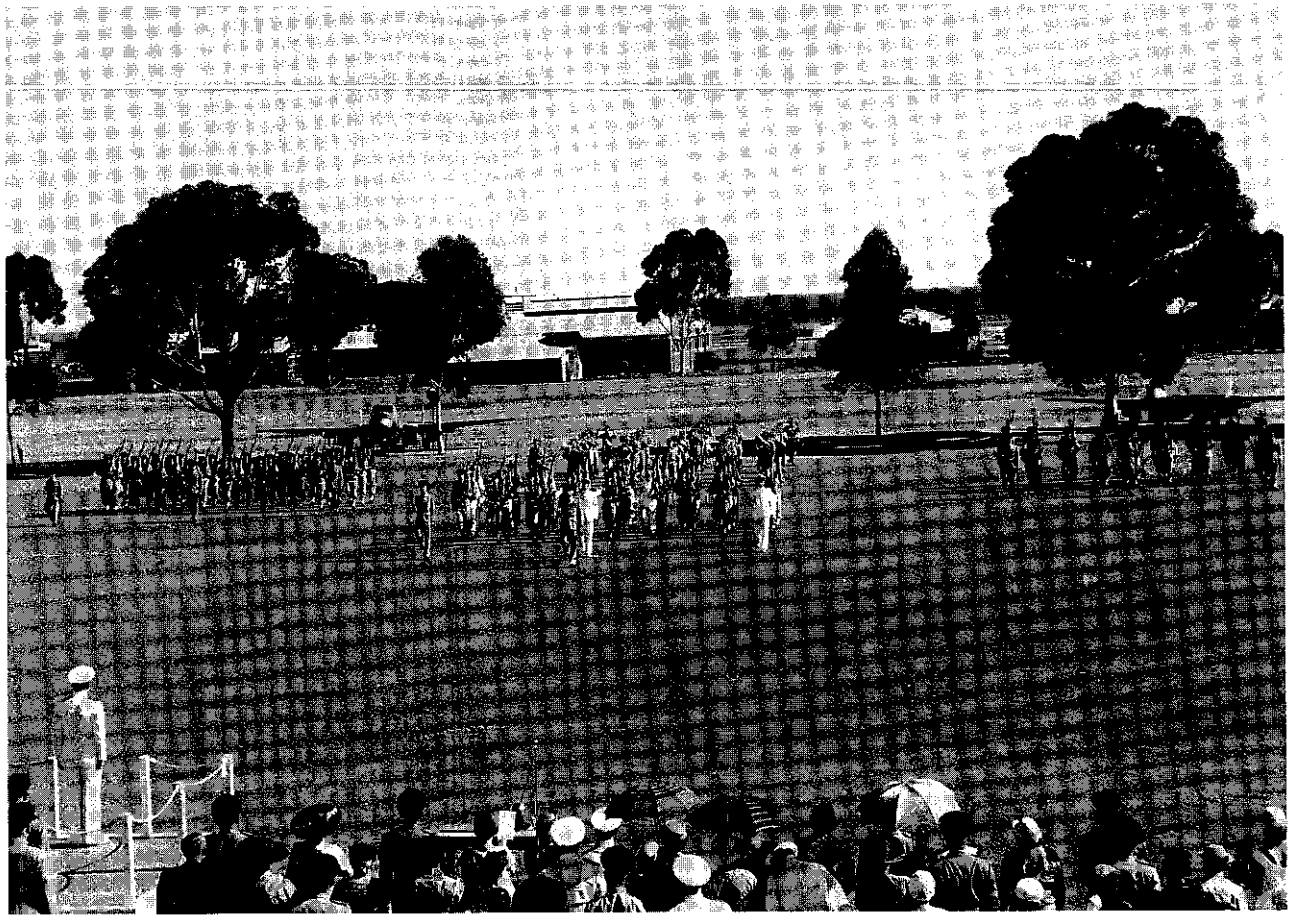
On 1 February 1959 Lynne Margaret arrived at Midland Hospital, in the middle of the heat wave. During Joyce's labour the duty sister decided to administer a sedative which unfortunately slowed down the delivery process and resulted in a protracted birth. The likelihood of some oxygen-deprivation has since been blamed for some of Lynne's problems. We had no inkling of this during her infancy, her first few months being spent in stifling heat in our house at Pearce. We had to drape her bassinet with water-soaked towels to keep her cooled, just like the old-fashioned 'Coolgardie safe'.

Lynne was christened in the Chapel at Pearce, her godparents John and Judy Cooney. John was one of the flying instructors and the weapons lecturer. By the beginning of 1959 Jennifer was attending the local primary school. We enrolled Christopher at the kindy on base but were puzzled when the teacher asked us why he was not attending. A little covert spying revealed that he was wagging from kindy, hiding behind the senior officers' garages rather than having to mix with strange children. He and Jennifer built themselves a gunyah-style cubby house in the scrub between our house and the primary school but hastily lost interest in it on discovering that a large goanna had taken up residence. At about the same time I was sitting for the C Exam, a pre-requisite for further promotion.

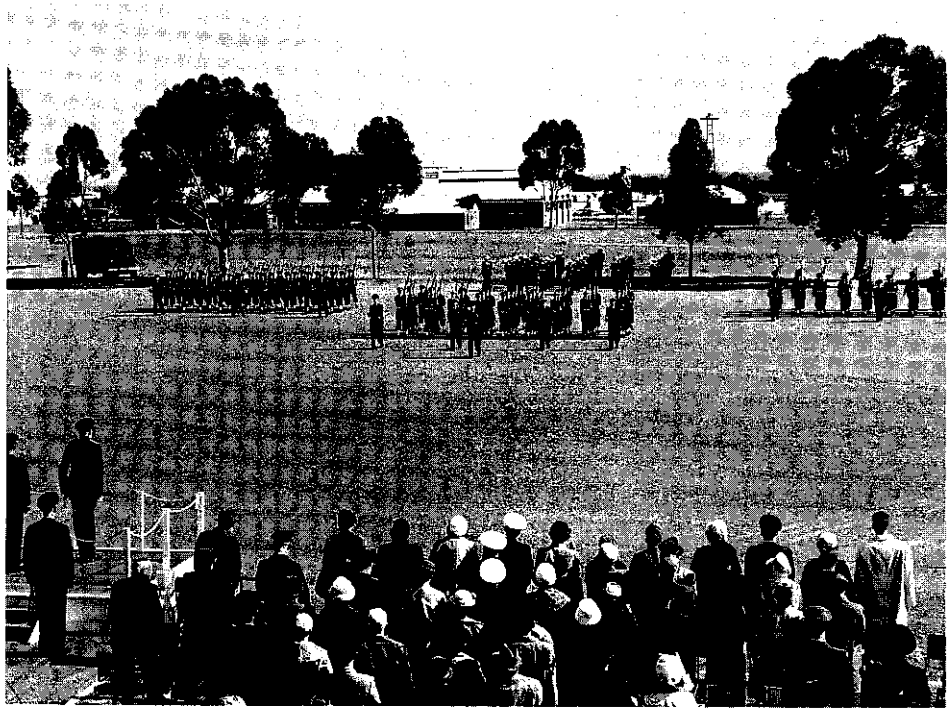
My first flight of students graduated in April 1959 and I very proudly led them on their Wings Parade, just as Charlie Wakeham had done eight years before when I graduated at Point Cook. The next course we received in B Flight was 34 Course, another first for the RAAF. Thirty-three courses through FTS had won their wings as Sergeants but these lads came to us as Cadets and graduated in September as Pilot Officers. I was glad to note that their curriculum now included training for the numerous other duties they would have to perform as officers.

The routine of instructing and testing continued right through 1959. Our Chief Flying Instructor, Cliff Fivash, was posted away and George Turnnidge arrived in his place from East Sale. As a Squadron Leader he had to be addressed as 'Sir' in the workplace, but we stayed good friends otherwise.

Towards the end of each course, the instructional staff had the responsibility of allocating marks earned by the students throughout their course, and determining which lads would emerge as best pilot, best at academics, and overall dux of the class. We also had to make recommendations for postings to operational squadrons. I found that it had been traditional that the top achievers became fighter pilots and those low on the gradation list went to transports. This probably was based on the contention that the sharper individual could be relied on to handle a single-seat fighter, whereas the less adventurous lad might find his potential after time as a second pilot in a multi-engined type. I felt that we should be looking for qualities other than the 'hotshot fighter type', and I made a few recommendations which may not have been welcomed by some of the graduates. One of our better lads, named Bill Cape, probably expected to head off to Williamtown but we recognised in him a potential for crew leadership and had him posted to a maritime reconnaissance squadron flying Neptunes. There he was highly regarded and proved to be an excellent captain of a crew. After a few years he left the RAAF to join Qantas, becoming a senior captain on the Boeing 747 and their training officer – and, incidentally, earning vastly more than I ever did.



Graduation Parade of 32 Course at RAAF Pearce, 15 April 1959.



Graduation of 34 Course AFTS at RAAF Pearce on 17 September 1959.

The Governor of Western Australia Sir Charles Gairdner was the reviewing officer at the graduation of 34 Course at AFTS Pearce on 17 Septemebr 1959.

The RAAF took a big step forward in 1959 by acquiring the first C130A Hercules transports. When some of them visited Pearce I remember feeling pleased that we at last owned a respectable transport element to support operational deployments.

The winter months passed with the usual rain and gales interfering with the flying program. The weather even ruined a week's holiday we took at a seaside resort of Rockingham. However, the skies cleared in September when we left the children with kindly neighbours for four days while Joyce and I did a short tour of the South-West to look at the Cape Leeuwin area and the huge karri forests near Pemberton.

Shortly after that the testing team from Central Flying School arrived for a week. Being well experienced by that date I had no trouble earning an upgrading to Category A2 instructor from Chief Flying Instructor Jim Wilson. By tradition, CFS visits were placed by many pilots in the same category as the Spanish Inquisition but I felt that I was as good as any of them and casually mentioned to Jim Wilson that I would be happy to join CFS one day. Much to my surprise, a month later came a posting to CFS, effective January 1960.

We had fully expected to stay longer at Pearce but were quite looking forward to returning to the greener pastures of Gippsland, in spite of its winters. Our little married quarter was neat and comfortable, we had bought some new furniture and, as a handyman carpenter, I had made other furniture items. Our garden boasted a handy vegetable patch, front lawn and beds of kangaroo paw. However, the summers were terribly uncomfortable, we were too far from the coast to feel a sea breeze, and at night the warm katabatic winds from the east made sleeping a trial instead of a comfort. Also, as we had no beauty spots near Pearce, our weekend outings for picnics, or to the beach or the zoo, meant long car trips which were not popular with my fatigued and irritable young passengers. So we were not really sorry to be packing up again on this occasion.

One aspect we did enjoy was the friendship among families in our 'married patch'. We still keep in touch with the Spilsburys and Ramseys, met the Macintoshes and Guntons in later years, and occasionally see George Turnnidge.

I am reminded of a funny incident in 1959 when Mack Drew, who lived two houses from us, asked if I would drive his wife to Midland Hospital when the time came for their third child to be born. One evening we were sitting round the table at dinner when Mack appeared at the door to announce that the time had arrived. When I said that I would be free in 15 minutes, he replied with some concern that he did not think his wife would last 15 minutes, and could we go NOW! Hastily leaving my meal, I put Mrs Drew in the front seat, Mack in the rear, and shot off down the road to Midland Hospital, 25 kilometres away. The faster I went, the more the car bounced, and she cried out that the baby was coming! When I slowed down for a more comfortable ride, she yelled, 'Hurry, hurry!' What a relief when I zoomed up to the hospital entrance! The panic over, she rested comfortably and eventually delivered the baby late that night. Our next-door neighbour Gerry Gunton years later met that baby who was then a young navigator in 11 Squadron at RAAF Edinburgh.

For our family 1959 was a busy year — new school and new baby, the usual colds and fevers, polio needles for everybody, and teething problems. Hayfever, which I had suffered from early in my career, would plague me in Springtime for the next 20 years.

So we packed up in December, sent our possessions to storage and our car to Melbourne by ship, said farewell to AFTS and Pearce, and flew back to Victoria, arriving at Sale on the last day of 1959. Our temporary home was a rented house near Lake Guthridge, large enough for us and my parents who drove down from Queensland to spend the New Year with us.

CHAPTER NINE

Schooldays at Sale

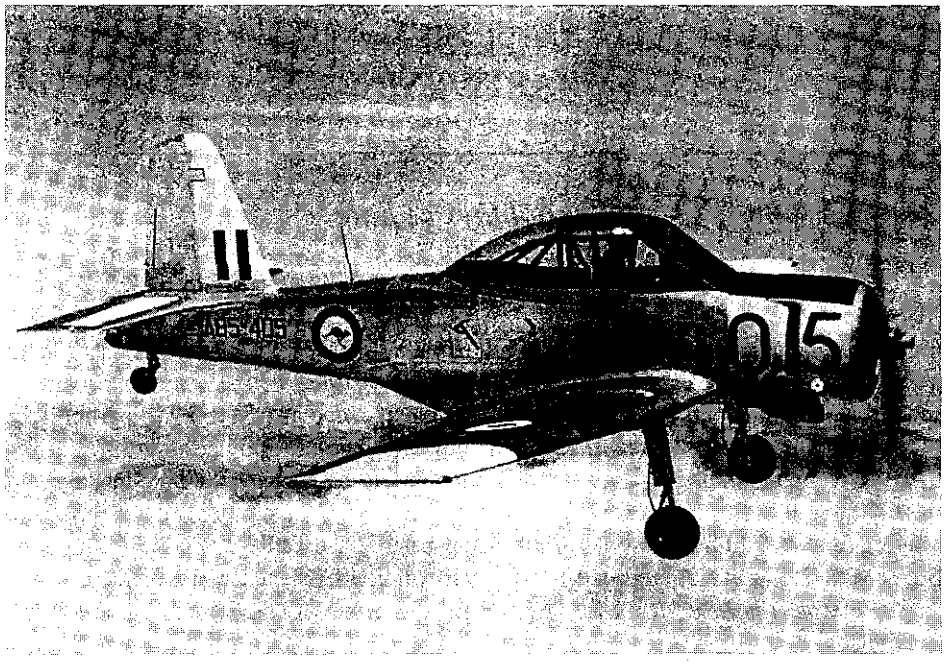
Our pleasant surprise to start 1960 was my name in the New Year Honours List, being awarded a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air, no doubt on recommendation from Pearce for the effort I had expended at AFTS. I was particularly pleased that my parents were with us at the time, to share the good news.

At the beginning of the year we rented an old house near the lake in Sale, the base being only four miles away. We had the necessary points to qualify for a married quarter but were obliged to wait until an on-base house came available through an outwards posting. This happened in May when the USAF exchange officer, Captain Jack Folkins, returned to USA, and we moved into MQ 320 behind the Dental Section.

At Central Flying School I found that being a member of the staff gave one quite a lift in personal status. In earlier years CFS examiners were regarded as ogres because of their overbearing treatment of those they instructed or tested. By the time I arrived on staff I am sure that all of us realised that we enjoyed no special privilege; rather, the onus was on each of us to be exemplary in our aircraft operation, observance of airmanship regulations and maintenance of safety standards. I know that this pride of belonging was not just a fancy of mine as I cannot recall a single staff pilot during my several postings at CFS who was other than dedicated and respected as an instructor.

As for the art of instructing, I had decided by this stage that it was the most rewarding of all my flying tasks. Remembering the treatment of students in my Point Cook days, I resolved always to be a helpful and respected instructor. Really, this required no conscious effort as an instructor can derive great satisfaction in assisting a student to progress confidently and competently. I always told my staff that if their student had not made an improvement by the end of a flying period, then the failure lay with the instructor.

In my view the primary requirement was to brief a sequence clearly before flight, then to demonstrate it precisely without confusing or irrelevant comments. When the student tried the manoeuvre the instructor should be able to recognise a problem then to help him appreciate why he has it, followed by how to avoid it. By patiently explaining the 'why and how' aspects the instructor can usually help the student over the hurdle of frustration and underconfidence. I deplore the old-style method when the instructor repeatedly does the manoeuvre then says, 'Now you do it', leaving the hapless student either to eventually get it right by sheer accident or to become dispirited through his inability to analyse his own difficulties.



The Winjeel, basic trainer for the RAAF from 1953 to 1975.

In A Flight we took in experienced pilots for a five-month course and turned them into Category C instructors. We normally had 12 on each course, two for each staff member. Normally we could expect the course pilots to fly the Winjeel and Vampire reasonably accurately. The students then had to learn how to brief the various sequences (such as stalling, spinning, forced landings and aerobatics) and how to demonstrate them in flight while still flying accurately. Some talked too much or too fast. Others had the patter perfect but at the same time lost control of the aircraft. At least we could laugh about it and try again.

You will notice that I am no longer relating hair-raising stories of incidents which nearly cost me my life. As a responsible instructor with 2,500 flying hours I was long past descending recklessly through cloud or trying unauthorised slow rolls just above the ground. Indeed, a lot of the frothy excitement of my younger days had been replaced by a serious commitment to sound instructing, although I am sure that the satisfaction of this role made up for the repetitive and routine flying program. And routine it certainly was! When we had successfully graduated one course, we started again with the next. Often the only relief to the monotony was how we played the role of Bloggs, deliberately making the sort of mistakes which a trainee might, but of course only to a point short of causing a real mishap. As I had noted during my own instructor course in 1958, the character of Bloggs was introduced by an RAF exchange officer. For many years the RAAF sent a Flight Lieutenant instructor to the RAF Central Flying School at Little Rissington in the charming Cotswolds in England and the RAF reciprocated by posting one of their instructors to our CFS at East Sale. Although we trained on different types of aircraft, the arrangement proved an effective means of keeping up with developments in training techniques and cooperating on

matters of standardisation where applicable. Such an exchange was always regarded as a plum posting. A fine RAF officer who came to us in 1960 was Jim Rhind who often flew with me in Vampire demonstrations. He and his family liked Australia sufficiently to return some years later when he became a testing officer with Department of Civil Aviation. The USAF also conducted an exchange program with the RAAF. Jack Folkins was not replaced at CFS, although the USAF continued their exchanges at Williamtown and Amberley, and possibly at Richmond on transports.

At the end of 1960 I became the flight commander of A Flight, directly responsible to CFI Jim Wilson for the conduct of each Flying Instructor Course. We were good friends in that flight, people I regarded highly, like Col Roffe, Peter Coy, Jum Chataway and Max Buchanan. Pilots who came through A Flight as students were often fellows I knew well or would have association with for many years afterwards. John Whitehead, John Chesterfield, Tex Watson, Mick Lyons and 'Og' Worth went on to Air Commodore rank, Mike Ridgway, Ken Tuckwell, Dick Bomball and Pete Scully to Air Vice-Marshal. They were typical of the high standard of pilot who passed through CFS. Many others used their RAAF experience to go far in the airlines.

Occasionally the monotony of instructing was relieved by some special task such as a formation flypast during Air Force Week or a flypast over Melbourne's Cenotaph on Armistice Day. Also we made the annual visits to the Flying Training Schools at Point Cook and Pearce to test and upgrade instructors and to assess the standards of training at these schools. On another occasion we took a flight of Vampires to Tasmania to perform at the Hobart Regatta, reminding me of our visit some years earlier in Canberras. Extra flying was also available to staff pilots as we had two Canberra Trainers for a while, the two T4 models which had been flown out from UK to Amberley in 1956. Few of us liked them, as the side-by-side seating was far too cramped and uncomfortable. We also had Dakotas for conversion and travel support so most of us were checked to fly four types, rather unusual on any base.

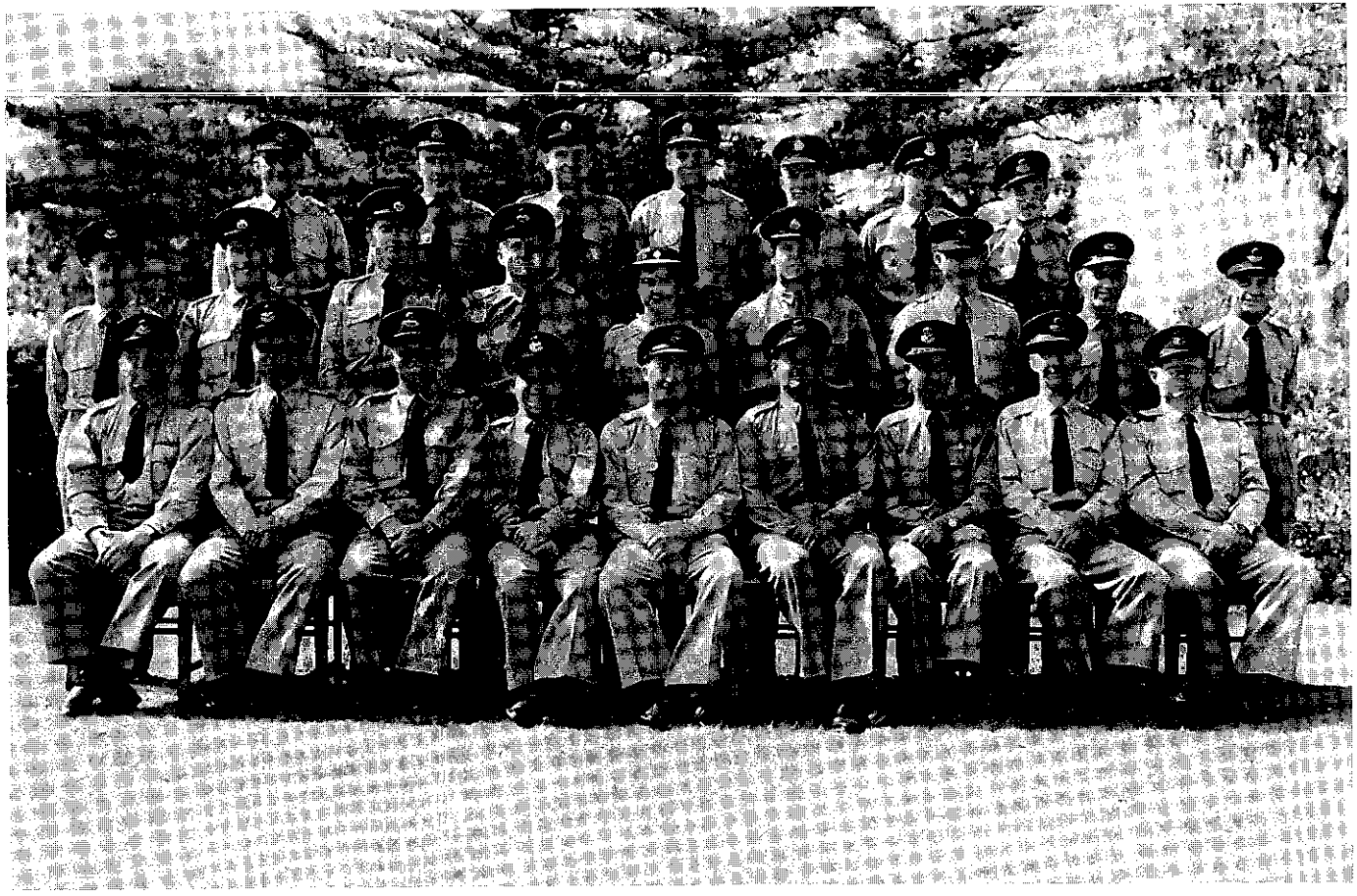
Ted Fyfe (OC East Sale) congratulating me on the award of the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air.

I believe without any doubt that the best pilot at the School was our CO, Wing Commander Ian Parker, a real professional who could fly competently in any conditions, even in the frequent foul weather which characterised East Sale in winter. I remember days when we would be huddled round the pot-bellied stoves in the old flight huts, low cloud rolling overhead and stinging sleety rain peppering the windows — clearly not the conditions for teaching students! Ian Parker would look in the door, comment loudly that all those aeroplanes were lined up out there waiting to be flown, and then take off for some genuine instrument flying practice in solid cloud up to 30,000 feet! Not a word of criticism from him, but we would look at each other, wondering if he regarded us all as sissies. I remember once making application to go to Williamtown to do a short course in parachuting which comprised some intensive instruction and one static-line drop from a Dakota. After years of flying I felt that it would be beneficial to know what it was all about in case I ever had to bail out. I was called into the office of the CO who asked me if I were not a married man — which he knew perfectly well. When I replied in the affirmative, he said, 'Then don't be bloody silly! Pilots only jump out of aeroplanes when they absolutely have to', and tore up my application.

On the other hand Ian Parker did have confidence in me as he nominated me to give the solo demonstration of the Vampire at each air show or pageant. The requirements were simple — do nothing dangerous, stay in view of the onlookers, and keep it fast and noisy with plenty of zooms and rolls to inspire the 'oohs' and 'aahs' from the attending crowd.

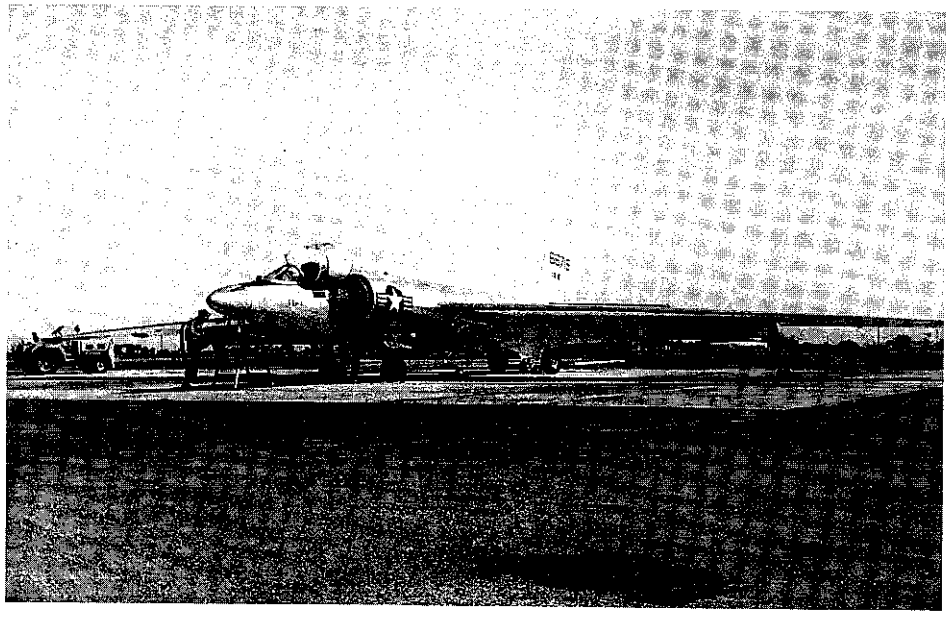
If it could be called a distinction, I was the last in the RAAF to fire rocket projectiles (R/P). After their success in World War II these weapons became standard fitment to Vampire and Meteor fighters and were used extensively by 77 Squadron in Korea. Delivering the weapon accurately to the target was an inherent problem as the aircraft had to set up a long steady dive, during which it was vulnerable to ground fire. We stopped using R/P about 1960. At that time TV Channel 9 in Melbourne ran a series of filmed adventures for a children's program. When a film crew came to East Sale to do a feature on jet flying, we flew the camera men around in Vampires and helped them get all the right shots of aircraft landing, taking off, and flying in close formation. For some extra excitement the CO authorised a rocket attack on a target, an old armoured car on Dutson Range.

We loaded four rockets, probably the last in store, and I headed off with the camera man beside me to film the attack from the pilot's angle. Jack Green, as Range Safety Officer at Dutson, laid explosives round the target, ready to detonate the charge as my rockets reached the target area. We had no time for rehearsal but reckoned that between us we could stage a spectacular show for the benefit of the camera-men on the ground and in the air. In the attacking dive I fired the four rockets in salvo, straddling the target. Two hit with a mighty bang, the flame and explosion just what the film crew wanted. This was very fortunate as one rocket hit and severed Jack's electric cable, preventing him from firing the charge. Everybody thought we were very clever but it was a case of 'get it right the first time, we have no more rockets'.

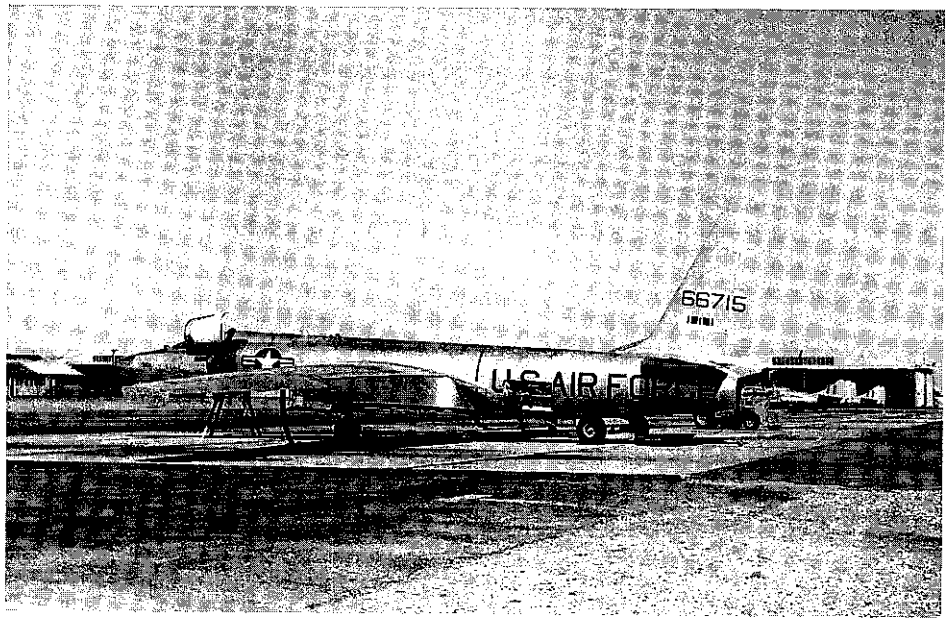


Staff of the Central Flying School at East Sale in 1960 when Ian Parker was CO, Jim Wilson the Chief Flying Instructor and Ken Godfrey the Chief Ground Instructor.

The unusual interest during 1961 was the arrival of a flight of U2 aircraft from the Loughlin USAF base at Del Rio on the Rio Grande in Texas. The Lockheed U2 spyplane aroused world-wide interest when one of them, piloted by Gary Powers, was shot down over the Soviet Union. For weeks one of our U2s went off daily, heading south and climbing to above 60,000 feet (exactly how high we were never told), returning hours later. As far as I know they collected air samples at high altitudes in the southern high latitudes. A USAF pilot told us that they normally flew far enough south to see the ice cap of Antarctica. I suspect that scientists were concerned about the ozone layer even in those days.



U2 aircraft of the USAF operating from East Sale in 1961.

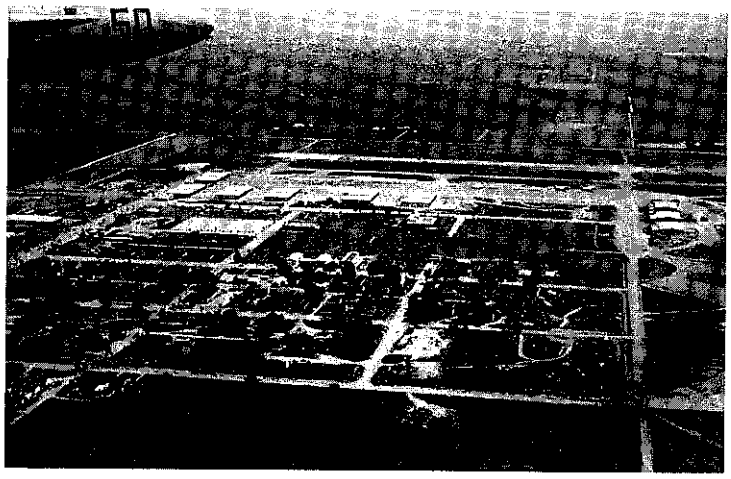


Domestic life on base also settled into a routine of sending children to school and tending to the usual run of childhood ailments. Going to school at St Mary's in Sale is the first clear recollection Jennifer has of anything other than home life. She remembers 'the formidable nuns, especially the Principal, Sister Michael, who was as wide as she was high, and bustled round in her black habit, a big leather strap hanging from her belt next to her Rosary beads. Her black moustache and booming voice terrified us kids. The nuns told us how lucky we were to be Catholic and that we should feel sorry for the other kids in town who were not, as they had black souls and would never go to Heaven. Whenever I saw one of these State School kids at the bus stop, I detected a black aura around his head and would always say a quick prayer for him.'

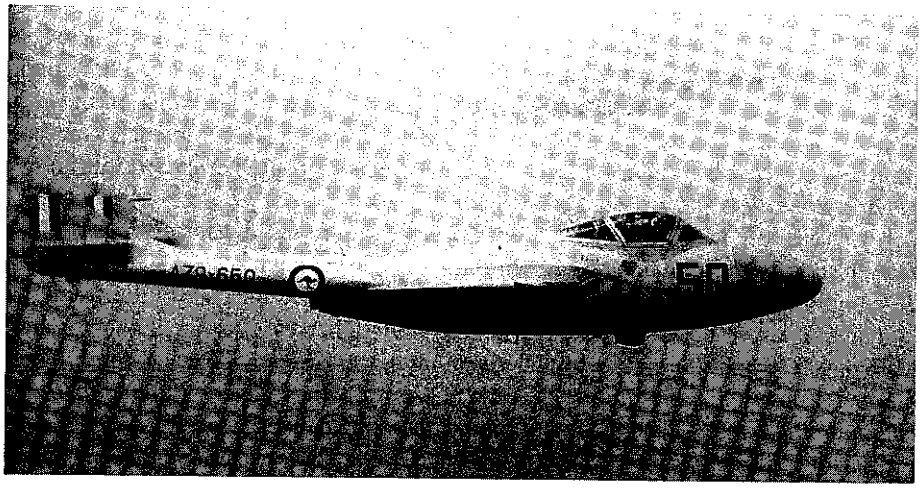
While remembering aspects of school life such as the morning issue of hot cocoa provided by the mothers' tuckshop committee and travelling to school on freezing mornings in the back of an Air Force truck, Jennifer is hazy about when Mum came home with a new baby. The next member of our family, another daughter we named Debra Joan, arrived at Sale District Hospital on 20 November 1960. As Joyce recollects, 'She was born with a frown on her face, probably undecided whether to come or not. Perhaps she had a vision of the future.' Our good friends 'Blue' and Flo Connolly were her godparents. 'Blue' was the CO of the School of Photography. By this stage we were wondering why 'little brother' had not appeared on the scene. The OC of the base, Group Captain Ted Fyfe, made a snide comment to me about limiting the size of my family. As a Flight Lieutenant I could hardly tell him to mind his own business.

Ted Fyfe had been checked out on the Vampire but did not fly regularly. He liked to join in our armament programs when we practised air-to-ground gunnery and dive bombing on Dutson Range but our CO always insisted on a staff pilot flying with him and I was usually detailed to occupy the right seat. As an instructor I had developed the habit of resting my hands on my knees, seemingly relaxed but ready to grab control column and throttle if needs be. As we winged over for the dive towards the bombing target, Ted was fumbling with radio call and safety switches while controlling the entry somewhat erratically. Nevertheless, he still noticed my hands edging towards the controls and snarled at me, 'I can handle the bloody thing!' No doubt he could but I certainly had no intention of sitting there passively while he did something silly and put us into a dangerous situation.

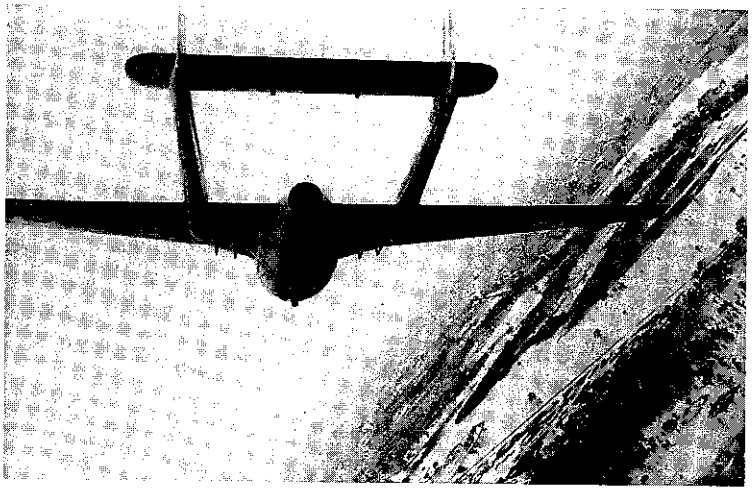
At Sale our perpetual problem was coping with Gippsland's weather. In summer we sweltered in heat wave conditions up to 103 degrees Fahrenheit; in winter we endeavoured to stay warm while the freezing gales whipped eerily round or through the timber dwellings and flight huts. Potbelly stoves made life more bearable indoors but everybody had to venture out eventually, perhaps to go to school or work, or even to hang another load of wet nappies on the line. Down in the crew room on the tarmac we had to press on with the flying program, except when the airfield was fogged in or the wind off the snow-covered mountains was beyond safety limits across the runway. Many a time we appreciated the help of ground radar to bring us safely back to a landing in foul weather.



RAAF East Sale in 1961.



A Vampire Mark 35A Trainer at East Sale in 1961.



A Vampire Trainer over flooded Gippsland in 1961.

With some amusement I look back on a flight in marginal conditions which was not particularly funny at the time. The CO of Base Squadron, Wing Commander Fred Robey, was to attend a senior officer course at Point Cook starting on Monday morning. As he wished to stay at East Sale that weekend for some personal reason, our CO said that one of the CFS staff would fly him to Point Cook early on Monday in time for his course. At 0600 hours on Monday morning the weather forecast was decidedly unfavourable, to put it mildly. Typical Victorian winter conditions prevailed, with rain, low cloud and gusty winds sweeping up the Latrobe Valley. All the same, Fred Robey was desperate to be at Point Cook in time so I loaded him and his suitcase into a Winjeel and headed off west. Being without navigation aids in a Winjeel we were obliged to stay in the clear, the main difficulty being the lack of 'clear' airspace thanks to the fog, misty rain and lowering cloudbase.

This probably sounds like a repeat of my near-disaster flight in a Wirraway along the railway line in 1952. However, this time I was quite experienced and knew the low-level route to Point Cook very well. We negotiated the hilly terrain around Morwell without risk, although Fred's anxiety was becoming obvious as we flew west along the railway line towards Melbourne. At Dandenong we were down to 200 feet but I knew it was easy from there on — just fly along Centre Road past the big golf courses towards Brighton then across the Bay to Point Cook. I think what made Fred really nervous was seeing our wing tip sweep past the big VW sign on top of the Volkswagen factory. Then, a few minutes later, being told by Point Cook tower that their base was closed due to fog and bad visibility. We were almost there so I said we were coming in, made a bad-weather circuit at 200 feet, and landed safely. Of course the Point Cook control would not permit a take-off until the fog cleared about midday but at least I delivered Fred in time to avoid a reprimand for late arrival. I sometimes wonder whether he thought that particular taxi ride was worth the grey hairs he probably developed.

In August 1961 I received a big shock, being told to fly to Canberra for an interview with Air Commodore Hannah at Department of Air in Russell Offices. No explanation! On arrival at Canberra I learned that he was to become Deputy Chief of Air Staff in 1962 and I had been nominated as his Personal Staff Officer. For a person who knew little about the Air Force except flying I was utterly astonished and even fearful at the prospects. Later I came to learn that an Air Force career was far from complete without a share of staff appointments. At the time I wondered how I would cope and why they had to select me. My interview with Colin Hannah lasted about two minutes. He asked about my current job and did I have a family, then said he would see me in January. So in a flash I was confirmed as a future staff officer. The only consolation was that the post was established for a Squadron Leader, so I could look forward to promotion.

With an official posting advice in hand, I made application for a married quarter in Canberra. In 1960-61 Government departments (including Department of Air) moved en masse from Melbourne to Canberra, occupying dozens of new office blocks and requiring hundreds of new dwellings in new suburbs of the rapidly expanding city. I was assured of adequate accommodation by the time we would need it.

The next unexpected event was an attachment to Officers Training School at Point Cook to do a Senior Officers Administration Course. I recall that we had about 20 flight lieutenants of all categories on this course which proved to be the most

intensive and valuable learning experience I ever had. In the twelve weeks we covered a multitude of administration and management matters, dealt with a wide range of current and international affairs, and sat for lots of tests and exams, all excellent preparation for future desk jobs. Despite severe hayfever I tried hard on this course and earned a Pass with Distinction.

Meanwhile, back at East Sale, Joyce bore the load of family difficulties, accentuated by a succession of illnesses including chicken pox, flu, gastric upsets, and Deb's teething. I managed to get home most weekends but was not around when help was needed to share the load. She may have contemplated divorce or even mass murder but did not have time to accomplish either as she was too busy coping with one crisis after another.

By mid-December the course finished, I returned to East Sale and cleared from CFS. We packed up on our tenth wedding anniversary and, with five children and a cat aboard, drove overnight via Orbost to Canberra, wondering what the next phase of our life would bring. One happy aspect was the allocation of a brand-new, four-bedroom house in Blacket Street, Downer, where we were welcomed by friendly neighbours and settled down in time for a quiet family Christmas.

CHAPTER TEN

The Dreaded Department

After so many anecdotes to do with flying, it may sound odd when I claim that my strongest recollections of 1962 relate to household tasks rather than to Air Force events. Perhaps the reason is that the new house absorbed so much of our time that year, whereas the new job did not thrill me at all.

We took over tenancy of a brand-new brick veneer house, the yard so overgrown by high grass on our arrival that we could not even find the path from the back door to the clothes hoist. During the next 11 months I seemed to be overwhelmed with jobs just to turn the place into a comfortable home — sowing lawns, digging garden beds, laying concrete edges, planting trees, shrubs and hedges, erecting a garage, sanding floors, laying lino, carpet and vinyl tiles, and starting a vegetable garden. Such are the labours of a Do-It-Yourself devotee. We could not have hired tradesmen, in any case, as we were too short of cash for such luxuries.

Downer was then on the outskirts of Canberra so we considered ourselves rather remote until a handful of shops was built at Dickson. The nice part of our new life was having friendly neighbours, all in the same boat, so to speak, setting up new homes and all sharing help and advice. Thirty-five years later we are still close friends of the Hurleys and Robertsons. Early that year Joyce's parents and Judy visited us. Her Dad had a spell of illness which necessitated a call on our local doctor. He said nothing about this consultation but we realised the impact of it in later months.

As the Air Force was paying me a Squadron Leader salary by this time, I reluctantly reported to the Department of Air in mid-January to start work as a Personal Staff Officer, with not a single clue about my duties. After a week of familiarisation with my predecessor I was on my own, confused and bewildered. I did not know the departmental organisation or any of the key personnel, nor did I have a clear picture of my own role.

Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (DCAS), Air Vice-Marshal Colin Hannah, was a brusque, intense, humourless and uncommunicative person, at least in his relationship with junior officers. I always felt intimidated by his impersonal attitude, feeling that he was unaware of my presence unless he needed a messenger boy. He would lean back in his chair and yell at me through the door, 'Get Lush!' I would hurry along the corridor to the office of the Director of Air Force Plans, Group Captain 'Ginty' Lush and politely advise him that DCAS wished to speak with him. My duties rarely stretched beyond taking in and collecting his working files, reminding him of appointments, ensuring that he had a fresh pack of Rothmans cigarettes before any conference, and sitting waiting for him to go home at night so that I could clear his desk and lock up the classified material. If he had thanked me or rebuked me I would have known where I stood, but little communication passed between us. Life was

boring and disheartening, which is why I looked forward to some constructive work at home.

The job had one advantage. For most of every day I sat in my little office (third floor of Building E at Russell Offices), reading the highly classified files on world events and current affairs affecting Defence, plus the magazines and other publications which discussed foreign policy and international relations. With nothing else to do I became fairly conversant with these worldly matters, enabling me to sit for and pass the Q Exam. This exam qualified an officer to be nominated for the Staff Course, as well as being a pre-requisite for further promotion. I remember returning to the office from the Examination Centre at RAAF Fairbairn after the second exam paper, the one on current international affairs. When DCAS asked to see the question paper, he noted that one question was so ambiguous and perplexing that he declared that he would not know how to answer it. He immediately picked up the telephone, called the Commandant of the Staff College at Fairbairn and told him very bluntly that he had the exam paper in his hand, considered that particular question absurd and did not wish to learn that any candidate had failed on account of his answer to that question. His abrupt and immediate reaction left me a little astounded. I had never before been close to a person with such a peremptory and dominating attitude.

Our relationship did not change, although I began to understand Colin Hannah's surly and aggressive nature, learning when to stay clear and when he was approachable. Eventually, being so frustrated by my useless job, I dared to discuss the matter with him. I told him that I was not gainfully employed and that the job could be done by an intelligent corporal. To my amazement he sympathised with my position and admitted that he preferred to do his own research, think out the substance of his project submissions, dictate to his stenographer, then amend to his own satisfaction. (This was quite the opposite of the style of the previous DCAS, Air Vice-Marshal McLaughlan, who delegated as much as possible to the directors within the Air Staff.) He said that he was unable to give me more fulfilling work but was pleased that I had spoken up about my empty existence and would enquire whether a more satisfying job might be available. Meanwhile, back to the files, cigarettes and tea cups.

What a surprise then in July to be asked by the Director of Postings, Doug Hurditch (our navigation officer in Malta days) if I were agreeable to going to USA as an exchange instructor. A Squadron Leader instructor with considerable jet experience, I fitted the bill precisely to replace 'Snow' Joske at Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma, even though I had five children. Believe it or not, the Chief Finance Officer (a civilian) objected to my selection on the grounds of cost of travel for my family, but he was emphatically over-ruled by DCAS who said I was the best man for the job.

The rest of the year passed in a whirl. In those times occupants of government houses were free to make a ten percent deposit and buy their house on very favourable terms. As Joyce and I felt that we needed a base and an asset, we sought to purchase our house in Downer. Our bank declined to lend us the deposit which was more than the surrender value of my insurance policies. On a suggestion by Wing Commander 'Spud' Spurgeon, the Staff Officer to the Chief of the Air Staff in an adjacent office, I approached the Bank of New South Wales where we had no trouble obtaining the necessary loan of £528 ($1,056), being the required ten percent of the value of the house. We planned to fit out the house sufficiently well for it to be leased furnished during our expected two-year absence, and subsequently engaged an agent. We lacked

the financial resources to install any luxuries. The old slow-combustion wood-burning Rayburn stove in the lounge room was our only heating in those days, inadequate warming for a house with four bedrooms. We had to resort to plug-in electric radiant heaters to avoid freezing on frosty winter nights and early mornings.

The staff job continued with little relief from the boredom, though of course I was buoyed up with anticipation of the forthcoming exchange to the USA. In the latter months of 1962 I became secretary to two new committees which DCAS chaired. We had made the decision (or the Government had made it for us) to buy the Mirage fighter from France as the Sabre replacement and to build close to 100 in Australia. As negotiations seemed to have stalled over language difficulties, supply problems and contractual arrangements, DCAS was tasked to set up a committee to unravel the mess so that we could start manufacture in Melbourne without further annoying delay. It certainly was interesting to see at close-hand all the top-level duck-shoving by people finding excuses for not getting on with the job.

At our first meeting which was attended by concerned RAAF officers, our Air Attache in Paris (Air Commodore Ron Susans), and representatives of Government Departments associated with the planned manufacture at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne, I took the minutes in my own style of shorthand, then had a draft typed for distribution. I reckoned without the wiles of the Air Member for Supply and Equipment (Air Vice-Marshal Creal) who returned my draft extensively rewritten to incorporate all the statements and comments which he probably wished he had made during the meeting. DCAS shrugged his shoulders and told me that such was the lot of a minute secretary. Determined to provide accurate minutes for the next meeting, I borrowed a tape recorder from the library and set the microphone centre table. Air Vice-Marshal Creal gave me a disapproving glare but I noted an amused (and rare) twinkle in the eye from DCAS.

I can thank Spud Spurgeon for much of my education as a novice staff officer that year. As Staff Officer to CAS he operated with efficiency and confidence, anticipating the needs of Air Marshal Sir Valston Hancock by preparing much of the massive supply of paper work which CAS had to review. At that time I had not the knowledge, judgment or confidence to do a similar job for DCAS. I was in awe of Sir Valston though very impressed by his quiet gentlemanly demeanour. He kept up his flying currency, occasionally flying a Canberra with his Personal Staff Officer, Barry Tennant, a navigator but, more importantly, a tennis player who was frequently summoned to accompany Sir Valston on the court. I recall several occasions that year when Cabinet was discussing Defence matters and Sir Valston was told to be on hand to answer questions if needed. He was left sitting on a hard chair outside the Cabinet Room for hours until a secretary came out to tell him that he was not required that day. I thought it was disgraceful and inconsiderate treatment of our most senior RAAF officer, particularly a sincere and sensitive man such as Sir Valston.

A couple of tragic events late in 1962 need recording.

After I left East Sale, Central Flying School (CFS) formed an aerobatic team of Vampires called the Red Sales. Led by my friend Reg Jones (from Malta days), the pilots were staff instructors from A and B Flights. During a practice session on 15 August the entire box formation of four aircraft dived into the ground at the bottom of a barrel roll not far from Sale. A terrible shock to the RAAF, this was a tragic loss of five good pilots — Reg, Alec Young (on my instructors' course), Marty Burke (in my flight at Pearce), Peter Hearnden and Don Gow. I was called into Air Marshal

Hancock's office and asked for my opinion as I knew all the pilots at CFS. The subsequent inquiry was unable to establish the cause of the accident. It could have been a misjudgment by Reg, but those who knew him well always suspected a collapse as it was not his nature to risk a roll at low level which was not directed safely upwards, away from the ground. That tragedy put an end to public displays of formation aerobatics for a year or so, when the Telstars were formed under the meticulous leadership and monitoring of the then-CO of CFS, Herb Plenty.

The other event was very much a personal one. From the visit to the doctor in February, Joyce's Dad knew that he had inoperable cancer of the stomach. He said nothing about it but continued during the winter of 1962 to work on pastoral properties to provide for Nana and Judy (then aged 14). He eventually collapsed in late August, boarded a train for Brisbane for treatment, but had to enter hospital at Rockhampton and died there on 14 September in a matter of days. Joyce flew north to attend his funeral. Fortunately her brother Jim was also there to arrange the details and to support Nana and Judy.

At Department of Air I had to find a replacement from three nominations. I chose Jum Chataway, an instructor friend from CFS, and one who had enjoyed an exchange posting with the RAF in England. I knew he would not thank me but I regarded him as the most reliable and dedicated. As it turned out, his unexciting introduction into staff work did him no harm as he eventually retired as a Group Captain.

In December I had a two-week detachment to CFS for a Vampire refresher course, just to get my hand in again after a year at the desk. Then followed a frantic pack-up, sale of the old Holden, and last-minute preparation of house and garden before we left on 22 December for a short stay in Sydney. Jennifer is the only one of the children with better than vague memories of our first spell in Canberra. She remembers attending school at St Brigid's at Dickson and going back there for Sunday Mass, the girls all dressed up with hats and gloves, feeling very proud that we had a large family which occupied a whole pew. By this stage she realised that our family moved quite often, the children having to accustom themselves to a new location and a new school, and either leaving pets behind or acquiring new ones. Although she did not understand what the Air Force was, she could blame it for having to farewell school friends and for the nervousness in easing herself into a new strange environment. However, when she disclosed in 1962 that we were going to Oklahoma, 'the other kids were so envious of me that I realised there were some advantages to belonging to an Air Force family after all!'

That Christmas was rather tense and unsettled. Imagine the upheaval in leaving Downer, arranging travel details, and organising clothing for seven people travelling across the world to the unknown. For Joyce the excitement of the official posting mid-year had long abated. By Christmas she was not happy about going, partly through the stress of the disrupted family life and partly worrying about the welfare of her Mother who now had Judy to raise alone. So, with a mixture of anticipation and regret, we sailed from Sydney on the P & O liner *Orsova* on New Years Day 1963, farewelled by my parents, Nana and Judy, and numerous other relations. It must have been an awesome experience for five young children.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Oklahoma, Ok!

Never listen to anyone who tells you that a shipboard cruise is a restful, romantic, idyllic, fun-filled way to while away your time. During the 20 days on board the *Orsova* sailing to San Francisco, Joyce was seasick for two days after each port call, Lynne ate the wrong food and needed medical treatment, and the rest of the children were bored stiff after four days of monotonous ship routine. We were glad to be ashore for a day at Auckland, Fiji, Honolulu and Vancouver, though it was quite a shock to our systems to arrive in North America in the midst of winter. From San Francisco the Santa Fe Railroad transported us east for two days to Wichita, Kansas, where we alighted in a blizzard and changed to the Rock Island Line for the final leg south to Enid, Oklahoma, on 25 January 1963. What a chilly surprise to find the countryside glistening under six inches of fresh snow!

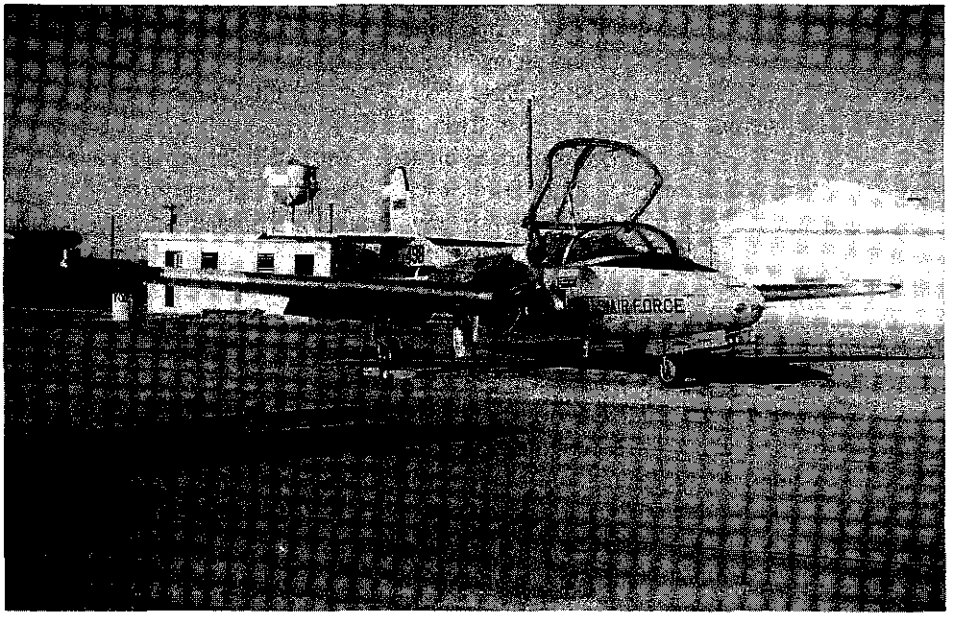
We moved straight into our married quarter, 1264 Hurst Drive, on Vance Air Force Base, about four miles south of Enid. It was a spacious and comfortable house, built ruggedly to withstand tornadoes, air conditioned in summer and heated by natural gas in winter. Any furniture we needed was borrowed from the base depot although we bought our own drapes, carpet square and bedspreads from Sears Roebuck department store. Another early purchase included warm parkas, pants and boots for all the cold children from 'Down Under' who had never before seen this sort of weather.

Without delay I joined ten other newly-arrived instructors for a conversion course on to the Cessna T-37. In regards to its performance this is an ideal basic jet trainer with side-by-side seating and smart performance up to 20,000 feet. We used oxygen but were not pressurised for operations above 20,000 feet. Its only drawback was the high-pitched scream from the two Continental jet engines, each producing 1,000 pounds of static thrust; prolonged exposure to this noise caused irreparable damage to hearing so we always had to wear ear muffs on the tarmac. It was a very small aircraft. The instructor could stand along side the cockpit and reach in comfortably to indicate the controls and instruments to the seated student. To some of our pilots who had previously flown any of the massive Century series fighters such as the F-105, the T-37 must have seemed a midget aeroplane. No wonder it carried the nicknames 'Hummer' or 'Tweety Bird'.

Not all of our students appreciated the delights of flying the 'Hummer'. Even for his first flight the student had to don his parachute pack, climb into the cosy but restricted cockpit, strap tightly into the ejection seat, put on his crash helmet and fasten the oxygen mask, then lower the perspex canopy and lock himself into this sealed plastic and metal box — an extremely daunting experience for anybody who had never flown before or who may have had claustrophobic thoughts. We had

numerous students who did not advance past the first take-off without becoming physically sick, the result of this unfamiliar confinement in what could be regarded as a torture chamber. After repeated and valiant attempts to complete a period of instruction without vomiting, students frequently resorted to Self-Initiated Elimination (SIE), convinced that they would never become a pilot. About the time of my arrival, Training Command became alarmed at the unacceptable numbers of SIEs. Losing students who really wanted to fly, even after repeated but aborted flights, was wasteful of men and flying hours. We started a program of counselling by medicos and specialist psychologists who must have known what they were about because many of our potential failures overcame their apprehensions and went on to complete the course without further worries about being sick in a confined cockpit.

The situation reinforced my contention that humans needed to be introduced into the aerial environment with confidence rather than apprehension. Which is why I always believed a Tiger Moth flight to be a comfortable but exhilarating experience



A Cessna T-37 Trainer at Vance AFB, Oklahoma, in 1963.

for a newcomer to the air. Of course the USAF was long past using anything like a Tiger Moth in 1963 yet, after the ongoing sickie and SIE situation in the T-37, the authorities recognised the need for some alternative measures. Just after I left in 1965 the USAF introduced a new program of giving an incoming course of students their first ten or twelve hours of flight instruction in Cessna 172 aircraft flown by a civilian firm under contract at the nearby civil airport of Woodring. The intention was to eliminate any student who showed no aptitude for flying, rather than having to put him through the wringer of the more expensive T-37 phase. I heard later from friends

that the concept was not really successful as the Cessna 172 was so easy to fly that everybody passed. As was said at the time, 'You can teach your Grandmother to fly a Cessna 172!' However, I believe that the opportunity for the first few hours to be flown in a light piston-engined civvy aircraft may have mollified some of the early apprehensions and ultimately reduced the numbers of failures and eliminations during the T-37 phase.

The USAF used a training syllabus similar to our own. In the T-37 each student flew 100 hours of general handling (day and night), instrument flying, formation and navigation. However, their method of instruction was very mechanical, the student required to repeat a manoeuvre until he got it right. Little time was spent analysing the student's mistakes then teaching him why and how. Consequently my more personal and helpful style was much appreciated by my students, and even praised by other instructors who flew with me. Unfortunately the intense output of their training program did not permit any individual differences so they used a system of absolute standardisation of instructional technique. I also had to conform to this but used my own style of 'patter'. To guarantee this standardisation and absolute compliance with the techniques designated by Training Command, each IP (Instructor Pilot) was tested annually on his general handling and twice annually on his instructional technique on all the three phases — Contact, Instruments and Formation. A panel of top-grade IPs carried out these tests all year round. The section was called Stanboard (Standardisation Board) and the testers were absolutely ruthless — you performed exactly according to the book, or you failed!

The size of the operation staggered me. Vance was only one of six pilot-training bases in the USAF, yet we had 165 aircraft on our base and flew in excess of 30,000 hours each year, more than the entire RAAF! Vance was home to the 3575th Flying Training Wing which comprised two flying training squadrons, each with 120 junior officer students and 60 IPs, plus Stanboard and Group Operations staff. It also had an academic squadron for ground training and lectures. Most of the regular base services such as messing, security, stores and ground transport, were staffed by civilians. All the servicing and maintenance of aircraft was provided by a civilian organisation called Servair. Civvies even did all the flight-line duties including marshalling us back into the chocks. Although Vance was the only pilot training base with a civilian technical element instead of a uniformed one, the arrangement worked extremely well. Servair was probably the largest employer in the Enid district. Management always strove to meet aircraft needs and deadlines, which no doubt assured renewal of their contract.

My first assignment was to a T-37 flight of the 3575th Pilot Training Squadron as an ordinary IP, even though I was the equivalent of a Major. I had never worked so hard! The first flight was away at 6 am and each aircraft flew five or six trips per day until nearly midnight. If our squadron had the early morning start we finished work about 3 pm. On alternate weeks we started at midday and went through until close on midnight. Navigation trips were all flown at weekends. We left Vance on Friday afternoon, having selected a route to meet the students' requirements for navigation, instrument flying and landing away at as many as five strange bases. Vance closed for the weekend but opened on Sunday afternoon for the return of the nav flights.

Over the two years my trips with students and other IPs gave me opportunity to see much of the USA. We could do 600 miles in two hops in the T-37. This way I travelled south-west to New Mexico and Texas (twice walked across the Rio Grande

border into Mexico), south-east to New Orleans, and north to the Black Hills of Dakota. With students our weekends were taken up with flying legs to meet the syllabus demands, but when I accompanied other IPs I always planned to fit in some sight-seeing time such as a day strolling through the French Quarter of New Orleans and a drive by hire car to see Mt Rushmore and Custer National Park in South Dakota.

One of our popular trips was to head south-west, refuel at Amarillo in Texas, then on over New Mexico to land at Biggs AFB near El Paso on the Rio Grande. At night we could cross the river by footbridge to Ciudad Juarez to enjoy the delights of Mexico after dark. One Friday night the police raided a certain nightspot and arrested all in sight, including four of our Vance students and instructors. Fortunately a Mexican who was released reported to American authorities that four USAF officers were in detention. Several days passed before diplomatic intervention finally obtained the release of the four. On their return to Vance we heard some hair-raising stories of conditions in a Mexican gaol, the worst aspect being the refusal of the police to allow them to contact anybody for help. I realised what might have been my fate if, as an Australian in Mexico without passport or visa, I had been scooped up innocently in a police swoop — so I avoided excursions into Mexico after that!

After their basic phase in the T-37 the students progressed to the T-33 (known for years as the 'T-Bird'), a single-engined trainer, a derivative of the F-80 Shooting Star, and having a performance not unlike that of a Vampire. This aircraft phased out in 1963, being replaced by the Northrop T-38 Talon, the first supersonic trainer. The T-38 was a sleek, white, dart-shaped aircraft with a spectacular performance. It had two seats in tandem and twin General Dynamics J-85 jet engines. The pilot used afterburner on take-off, accelerated to 400 knots, pointed the nose up and reached 40,000 feet in three minutes. Its maximum speed was Mach 1.4, and even on a cruise at 40,000 feet or above we flew at Mach .94, which is almost the speed of sound. To do a loop we started at the bottom at 10,000 feet, pulled back with a 6G force, and went over the top at 20,000 feet. A necessary precaution with students was to ensure that they did not exceed Mach 1 at the bottom of the loop as the sonic boom hit the ground below and caused a lot of fuss with the local population. Pilots had no problems making tight turns and high G manoeuvres in the T-38 as we always wore a G-suit, something like nylon mesh trousers which wrapped tightly round lower legs, thighs and abdomen. When we pulled into a high G manoeuvre, air pressure automatically inflated air bladders within the suit, squeezing the abdomen and lower limbs and preventing the pooling of blood in these areas. Without this aid, blood flow to the brain is impeded, causing loss of vision and 'blackout' until the G force is removed and blood flow up through the neck to the brain is restored.

In short time I became accustomed to USAF procedures, although their different instrumentation and navigation aids gave me a headache for a while. I had to learn to recognise the features of our extensive training area, the northern half of Oklahoma and the southern section of Kansas, best described as a vast expanse of wheat fields fenced in square mile sections, dotted here and there with oil wells and small towns, each with a dominant grain silo standing up like a tall white headstone. Outside the training area I found some difficulty complying with the strict aircraft movement control by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA). Unless I was accompanied by another pilot I tried to avoid transitting the southern States (Georgia, the Carolinas and Alabama) because I could not understand the southern drawl of the controllers. Perhaps they were puzzled by my accent too.

Initially I stumbled over a lot of terminology. In a Vampire we used Jet Pipe Temperature, they called it Exhaust Gas Temperature. In the RAAF we fly a circuit, they fly a pattern. Then of course they had heaps of slang or colloquial phrases which I found hard to grasp, but generally speaking I had little trouble fitting into their system. I felt embarrassed at times when my ignorance of their terminology or procedures or expressions may have given the impression of a degree of ineptness not consistent with my rank and experience. Then I realised something which Joyce and I thenceforth recognised frequently during our tour — Americans naturally take for granted that everything they say or do is the standard for the rest of the world. I do not say this in a critical sense. They are educated to believe that USA is the greatest and best nation in the world, and that they set the example for all others, thus finding it strange that foreigners do things differently. When I was having a few problems during my T-37 checkout, it never occurred to the IPs in Stanboard that I might not be conversant with their instrumentation or navigation aids or terminology. During our tour we found people who were amazed that in countries outside USA motorists drove on the other side of the road. Many were incredulous that we avoided buying electrical appliances because we did not use 110 volts in our country. The commonplace attitude was — 'That's the way things are done. Why don't you do the same?' When we mentioned that December was our summer, a time for picnics and salads on the beach, some people asked us, 'Well, when do you have your Christmas?' They just could not comprehend that others might not live exactly as they do in USA. Many people we met (not USAF folk) congratulated us for learning to speak English so quickly after our arrival in USA. I think that some thought we had come from Austria. Many had never heard of Australia or thought it might be somewhere near Japan.

The Group Commander, Colonel Hallam, made it clear from the start that I would be moved around during my tour, partly for my own education but also for the Group to benefit from my talents as an experienced IP with rank equivalent to Major. After three months grounding as an ordinary IP in a T-37 flight, learning the USAF ropes so to speak, I moved into what was called in the Squadron the 'Centre Office' to be the Assistant Operations Officer. My job was supervising all T-37 flying in the squadron though I still flew regularly with students. Within three months the senior supervisor in the squadron was posted to Saigon as an 'adviser' to the South Vietnamese and I became the Squadron Ops officer, the person with executive control of the four flights, two flying the T-37 and two flying the T-33 — a strange situation as I was not checked out on the T-33. Even stranger, our CO, Lieutenant Colonel Scott, was posted to Korea so I was promulgated Temporary CO of the 3575th Squadron until the arrival three months later of Lieutenant Colonel McCool. Some of the USAF officers would have thought this very odd but I was, to use their term, the ranking officer. I had no disciplinary powers but managed to run the squadron flying program successfully and earned a commendation from the Group Commander.

Towards the end of 1963 I moved again, this time to Stanboard to become one of the terrible testers. By this time I had accepted the USAF need for strict compliancy but privately felt that the system was as mechanical as putting a car (I should say 'automobile') through a periodic service. There was no way of evaluating one IP as a better instructor than another — they all did everything the same way!

Our family members also found 1963 to be an interesting and eventful year. Shortly after our arrival we enrolled Jennifer and Christopher at the Catholic School in Enid. The local children had absolutely no idea where Australia was but were

genuinely envious that Jennifer had 'actually been in San Francisco' which was the limit of their knowledge of the world beyond Oklahoma. After one term, assessing that they made no real progress, we transferred Jennifer and Christopher to the Eisenhower Public School on the base at Vance. As well as having their school friends living nearby, the children much preferred the base environment and shone at their studies during the next 18 months. Susan joined them in 1964. Of course it was inevitable that the children picked up the American accent which caused no real problem as the drawl of the Oklahoma/Texas region is not difficult to understand. Joyce was astounded one day when sitting in on a lesson to Susan's class. The lady teacher who had been taking the class through the alphabet wrote a large W on the blackboard then told her charges, 'Today we'll look at the letter Double-yah'. Another remark which confused us at first was the standard comment made by shop assistants on passing us our change — 'Yo'all come back now!' Which was the Oklahoman friendly parting, meaning, 'See you later' in modern jargon.

A few days after our arrival I bought an old Ford Mercury as we needed transport to run into Enid, four miles to the north. We labelled it 'The Beast' as the carburettor was constantly blocking and the manual gear shift frequently refused to change from second to top. Very frustrated, I had to raise the hood, reach down into the engine compartment and jiggle the offending gear shift levers to clear the problem. As Joyce used 'The Beast' more than I did, I showed her how to deal with the difficulty should she ever be caught out. Which happened once on her way into Enid when she had to stop at the level crossing. Two gallant Oklahoman gentlemen stopped to ask if they could be of assistance. Joyce replied with a typical Australian remark like, 'She'll be right, mate' (or words to that effect), raised the hood, jiggled the offending levers, dropped the hood, hopped into the car and drove off, leaving the two locals with mouths open in amazement, as it was not common in those days for women drivers to have the slightest notion about mechanical repairs in an emergency. Some months later we rid ourselves of 'The Beast', replacing it with a two-door Chevrolet sedan which satisfied Joyce's local transport needs until it developed such a variety of malfunctions that the Base Safety authority declined to give it a road-worthy certificate. So we off-loaded it to a used-car salesman for $50, handing over the ignition key and hastily departing before he found that it was difficult to start.

After much advice and study of various models of cars, we decided to buy a Rambler Station Wagon direct from the American Motors factory at Kenosha in Wisconsin. In those days a buyer could specify in his order every detail that he wanted — size of engine, manual or automatic, sedan or wagon, type and colour of upholstery and trim, duco colour, lighting and sound system, air conditioning, and choice of various accessories. Intending to bring ours back to Australia, we ordered it with right-hand drive. When the time came to collect the car, we engaged a professional baby-minder for four days, then Joyce and I took a train overnight to Chicago and on to Kenosha on Lake Michigan. Our first adventure was the return trip to Oklahoma, driving south on the magnificent highways through Illinois and Missouri, and attracting comments such as, 'Where'd you get that crazy car?' Before we left USA two years later we had accumulated 20,000 miles of driving in 13 States, with not even a near-miss or accident, despite having the steering wheel on the 'wrong' side. We recall many funny incidents, particularly when overtaken by another car which would suddenly drop back abeam of us for the passengers to stare in disbelief, seeing

Joyce on the normal driver's side but lying back eyes closed with her seat in the reclining position.

We made a good choice with that Rambler. It was comfortable, roomy and easy to handle. Seat belts were not mandatory in those days though we had them fitted to the front seats. The children either squeezed into the rear seat or spread themselves out on the spacious deck behind, frequently squabbling about who didn't have enough room or whose turn it was to lie down in the back space. In the mid-year summer holidays of 1963 we hitched on one of the hireable USAF house trailers (caravans, in our language) for a memorable trip through Kansas, Colorado and Wyoming to Yellowstone National Park, a beautiful part of the world with so much spectacular scenery, wild bears and moose, trout streams and bubbling mud pools, and awesome geysers such as Old Faithful. We spent several days at the delightful city of Colorado Springs, right on the edge of the Great Divide, where we met up with Squadron Leader Tony Fookes who was on exchange at the USAF Academy.

The Jacobs family with their new Rambler Station Wagon at Vance AFB, Oklahoma, Easter 1964.

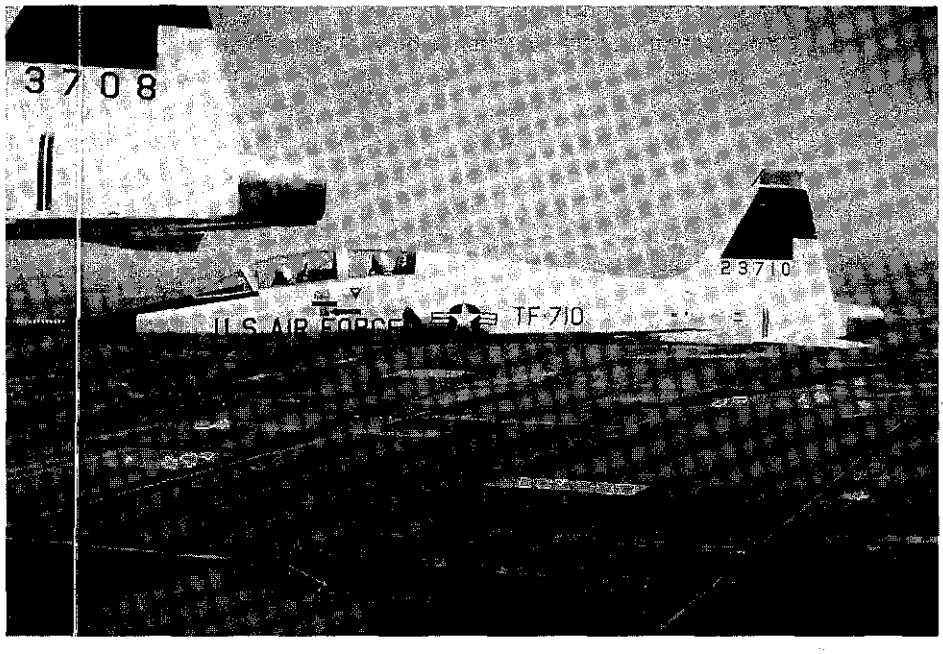
In October the weather turned decidedly cool and we knew that winter was coming when we saw V-formations of geese heading south and the leaves falling off the poplars. November, however, was the month that will stay forever in our minds — the assassination of President Kennedy on Friday 22 and the momentous weekend that followed. Although we sat glued to the TV most of those four fateful days and will never forget the depth of the tragedy, three aspects stand out vividly — first, the nationwide mood of initial shock and disbelief, then the outrage, followed by

profound grief; second, the absolute cooperation of all TV networks, abandoning their regular rivalry to bring to the nation a non-stop pictorial of events from the shooting through to the funeral on the Monday; third, the conduct of Jackie Kennedy who could have caved in with grief but who instead gave the nation a fine example of courage in time of despair.

When winter did come by early December we knew we were in for something different! Low black clouds and sleety rain turned to blizzards which left the roads ice-covered and dangerous. Snow fell the week before Christmas, only about four inches (100 mm) but enough to excite the children who put on all their warm clothing and boots, built a snowman and towed each other around on their toboggan. We dressed up a real Christmas tree and even participated in the American way by decorating the front of our house, but not to the extent of some who adorn their house with Santas in sleighs and blinking lights spelling out season's greetings in technicolour. Christmas presents were in profusion that year, really the first time we had money to be a bit extravagant. My Squadron Leader pay would have been quite inadequate in the USA so I had an extra allowance to bring my income somewhere near that of a USAF Major. As well I received a small entertainment allowance which was accountable. Sometimes we hosted groups in our house, showing films of Australian life which I borrowed from our Consulate in New York. Often we took guests to a local steakhouse where the delicious charcoal-grilled Kansas City steaks overlapped the plate. As the only foreigners on staff we were treated courteously and hospitably by all. Perhaps we were regarded as a sort of a novelty but, regardless of constant family commitments, did our best to join in social occasions, at the same time trying to be good representatives of Australia. With the closeness of good stores in Enid, particularly Sears Roebuck which sold absolutely everything on the spot or by mail order, Joyce took pride in dressing the children with the best of clothes at very reasonable cost. When we attended Mass at the Base chapel the girls were always resplendent in new dresses with hats, gloves and handbags, and Christopher wore long pants and checked jacket.

In January 1964 came my turn to be checked out on the T-38. I spent seven weeks at Randolph AFB, near San Antonio, Texas, doing my flying and study at the 3510th Flying Training Group, which had roughly the role of our CFS at home. Randolph was the base where we made our inglorious arrival in the Canberras during Operation *Bala Lagin* eight years earlier. That first flight in a T-38 was a sensational experience! In afterburner we took only seconds to reach 400 knots after retracting the undercarriage, then pointed the needle-like nose up — and what a zoom! Every 10,000 feet we were supposed to make several safety checks which included oxygen flow, engine performance and position relative to base. However, I think I was trying to level out at 30,000 feet after two minutes of dramatic climb before I managed to cover all the checks. At our rapid cruise speed we ranged over so much territory that it was easy to stray out of our designated training area. A necessarily early aspect of our training was familiarisation with a great device called TACAN (Tactical Aid to Navigation) which showed our distance and bearing from home base or from any other TACAN beacon within range. The T-38 also was fitted with the Instrument Landing System (ILS), commonly used by airliners approaching to land at civil airports in bad weather. Once we became used to its high performance, the T-38 was a delightful aircraft to fly — fast, smooth, nippy, light on the controls, yet having a performance similar to that of the Century series fighters used by the USAF at that

time. Actually it was almost a fighter. The Northrop manufacturers removed one cockpit, added cannon, underwing armament points and tip-tanks, and so produced the F5 Freedom Fighter which was bought by several Allied nations and used by the USAF in Vietnam.



The Northrop T-38 Talon, supersonic trainer of the USAF.

During our time at Randolph, three of us from Vance (Pat Hogan, Jim Ross and I) were free at weekends to explore the lovely city of San Antonio. Situated on the San Antonio River, it was one of the chain of missions established centuries earlier by the Spanish on the long trail from Florida to Monterey on the Pacific Coast. Two hundred years later the Spanish influence remains in the architecture, the people and the local dialect. The centrepiece of San Antonio is the Alamo National Memorial, now consisting solely of the chapel which is dedicated to the memory of the gallant defenders of the Alamo fort against the Mexican Army in 1837. Though the defenders (Travis, Bowie, Davy Crockett and 179 other brave men) were all wiped out by the Mexicans, their heroic resistance inspired a force under General Houston to drive the Mexicans back across the Rio Grande and establish Texas as a State of the Union. As a diversion one weekend we attended a Wild West show, a sort of rodeo with a lot more colour and excitement than we would see in Australia. I found it astounding to be sitting indoors in a huge domed amphitheatre with thousands of people, enjoying the spectacle of cattle roping, buckjumping, a chuck wagon race, a representation of wagon train in a circle fighting off a screaming horde of painted Indians, and the biggest parade of cowboys, horses and flags I have ever seen in my life. Everything is BIG in Texas!

Naturally I had to buy myself a cowboy hat and boots. In doing so I learnt the source of a phrase remembered from my childhood — a ten gallon hat. Knowing that no hat could contain ten gallons of water, I often wondered where the term came from. Back in the wild west days of driving cattle the cowboys wore unattractive tough boots and tough clothing to withstand the conditions out on the trail. When they came to town for a break they dressed up their wide-brimmed beaver-pelt hats by tying ribbons around the high crown. A very tall hat might fit as many as ten ribbons, or galens, a word with a Spanish derivation. Hence the way of describing a big hat was corrupted later to a ten-gallon hat — nothing to do with capacity to hold water.

At Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma I was discussing a flight in a T-38 supersonic trainer with two USAF instructors, Captain John Roberts and Lieutenant Vern VanDuyne.

On return to Vance I was back in Stanboard, being one of only nine pilots on base permitted to be current on both types, the T-37 and the T-38. Apart from regular testing of instructors for their periodic category renewals, I continued with frequent instructional rides with students of both squadrons. This gave me the dubious honour of being the first RAAF pilot to instruct pre-wings students on a supersonic aircraft.

Navigation trips at weekends also allowed us to travel further from Vance. With one refuelling stop we could reach either the east or the west coast, one particularly interesting trip being a weekend with a senior IP to Florida, visiting Miami and Tampa, and making a low flight over the famous Everglades. There can be no doubt that the most memorable trip was my weekend in Boston. I took a T-38 solo to Andrews AFB, Washington DC, to collect our Group Commander, Colonel Hallam, who wanted to spend the weekend in Boston with his parents before he departed on an overseas posting. We left Washington late afternoon, flew high over New York and descended through cloud into Hanscom Field, the Air National Guard base near Boston. As we broke through the low overcast, the setting autumn sun lit up the red, gold, russet and brown leaves of the Massachusetts woods as though they were on fire, decidedly the most colourful depiction of nature I have ever seen from the air. Until we left for Vance on the Sunday I was on my own but filled every available minute exploring quaint and fascinating old-world Boston, scene of the Boston Tea Party, home of Paul Revere and Henry Longfellow, and birthplace of the American Declaration of Independence. On another occasion, on return from a trip west to Hamilton AFB near San Francisco, we refuelled at Luke AFB, Phoenix, then caught a jet stream at 40,000 feet as we

headed east for Oklahoma. The FAA controller could hardly believe his eyes as he tracked us on his radar screen across New Mexico and Texas at well over supersonic speed.

In May 1964 I moved into Group Operations as Supervisor of all flying in both squadrons. This happened to coincide with the emergence of a series of problems with FAA over T-38 operations. Unlike the T-Bird which performed like a Vampire and rarely flew above 25,000 feet, the T-38 operated mainly between 25,000 and 45,000 feet, sometimes supersonic, and usually flown on instruments. At our high speeds we required a huge training area, while always under 'positive control' by FAA ground radar either at Fort Worth Centre (Texas) or Kansas City Centre. This same vast area in the centre of USA was also crossed by civil traffic as well as other military aircraft. 'Positive control' means keeping a constant surveillance on radar of each aircraft operating above 20,000 feet. A device in each aircraft called Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) emits a signal which is seen on the controller's radar screen as an identifiable blip. This enables the controller to monitor the movement of each aircraft and, in our situation as a training unit, to note if any aircraft looks like straying out of its designated exercise sector. The introduction of the T-38 into the flying training environment gave FAA controllers a lot more work, resulting in a flood of complaints from FAA Centres who obviously wished we had stayed with the T-Bird. Eventually we had to establish numerous round-table conferences with FAA officials at Fort Worth and Kansas City Centres. They emphasised the problems of controlling as many as 20 high-altitude high-performance trainers together in Oklahoma airspace and we had to educate them on our need for minimum inhibition to our flying program.

I was given the appointment as spokesman for Vance, flying to both Centres for discussions which sometimes turned into tight-lipped confrontation, returning home to develop procedures which eventually became acceptable to both parties, and then writing the relevant manuals of operation. This became a very challenging task, especially when arguing our case across the table with the powerful FAA chiefs. I know that I trod on a few toes but, being a foreigner, was perhaps forgiven for being so forthright. Appointing me was a crafty move by my bosses who thus avoided having to send a USAF officer into the verbal fray. I normally took along with me to these conferences our Vance-based FAA representative Fred Daniels. He confided in me several times that he was amazed, and perhaps a little envious, that I had the audacity to stand up to the authoritative FAA people who normally had the first and last word on aircraft control. The dialogue lasted several months until eventually I wrote a manual for T-38 operations which FAA accepted as a very practical document in respect of airspace control. As other training bases changed over to the T-38 their senior officers visited Vance to find out how high-altitude control was maintained. It was my job to give the briefing and to show them the ropes. This particular task was a wonderful experience for me as we had nothing like it in Australia at that time.

Instructing at Vance became fairly routine, with flying discipline always at a very high standard. My most vivid memory of those flying years was the atrocious weather. The song which says, 'Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plain' is so right. The wind blows across the prairie six days a week, all year round, and usually across the runways. Anyone who graduated from Vance knew how to make a cross-wind landing! We had the most dreadful weather I have ever known, particularly March to May which is the storm and tornado season. We were fortunate

never to have a tornado at Enid or Vance, for a perfectly understandable reason — in earlier years Enid was known as Indian Springs and the local Indians believed that it was protected by the Spirits from tornado damage. Several evil-looking black twisters passed within our view in 1964 but we stayed safe. However, the violence of the cold fronts and thunderstorms was unbelievable. As it was unwise to be caught out in approaching bad weather, our recall procedures were well heeded. With such a tight schedule to graduate eight courses a year on time, we used every opportunity to regain flying time lost to weather stoppages. I found it rather stressful as supervisor to have to monitor the weather conditions, knowing that if I made the wrong recall decision we would have aircraft sitting in the lines when they should still be flying. Yet if the recall were issued too late we had the embarrassment of diverting students to other bases.

I recall no major incidents when flying with students but ran close to being caught by weather conditions on numerous occasions. Returning from one of my conferences with FAA at Fort Worth I was advised that Vance was closed by bad weather so I had to divert to Little Rock (Arkansas) for an overnight stop. Next morning I took off again in rain and cloud but on approaching Vance at 20,000 feet was told by control that the base was still closed with cloud base of 200 feet. I replied that their radio transmission was garbled and understood that they were clearing me for descent. I made it down using a standard instrument approach pattern and after landing advised that my radio seemed to be clear again. Perhaps I got away with it as I was 'that goddam Aussie' and not a USAF officer who may have been reported.

On another day I had a student in a T-38 practising ILS approaches at Tulsa Airport, about 50 miles east of Vance. When we received advice of severe storms approaching, my immediate thought was to exit the Tulsa area quickly to avoid the inconvenience and embarrassment of landing at a civilian airport. So I took over from the student, pushed the throttles into afterburner, pointed the nose up like a rocket and cleared the front of the storm for a safe return to Vance. I remember clearly the satisfaction of that escape from the elements because it marked such dramatic progress from my young days in Vampires and Canberras when we could not avoid penetrating the wild weather.

Pilots were very comfortable flying the T-37 and the T-38, both aircraft having twin engines mounted side-by-side within the fuselage. If we had an in-flight problem with one engine, we were able to return to base using the good engine, and without the asymmetric problems which I had known in the Meteor and Canberra, both having engines set well out from the centre-line of the fuselage. On one instrument instruction flight with a student in a T-38, we levelled out at 30,000 feet but when my student throttled back to cruise power, one engine continued running at 100% rpm. Moving the throttle lever had no effect so I notified Control of the problem, then retarded the other engine to idle and cruised around at low level for a while to use up fuel. Eventually I entered the landing pattern using only the run-away engine and as we touched down for landing, stopped that engine by shutting off the fuel cock. We had the other engine for taxying back to the lines. Later I found that a cotter pin in the throttle control linkage had fallen out, just as the student throttled back out of after-burner.

Our main problem with the T-38 was its susceptibility to ice damage. The engines had compressor blades as delicate as Gillette razor blades. In severe icing conditions these blades could be destroyed by ice accretion so we were debarred from

flying in any weather conditions which might contain ice, or even permit ice to form on the aircraft. This frustrating restriction inhibited many a planned sortie and ruined many a flying program. At about this time the RAAF was seeking a suitable jet trainer to replace the Vampire. When the Air Attache's office in Washington asked me for comments on the T-38, I had sufficient experience to provide factual data which might not have been forthcoming from the manufacturer. The T-38 was a delightful aircraft to fly but, at more than a million dollars each, an extravagance for a pre-wings trainer. In their 100 hours of T-38 flying the students spent no longer than five minutes supersonic. However, the engine sensitivity to icing was definitely its major handicap. Servair engineers also furnished me with figures on costs and rates of serviceability. Years later Air Commodore Gel Cuming thanked me for my candid report which found its way back to Australia at the time when various other options were under consideration.

Despite Vance's flying effort of 33,000 hours per year, we had only two fatal accidents in my time there. The first was the loss of a T-33 at night, flown by a foreign student whose meagre knowledge of English failed him at a critical time during an emergency in bad weather. I am surprised that we did not have more incidents with the foreign students who were training with the USAF under an American Aid program. The young men from Denmark, Germany and Thailand were extremely capable, but the performance of those from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan suggested that they had rarely seen anything faster than a camel before arriving in the USA. I was not the only person to consider the situation with these Middle East lads as rather ludicrous. One fellow was so inept that he could never be sent solo in the T-37. I actually did a 'scrub ride' with him, after which I declared him unsuitable and unsafe, but the Colonel overrode our judgments, asserting that the USAF was obliged to put these lads through a pilot course by giving them the requisite flying hours in the syllabus, and it was not for us to question whether they were up to standard. One Iranian lad was scrubbed off course in the T-33 phase. He told his colleagues that he would be executed if he returned home a failure so he disappeared amongst the millions in the USA and was not found by Military Police for many months.

The other accident occurred when an IP and student were unable to pull a T-37 out of a spin. In such an event we had orders to eject no lower than 10,000 feet. Both ejected safely but when they floated down to the ground the fierce Oklahoma wind whipped their parachutes across the terrain, killing them both before they could release their harness. I was a bit taken aback at the small commemorative service on base when the Colonel invited all who wished to visit the funeral parlour in Enid to view the bodies laid out in the open caskets. It seemed so bizarre to me, despite being a common practice in the USA and one which I believe is now not unknown here in Australia.

We found many features of American life which, in our opinion, placed them 20 or 30 years ahead of us in Australia. And not necessarily beneficial aspects either! The upbringing of children we found a controversial point. American children wanted, and were given, more material possessions than were ours in Australia. Mothers even encouraged daughters to be dolled up and go out on dates at age 12 or 13. No wonder they had a reputation for promiscuity! Credit cards were then in general use, such as the oil company card we used to buy gasoline anywhere round the country. Kitchens boasted labour-saving electrical appliances which we had never before seen. TV programs showing sex and violence were not uncommon. Graft and corruption made

headline news day after day. Moral standards and family values were waning in USA in the 60s, except within the families holding sincere religious convictions. In this regard we found that the Mormon officers on base had close-knit families and were shining examples of moral integrity. If I had to identify the one alarming aspect of American life at that time, I would note, not the racism, but the wide disparity between the very rich and the very poor, something not so evident then in Australia. It has all happened here now, however, 30 years on. We seem to follow the American lifestyle, mainly, I suspect, influenced by the flood of American TV programs on our networks. I wonder if there is any essential thing remaining in our way of life which is distinctly Australian.

The severe seasonal changes in Oklahoma were more extreme than we had known in Australia. Summers were fiercely hot and the winds made life uncomfortable unless sitting in air conditioning. In winter we faced the violent storms and blizzards. After our white Christmas in 1963 we looked forward to another in 1964 but that December was just freezing cold and bleak. I recorded a temperature of 106 degrees Fahrenheit (41 degrees C) one summer day; on the January day I drove to San Antonio for the T-38 checkout, the temperature was -5 degrees Fahrenheit (-20 degrees C). During the winter we used to keep an electrically-heated dipstick in the oil sump over-night so that the car would start in the morning after I had scraped the frost and ice off the windows. We needed to exercise a lot of care when driving as cars would readily slide sideways on the glazed roads during a turn and end up in a frozen ditch — or into the path of oncoming traffic.

Jennifer, Christopher and Susan made many friends among the children in the married patch. Jennifer joined Girl Scouts, Christopher learned to play baseball in Little League, and Susan took her first swimming strokes in the base pool. Lynne had a frightening experience one summer. We had an open carport with a closed shed at the end, for storage of lawn mower, suitcases and unwanted trunks. During a game of hide-and-seek Lynne climbed in, or was put in, one of our wooden trunks and the lid closed, the hasp falling into place and preventing her opening the lid. Some time later, maybe hours, I finished mowing and heard a strange thumping which I traced to the shed then to the trunk where I found Lynne red-faced, petrified and with eyes huge and staring. We have no idea how long she was trapped or whether the experience had any long-lasting psychological effect.

Associating daily with their American friends, our children naturally merged into the local life without being aware, as Joyce and I were, of the privilege of living in a foreign country and relishing the experience as a highlight of their lives. In the summer holidays of 1964 we headed west with a luggage pack on top of the station wagon instead of towing a van, across the Texas Panhandle, making tourist stops at Santa Fe, the Petrified Forest and Meteor Crater in Arizona, then the Grand Canyon, over the Hoover Dam and on through Las Vegas to California. No doubt the children were interested in seeing these attractions but they had little appreciation of the fact that few Australians would ever have similar opportunities. Such as when looking down into the Grand Canyon, 'Yes, it's deep, isn't it? Can we have Kentucky Fried for lunch?' In California we visited Disneyland, Knotts Berry Farm and Marineland, before returning home via San Diego, Yuma and Phoenix. Our holidays and tourist trips are recorded on movie film as video cameras were then not in vogue. The wide-open plains of the State of Oklahoma had a lot to offer curious people like us. We found it quite remarkable when visiting the State capital, Oklahoma City, to see

dozens of nodding oil pumps operating in the main streets and back yards. When I was not away on weekend navigation trips with students or other IPs, we took every opportunity to visit resorts and places of interest within 100 miles radius of Vance. Not unexpectedly, we learned more about the American Indian tribes than my USAF colleagues knew, mainly through our visiting museums and Indian expositions which emphasised how shamefully the Indian tribes had been treated with the spread of white settlement. Joyce took a couple of weeks holiday in Washington DC, staying with Australian friends, the Raws and Robertsons, who were then on the Air Attache staff. While Joyce was away I took the children out to Okeene for the annual rattlesnake hunt in the nearby rocky hill country. We did not hunt, or even handle, any snakes but were fascinated at the sight of rattlesnakes being stretched out and measured, earning their finders trophies for longest or fattest or the biggest swag. After the event the snakes were all given or sold to laboratories where anti-venin is made. That day Oklahoma was swept by a fierce dust storm. After finding our way home through minimal visibility we were confronted by a door left open by one of the children and the house interior totally blanketed by a thick layer of dust which took me two days to remove.

Life was different for the children in Oklahoma.

Late in 1964 I was obliged to ask the Air Attache for an extension beyond our projected return date of Christmas or thereabouts. The reason was Catherine Amy, born in Enid Hospital on 7 January 1965. Joyce recalls her relaxed departure that morning — 'When the time came to go to hospital I was trying to get the children off to school, cutting lunches, finding coats and boots, then when they had gone, I rang John at work to say we had to go. By this stage I was quite calm, having had lots of practice. When Catherine arrived about 10 am, the children at school received the message but could hardly believe it as they had left me at home only an hour or so

earlier.' I doubt whether any of our friends at Vance were surprised that the prolific Jacobs family was expanding further. They were as joyful as we, and showered Joyce with gifts for the baby. Frank and Pat Dunlap, also parents of six children, were Catherine's godparents. Catherine is now one of those multicultural persons — born in USA, registered as an Australian, now living in London, carrying Australian and American passports, and having her first child born in England. The USAF people asked if I could stay another year but the RAAF had me assigned to the post of Chief Flying Instructor at Central Flying School, East Sale, and reluctantly extended us only until April 1965. Nobody replaced me at Vance as the RAAF terminated that exchange post in favour of a helicopter pilot placement with the US Army.

I am sure that the USAF benefitted greatly from our presence there at Vance. Many Americans were ignorant about Australia until they learned from us as ambassadors. I had gained a reputation as a first-class IP as well as contributing significantly to supervision and development of complex procedures, a performance acknowledged by their presentation to me of a trophy for Outstanding Supervisor. As a family we enjoyed living at Vance, being accepted into the Air Force community, and learning so much about the USA in our two-and-a-bit years of residency. Oklahoma is certainly not the most scenically attractive State, but we found plenty of interesting places to visit and really appreciated our exposure to Indian culture. As the entire cast sings in the finale of the stage show of the same name, it was for our family, 'Oklahoma, OK!'

Our return home became a mammoth effort in planning and is a saga in itself. Between vacating our married quarter at Vance just after Easter on 20 April and occupying another at East Sale, our family of two adults and six children (including a four-month old infant) lived out of suitcases for 42 days. Joyce reckons that we left a trail of disposable nappies all the way from Oklahoma to Gippsland. First we took six days to trek across USA, through Kansas, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California, towing our belongings in a hired trailer, then spent a week at San Francisco in temporary military quarters while I arranged for the Rambler to be steam-cleaned and handed over to the shipping company. At Hamilton AFB transit quarters Joyce had baby Catherine propped up with pillows in a high chair when Christopher for some mischievous reason loosened the butterfly nuts securing the tray in front of her and she slid through on to the floor. She was fortunately unhurt but Joyce almost needed hospitalisation to recover from the fright. We drove across the Golden Gate Bridge, had lunch at Fisherman's Wharf and took a ride on the famous cable-car, but even the eldest have only a vague recollection of San Francisco. Our 19-day 'cruise' home to Australia on board the P & O vessel *Chusan* turned out to be anything but a restful holiday with Joyce seasick again, and six bored children aged from 11 years down to four months. At Honolulu the ship's purser informed us that the Rambler had been damaged during loading at the wharf at San Francisco but I was not allowed to enter the hold to view the vehicle. Apparently a wind gust swung the cradle, smashing the car against the concrete post as the car was lifted off the wharf. 'Thank goodness for transit insurance', I thought. However, at Sydney the insurance company refused to honour my claim for repair, declaring that I had cover only for damage or loss **after** the car was aboard the ship!

We had to stay in a motel in Sydney over a weekend until the Rambler was unloaded, cleared through Customs and repaired at my expense — mainly a broken rear window and a large dent over the tail-light. The expected reception party for us at

Sydney was spoiled on learning that my Mother was in hospital in Toowoomba with a slight heart attack. So, with the whole tribe aboard, we headed north to visit her in Toowoomba for a few days. Loaded to the rooftop again we did another four days of driving, arriving at East Sale on 2 June 1965, recognised immediately as the family whose children's form of greeting was, 'Hi, you guys!'

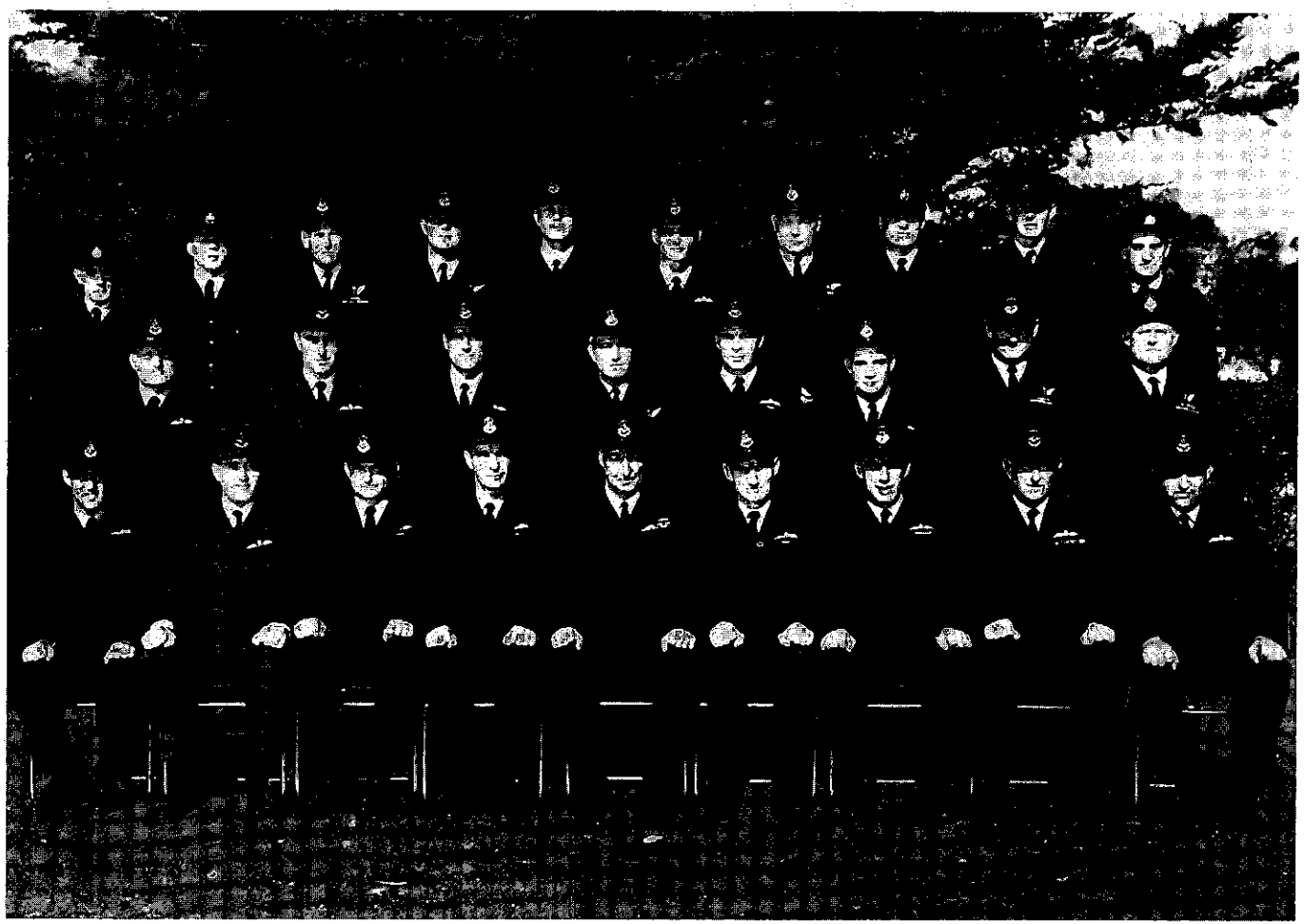
CHAPTER TWELVE

Gippsland Homecoming

At Central Flying School, East Sale, A Flight trained pilots to be instructors, B Flight gave jet refresher courses and did the recategorisation of instructors at the Training Schools and on the operational squadrons. The Chief Flying Instructor supervised both Flights and did a large portion of the testing. C Flight trained the Air Traffic Controllers.

I found it a genuine letdown to return to Winjeels and Vampires after my two years on the modern T-37 and T-38 aircraft of the USAF. All the same, I had learned a great deal about instrument flying techniques and had improved my lecturing capability, so felt qualified to provide some direction within CFS. The only obstacle to introducing any new ideas derived from my USAF experience was the CO, Tom Meldrum, a dyed-in-the-wool RAF disciple, having served his exchange with the RAF CFS at Little Rissington in Gloucestershire. I knew him well as he had been Chief Flying Instructor when I did my instructor course in 1958. Nevertheless, I was the only one on staff who was proficient in using our new navigation and approach aid called TACAN, very familiar to me after my hours of instructing in the T-38. Also, the Macchi MB326,which was selected to replace the Vampire, had the same instrument panel as the T-38 as well as TACAN, so my knowledge in this area was useful to those who were mapping out training techniques in preparation for the introduction to our airfields of this navigation aid.

Having considerable experience of the pilot-training syllabus in Australia and in USA, and being quite familiar with the RAF system, I was convinced that there were no practical or acceptable short-cuts to a course which takes an ab initio student through to 'wings' standard. Close to 200 flying hours, most of that being dual instruction, are needed to ensure a quality graduate, someone able to move up to a squadron with sufficient ability and confidence to convert to an operational aircraft. Notwithstanding economies and efficiency exercises, each of the Air Forces with which I was familiar was convinced that any shortening of a pilot course was seriously questionable in the long term. Even after graduating from a pilot training school, a pilot needs at least a year on a fighter or a transport or a maritime surveillance aircraft before he is categorised for operational service. Our modern technologies and advanced techniques demand a proficiency in operation for which there is no substitute for training. In World War I pilots in the British squadrons were sent into combat with German aviators after fewer than 20 hours of flight time. No wonder that so many were lost in their first few weeks, either shot down or unable to handle their aircraft competently. Even in World War II, particularly in the stressful time of the Battle for Britain, pilots were rushed into combat situations with inadequate experience on their Spitfires and Hurricanes – and sadly paid the penalty.



Staff of the Central Flying School at East Sale in 1966 when Tom Meldrum was CO, I was Chief Flying Instructor, and John Cooney the Chief Ground Instructor.

To me, the message is clear. If we are genuine in maintaining armed forces capable of responding to emergency situations, we must be prepared to meet the cost of sustaining an appropriately sized and structured force permanently trained to operational standards. Some of our modern philosophies of reducing to a core force, then supplementing when needs be with hastily-trained volunteers, may satisfy the 'bean-counters' but fail to acknowledge the folly of ignoring realistic, and time consuming, training and preparation. The theory of keeping only a nucleus of highly-trained personnel – both aircrew and technical support musterings – is unacceptable when it overlooks the inescapable penalties in time to recruit and train additional operators of modern weaponry to top proficiency levels.

Generally, that posting to CFS during 1965 and 1966 was mainly instructing or testing, and fairly routine at that! Being a senior instructor in the RAAF by that stage, I was long past ill-considered or thoughtless acts in the air. Indeed, I had to be a very good example in every respect. My principles actually got me into strife on several occasions.

Once I flew to Richmond to test two Hercules instructors who were still Category B. These fellows conducted the conversion course for new pilots posted into the Hercules squadron. Unfortunately, a few consecutive days of foul weather, plus non-availability of serviceable aircraft, prevented both of them from demonstrating their true instructional ability. Really all each could do under the unfavourable weather conditions was to monitor his student's handling of the aircraft during actual instrument flight in thick cloud. As Air Force Orders clearly stated that 'demonstrating above average ability' was the criterion for upgrading to Category A2, I had no choice but to renew their Category B rating, even though I knew both of them well enough to feel sure that they were ready for an upgrading. Of course my decision upset a lot of people, starting with their Squadron Commander, and a complaint rocketed up the line to Operational Command, across to Support Command and down the line to CFS where I stood my ground, assuring my CO that, through no fault of theirs, the two pilots at Richmond had not been able to demonstrate the required performance standards. The basis of the criticism of my decision was that I was not qualified to test the two fellows at Richmond since I had no previous Hercules experience. This was an absurd comment since I was then better qualified than most in the RAAF to judge the quality of instructional technique, not merely the finer points of handling a strange aircraft. What really irked me was to learn that a previous CFI had upgraded a Hercules instructor (a former classmate) to A2 without even flying with him. Of course nobody raised any ruckus over that blatant misconduct!

On another occasion when Tom Meldrum was overseas with a party looking at prospective Vampire replacements, I headed the CFS testing team to Pearce for the annual visit to Advanced Flying Training School. There we found a noticeable laxity in procedures, mainly attributable, I believe, to the disinterest of their CO who was enjoying his last posting before retiring. Anyway, my report on AFTS was somewhat critical and Headquarters Support Command did not like it one bit. And so I learned the risks of 'rocking the boat'. I suspect that my reputation as a hard-nosed CFI was the major factor in my superiors not recommending me for an Air Force Cross. I have the dubious distinction of being the only CFI in a decade to miss out on this award which recognised outstanding performance as a pilot.

As well as our annual testing visits to the Schools at Point Cook and Pearce, we had obligations to recategorise instructors at most of the operational squadrons.

The fighter world at Williamtown declined to accept CFS testing officers, declaring that within their own ranks they could better assess the proficiency of their Mirage instructors. Undeterred, Tom Meldrum and I made frequent trips away to other bases where we were welcomed. I logged several recat flights with instructors at Amberley in the dual-seat Canberra, and a couple with Cessna instructors of the Army Aviation Unit at Amberley (before it became the Aviation Corps at Oakey). My most unusual task was a re-test of a Navy instructor in a Gannet.

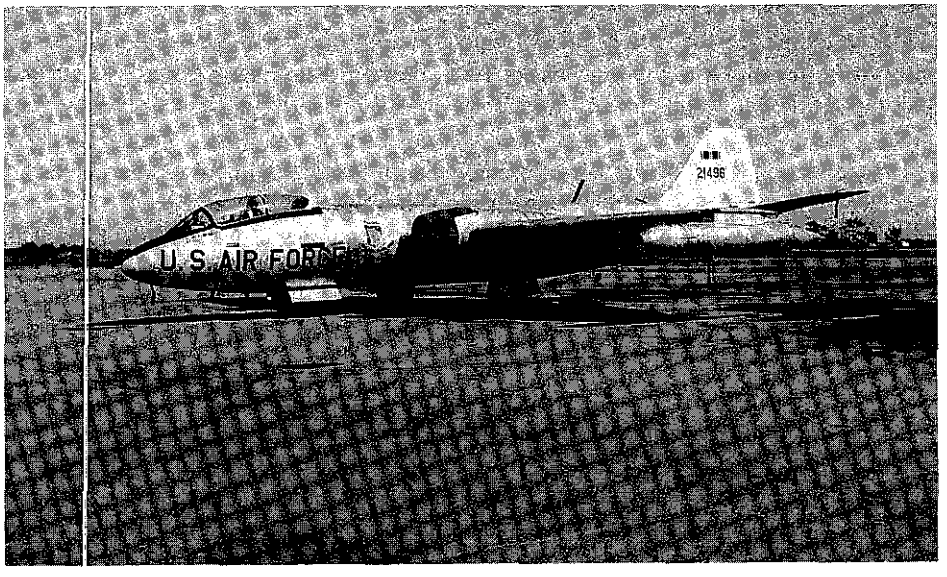
Among the CFS staff, I was happy to be back working with old friends — Barry Weymouth and Jack Green from my Point Cook days, John Cooney from my instructor course, and Mike Ridgway and Benny Raffin from my earlier CFS posting. Some of our talented students went on to bigger things — Tom O'Brien and Dave Rogers became Air Vice-Marshals. Benny Raffin led our Vampire aerobatic team called the Telstars, giving polished performances at major events and reviving the prestige of the RAAF after the tragedy of the Red Sales in 1962.

All of the staff pilots had to be re-categorised annually, on each of the aircraft which we flew at CFS. The CO Tom Meldrum normally conducted these tests, giving him an appreciation of his instructors' proficiency. When my turn came for upgrading to Category A1 instructor, Tom directed me to brief, fly and demonstrate his favourite sequence, Steep Turning. This sequence involved several manoeuvres at about 20,000 feet, showing how the Vampire should be handled to perform minimum radius turns and maximum rate turns. To do this exercise properly required precise and skilful control of the Vampire, more so than doing a few aerobatics, which is probably why Tom chose the sequence to test out his staff. Of course, he usually liked to show that he could fly the necessary manoeuvres better than any other pilot. It was a simple matter to explain the aerodynamic theory of maximum rate turns on the blackboard during the pre-flight briefing session, pointing out how one could obtain a faster rate of turn at higher speeds. However, in the airborne demonstration, the Vampire did not have sufficient power at full throttle, in a ninety degree bank at 20,000 feet, to reach the speed needed for the desired rate of turn. So we had to allow the nose to drop, increasing speed by losing altitude, at the same time drawing the attention of the 'student' to the improved performance. I always felt that this part of the demonstration was fairly pointless, as by this diving stage of the demonstration we were pulling 6G or a little more. As we did not wear G-suits in the Vampire, the student was usually 'blacked out' by the G force and consequentially saw nothing of the result which we were aiming to prove.

The USAF returned to East Sale in 1965, this time bringing several B-57 aircraft, the US version of the Canberra. Their task was high-altitude air sampling in southern latitudes, very similar to the role of the U2 aircraft which operated from East Sale in 1960. The obvious difference from our Australian-built Canberra was that both crew members sat in tandem under a common canopy. At least the navigator could see where the pilot was taking him!

B Flight at CFS had a major role during the 1960s, giving short courses to pilots who had been diverted to desk jobs before returning to flying posts, and checking out newcomers who had joined the RAAF to make up the deficiency of pilots. I cannot remember which years we were desperately short of pilots, probably accentuated by the demands of the squadrons in Vietnam, but recall our advertising overseas and eventually employing a number of former RAF pilots and at least one from Canada, some of whom were needed as instructors. In 1966 CFS had the task of

training four or five indigenous Papuans as Dakota pilots, the first of the newly-formed Papua New Guinea Defence Force. Two Flight Lieutenants in B Flight, Zane Sampson and Frank Daniels, had the unenviable chore of trying to make pilots out of these foreign lads who had little aptitude for, or confidence in, their new role. Considering the frustrations and frights during the conversion course with the Papuan lads, I felt that Sampson and Daniels earned their pay many times over.



A USAF B54 (US version of the Canberra) operating from East Sale in 1965.

Occasionally I took a visiting senior officer under my wing for a jet refresher course. One of these was Wing Commander Nev McNamara who was on his way to a Sabre squadron after a spell of desk work. Although he was a careful pilot he had been away from flying for so long that he was obviously apprehensive about flying on instruments in cloud. One of our dual periods was flown entirely in cloud up to 30,000 feet. Once we started our descent towards base I could sense his nervousness so I calmly talked through our let-down procedures, pointing out how the instruments and homing aids could be trusted if one flew smoothly and precisely, and used the correct technique of monitoring the relevant instruments. We broke out through the cloud base at 500 feet and there was the runway in front of us. I do not remember anyone showing such obvious relief, yet so convinced that 'flying blind' was not really hazardous. I worked for him some years later, before he went on to become Chief of the Air Staff and, as Sir Neville, the Chief of the Defence Forces.

Another senior officer who did a jet refresher under my supervision was Warren Stickley, the Flight Commander when I did my own instructor course in 1958. How the wheel turns! George Turnnidge, my immediate superior at Pearce in 1959, also arrived in a Canberra for a re-test and instrument rating which I eventually awarded with an appropriate comment about the reversal of roles.

The wheel turned again in 1966 when Headquarters Support Command directed me to set the Air Operations paper for the C Promotion exam and to mark all the answers, quite a change from 1959 when I had been sitting for the exam myself. Support Command also sent me to RAAF Base Laverton, near Melbourne, to do an

official investigation of a minor accident to an Army Cessna aircraft which was being operated by Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU). While I do not recall all the circumstances, the damage occurred after loss of brake hydraulic fluid during fast taxiing across the grass airfield. The conclusion was obvious — the narrow aluminium tube carrying the brake fluid snapped off owing to metal fatigue caused by constant flexing of the undercarriage leg. By sheer coincidence I took Ward Rayner back to Sale that weekend. He was the pilot who wrote off the Canberra at Hickham AFB, Honolulu, on the return home of Operation *Bala Lagin* in 1956. He had spent a few years out of the Air Force flying civil aircraft, including Cessnas, so he was familiar with the problem of fatigue in brake lines. Using his experience of modifications to the braking system, I was able to conclude my findings with a recommendation of a fitment of a flexible hose in the brake line. I never found out whether Air Force or Army followed up my suggestion.

On the domestic front we lived comfortably in a married quarter on base. The children soon lost their American accent and, by 1966, five were attending school or kindergarten. The eldest had some difficulty coping with pounds, shillings and pence on our return from USA, but were quite at ease with the change to decimal currency in February 1966. Jennifer went to school in Sale at Our Lady of Sion College, a lovely brick edifice built like a French castle. The nuns were young and progressive, the first to abandon the old formidable habit in favour of short dresses and a short veil. They were a little too progressive as Jennifer's teacher told her 12-year old charges that they 'had rights as children and did not always have to obey their parents'. Joyce had the odd clash with Jennifer until she confronted the teacher with her ultimatum — 'while she is under our care she lives by our rules!' As well as her rosters for tuckshop duty, Joyce volunteered to teach Catechism at Sale High School but found it an unpleasant chore as her class of 15-year old boys, being not the slightest bit interested, played up throughout each lesson unless Joyce had the support of her friend Father White.

Back in Oklahoma we realised that costs of catering for the needs of our large family would preclude extravagant holidays in future so we bought a large modern-style tent from Sears Roebuck and a supply of camping equipment. On arrival at Sale we bought a new trailer, had a neat canopy built for it, and assembled a complete camp-out kit for a family of eight. During Christmas leave at the end of 1965 we dawdled up the New South Wales coast to Toowoomba for a family reunion at my parents' home. In spite of our preparation, which included training the eldest children to help me erect the tent in quick time, the cramped conditions with too many occupants proved a test of patience. It's not much of a holiday when you have to remind yourself that you are having a good holiday. Perhaps Joyce might have enjoyed it more if Catherine had been out of nappies and been able to use the ablutions block like the others, instead of being washed down in a bucket. Anyway, though it seemed like a good idea at the time, we did not thenceforth make a habit of camping.

With a large number of children growing up we experienced the usual succession of bouts of flu, minor accidents and calamities, and specific problems such as Christopher and Debbie having to go to hospital in Melbourne for removal of impacted teeth. Lynne fell off the monkey bar in the playground one day, falling on her nose and forehead and giving herself two severely blackened eyes. During a shopping trip in Sale Joyce received some murderous looks from passers-by who probably thought that Lynne was a victim of child abuse. As we had learned in earlier

years, our biggest problems in Gippsland were staying warm and dry in the miserable winters, trying to get the washing dry between rain showers, and coping with coughs and colds. The children made plenty of friends, although Jennifer was again the only one to bemoan the disadvantages of Air Force life. She recalls, 'A family arrived near us with twin girls my age. Their mother was a ballroom dancing teacher, and my friend Lesley and I had great aspirations to take lessons from her and become famous ballroom dancers. Alas, I was never allowed to begin these lessons, one reason being the exorbitant cost of the costumes and the other the fact there was little point in starting because we would soon be moving elsewhere. How my ambitions were thwarted by Air Force life! Even at Sion Convent they built a swimming pool and introduced archery to the sport curriculum the year *after* I left! Life on the move was tough!'

One had to be fairly tough to live in East Sale in any case, especially during the winters. During a drive to Licola in the mountains behind Sale, the children actually played in deeper snow than they had seen in Oklahoma. The freezing conditions, heavy rains, gales and snow flurries often interfered with our flying program but also made life quite miserable. I remember standing on parade one bitterly cold Tuesday morning, the day all of the base personnel paraded before the Officer Commanding. Despite our wearing overcoats, numerous people on parade collapsed and were carried off by the medical orderlies. A thick bank of fog rolled across the parade ground from the west, settling and freezing on the western aspect of every one of us as a covering of white frost. I was only a Squadron Leader at the time but resolved that if ever I became an Officer Commanding I would have enough initiative to cancel parades in such appalling conditions.

Group Captain John Cornish was our Officer Commanding in 1965. A popular and gregarious figure, his cheery and friendly demeanour was sadly missed when he left for duty in Kuala Lumpur, seconded to Malaysia as Deputy Chief of their new Air Force. Jeff Blackwell was his successor at East Sale, as far as I remember, the first navigator to be appointed OC. Perhaps that was the era when navigators were at last being acknowledged by the hierarchy at Department of Air as entitled to many senior appointments previously the prerogative of pilots. OC East Sale was an appropriate post for a navigator since our other major training unit was the School of Air Navigation which graduated all navigators and conducted advanced courses.

I recall two regular customs on most RAAF bases, usually in mid-December. On a particular day before the bases stood down for Christmas leave, all the officers and SNCOs presented themselves at the Airmen's Mess and served the airmen a large Christmas dinner. I suspect that the cynics among the airmen questioned the value of this display of egalitarianism. The other event was the children's party on an afternoon towards the end of the school year when the offspring of all base members were treated to merry-go-round rides, drinks and other goodies, ending with a visit by Santa Claus who handed out a present to each child, all this funded by the parents, of course. Wherever a slow-flying aeroplane was available, such as at East Sale, Santa arrived over the throng on the sports oval, waved to all the kids, then landed and was driven to the party in the Controller's jeep or on the crash wagon. Some years after I left Sale, the children were treated to a memorable party. The RAF exchange officer was flying Santa Claus overhead in a CT4, the successor trainer to the Winjeel, a light-weight propeller-driven aircraft built by Victa, and known affectionately as the 'Plastic Parrot'. As Santa waved enthusiastically to the excited children below, the

pilot misjudged his height and clipped his wingtip on a row of the cypress pines common all over East Sale. The aircraft crashed in front of the spectators, the children dismayed to see Santa carried off to hospital in the ambulance with a broken arm. He presumably recovered in time to do his regular 'down the chimney' job on Christmas Eve.

By August 1966 we knew that we would be returning to Canberra. Mike Ridgway and I were posted to RAAF Staff College to do the Staff Course beginning in January 1967. Our big surprise was my promotion to Wing Commander, usually not given until completion of the Staff Course.

Again we packed up in December, said farewell to East Sale once more, and drove with six children and the cat overnight to Canberra. To keep the cat subdued during the trip we bought some knock-out tablets from the chemist. Unsure whether the protesting cat actually swallowed any of the first one, we played safe by forcing the spare tablet down her throat. The medication worked well as she collapsed like a wrung-out dish cloth and could not stand on her feet again for three days, much to the consternation of the children.

As the Blacket Street house had been leased for the better part of four years, we spent a lot of time cleaning up and getting it tidy again for Christmas. Not that there was any significant damage to repair, but walls and ceilings had to be scrubbed and re-painted, worn carpet replaced, and a neglected garden rehabilitated. And that marked the end of my flying for a long time. I was about to learn that there is a lot more to an Air Force than flying aeroplanes.

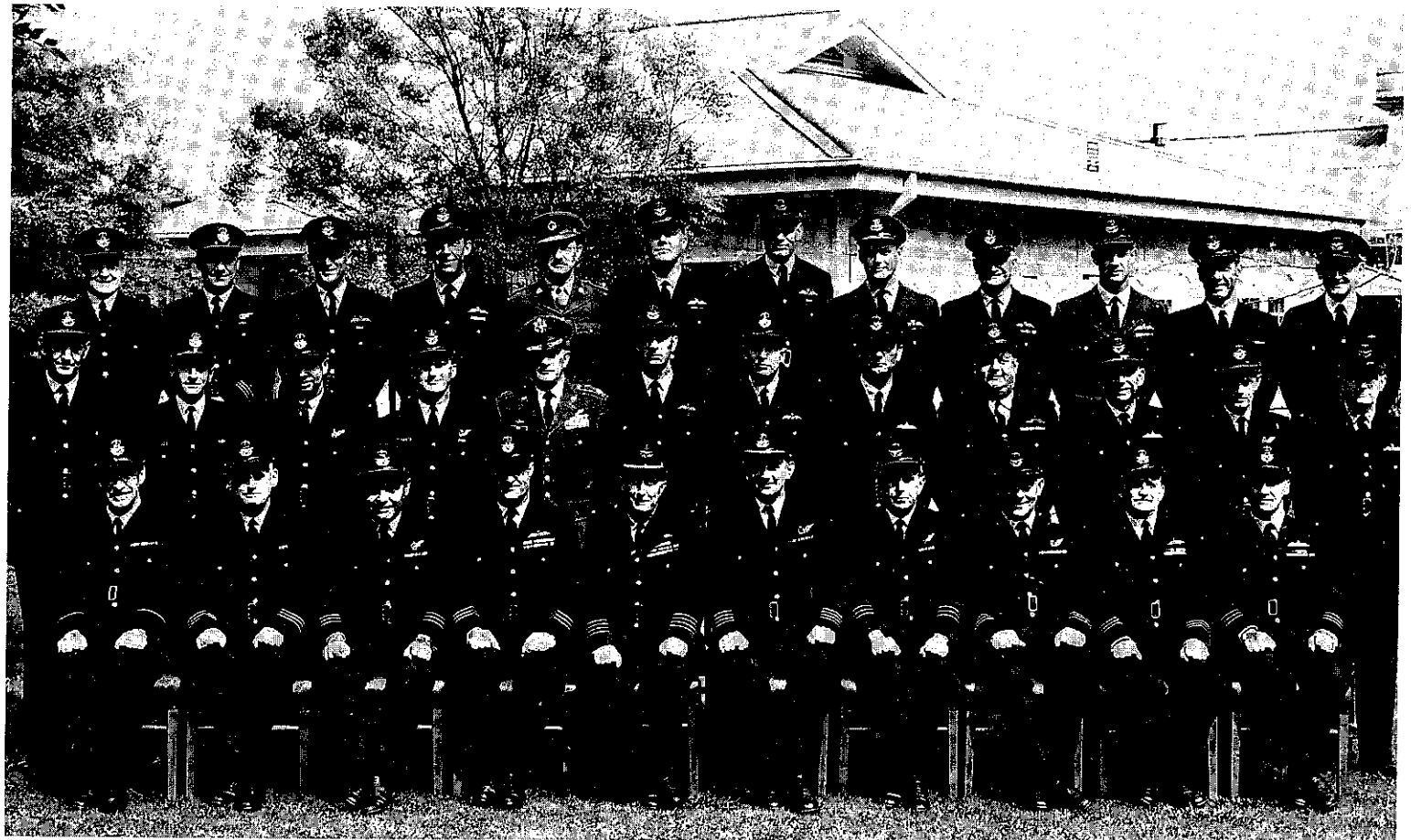
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Student Again

Any officer on his way up the promotion ladder had to complete the Staff Course at Fairbairn. The purpose was to develop communication skills (in other words, tune up your readin' and writin'), learn how to analyse and solve problems at staff level, broaden your knowledge of current and world affairs, learn more about Army and Navy and other enlightening topics which might prepare a person for a senior desk job. That sounds very interesting, but for me, 1967 is one year I prefer not to dwell on.

The Staff College was headed by a Group Captain Commandant (Ian Parker, again), assisted by a Directing Staff (DS) of seven or eight Wing Commanders of various categories. The base organisation at that time was somewhat peculiar as Ian Parker was also Officer Commanding Fairbairn, reporting to Operational Command, while Staff College remained a unit of Support Command. Consequently the conduct of the course was, for the most part, the responsibility of the Assistant Commandant, Group Captain Sam Jordan. The role of the DS was to direct the studies of the 24 students, but in my year I found for the most part little amiable rapport with the DS. Almost all of the students were of Squadron Leader (or equivalent) rank, even the RAF, RNZAF and Army officers on our course. Although Tony Dietz was also a newly-promoted Wing Commander, our senior student (and nominated Course Captain) was a mature and self-assured USAF Lieutenant Colonel, Harry Witt, who stayed on the following year as one of the DS, and some years later returned to Canberra as the United States Air Attache. The College seemed to regard itself as a sort of filter, to exclude anyone who the staff considered did not show potential for higher duties and higher rank. In fact, on the previous course, three students were put off halfway through the year, labelled as not up to standard. Ironically, they were all later promoted to Wing Commander and all occupied important staff jobs.

I firmly believe that, having already achieved my promotion, I had escaped their filtering system and therefore was first in line to be humbled. There were plenty in the line behind me, waiting their turn to be criticised and hopefully learning to grow a thick skin. Rather than be encouraging, the staff concentrated on showing us how little we knew and how dumb we were. Our Education Officer delighted in giving us vocabulary tests which only proved that we did not know as many rarely-used words as he did. So much for Churchill's admonition to his wartime Cabinet to phrase their staff papers in simple language! Other DS showed little regard for a student's reasoning or solution to problems but insisted on assessing answers to assignments against the 'correct' one issued by the College. In my opinion, any student on any course is liable for criticism, but it should be helpful or constructive, not derogatory. The hours were long — lectures, tutorials and study each day, research and writing assignments at night. Sometimes I was unable to get home at weekends in order to complete an assignment deadline.



Directing staff at RAAF Staff College in 1967 and students of 21 Course. The Commandant was Ian Parker and Sam Jordan the Assistant Commandant. The Course included some high-flyers – in the back row: fourth from left, is Mike Ridgway (later AVM and Chief of Air Force Personnel) and seventh from left, Ray Funnell (later AM and Chief of the Air Staff). In the middle row is Harry Witt (later the United States Air Attache in Canberra) and on the extreme right is John Paule (later AVM and Chief of Air Force Personnel). (RAAF Photo)

I found it generally a degrading year for me rather than an uplifting one. Not all my associates would agree, certainly not the few egotists amongst our group who were not fazed by the treatment, regarding the course as just another step up their ladder. Nevertheless, in years that followed, many of my course admitted how much they detested the frigid 'them-and-us' attitude. The Assistant Commandant and I never saw eye to eye. I could put up with his disparaging comments about my essays but resented being treated as an erring schoolboy.

Joyce's mid-year announcement that she was expecting again convinced me that 1967 was not our best year.

Despite the foregoing complaints, the course was not all miserable, by any means. We worked on some very useful learning exercises, prepared and gave numerous presentations ourselves, listened to many interesting and distinguished guest speakers, and started to appreciate how much our fellow students had to offer as a result of their years of service life. Friendships were made on that course which helped open doors to solving difficult situations in later years.

Part of our education included visits to most RAAF bases and to Army and Navy establishments. We roughed it in tents at the Army's Jungle Training Centre at Canungra in Queensland, and three weeks later pondered over tactical manoeuvres with the Army students at their Staff College at Queenscliffe in Victoria. The highlight of our year was a week-long trip by Hercules to Papua New Guinea, visiting military bases at Port Moresby, Madang and Vanimo, as well as investigating commercial and strategic aspects of Mt Hagan and Rabaul. Even then we recognised the tremendous problems facing Papua New Guinea as an independent nation – the hundreds of different tribes, many of them isolated and using their own distinctive dialect, the difficulties in communication caused by the weather conditions and the rugged impassable terrain, and the challenge to unite people of diverse social customs who were subject to three, at times conflicting, influences, namely, tribal custom, the white man's law, and the Christian missions.

While visiting Naval Air Station Nowra to study anti-submarine warfare, some of the wags on our course souvenired a large portrait of Lord Nelson from the wall of the Wardroom and somehow smuggled it back to Fairbairn in the Caribou transport. In Navy circles, Nelson stands on almost the same level as God. In due course the portrait was returned to Nowra and the offenders chastised by a grinning Commandant. However, the initial wrath of the Navy was exacerbated some weeks later when an observant naval officer happened to notice that Nelson was wearing a set of RAAF wings superglued to his left breast, above his honours and medals.

The year finished with postings, some to Washington DC, some to flying units and most to staff jobs in various Headquarters. As expected after many years on flying units, I won a desk at Department of Air in the Directorate of Organisation, with orders to report early in January 1968. That year also finished in depression mode for the nation when Prime Minister Harold Holt drowned on 17 December.

We enjoyed a quiet Christmas at home, having no requirement, just for a change, to pack up, move elsewhere and find new schools. Our family was finally complete when Allison Mary arrived on the scene at Canberra Hospital on 28 December. Another girl! What happened to little brother?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Departmental Blues

The summer at the beginning of 1968 was one of the severest on record. The temperature rose to 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42.2 C) day after day with not a cloud in sight. The Australian Capital Territory authorities ordered severe water restrictions, hosing of lawns and gardens was not permitted, and Canberra looked drab and dead. When the rain eventually came in late March the green quickly replaced the brown. However, the critical situation we faced that summer was sufficient spur to the Government to hasten the building of two additional dams to ensure Canberra's water supply in the future.

With a brand-new baby to care for, we were unable to take any holiday trip during that Christmas leave period. Joyce's sister Judy was married in Queensland on 6 January but as Joyce was out of hospital only two days at that date, she had to decline the invitation. We sent Jennifer and Christopher to Queensland as our family representatives. In fact, Jennifer, then aged 14, was one of Judy's bridesmaids. On their return we looked into enrolling five of the children in local schools. Jennifer started at Catholic Girls High School at Braddon, Christopher at Daramalan College, and Susan, Lynne and Debbie at St Brigid's Convent School at Dickson.

I reported to Department of Air in January, immediately being sent to Williamtown for two weeks to do a course at Air Support Unit. This would have been an appropriate course to do if I had been destined for an army-support job in Vietnam, but I never found any application of my new-found information while serving in the Directorate of Organisation. I was designated Org 2, a position newly created to examine means of better using the Air Force Reserve, the Citizen Air Force squadrons, and the University squadrons. Nobody gave me any directions, guidance or terms of reference for this project, nor what sort of conclusions might be needed. However, my concern was short-lived as David Smythe, in the adjacent Directorate of Air Force plans, wrote a convincing paper recommending the disbandment of the Reserve and University units as an unwarranted drain on our resources. The Air Board accepted his conclusions and these units eventually disappeared by 1973. The Citizen Air Force squadrons were permitted to remain in close association with their nearest flying unit.

Suddenly I had no job, certainly not the one the post was created to do. Instead I was then lumbered with anything which nobody else wanted. The role of the Directorate of Organisation was to deal with the organisation and structure of the RAAF, the purpose of each unit, squadron or school, its size and composition, and where it should be located. All this was expertly handled by Org 1, Ken Janson and his staff. Their workload was very clearly defined. My section (Squadron Leader Glen Cliff and I) then got everything else that needed some form of 'organisation', although

it soon became obvious that for many of my seniors, 'organising' meant making all the detailed arrangements to ensure the smooth conduct of a function or event. In my opinion, much of it was of little consequence. For example, we fully expected to receive the first F-111 aircraft from the USA in 1969 and I was tasked to organise a big gala reception to mark their arrival at Amberley. All this paperwork went into the bottom drawer when the F-111s on the production line were rejected on structural grounds. They were eventually delivered three years later.

Every year it was customary to stage a week-long conference between senior staffs of the RAAF and the USAF, called 'Airmen to Airmen Talks'. On our side the team was led by CAS, and the USAF party always comprised officers of General rank. Top-level participants like these expect everything to go perfectly so it is not difficult to envisage the mass of detail I had to cover in arranging venues, transport, programs, meals and social events, in fact, everything except the content of their discussion papers.

Following some serious outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in Canada and the UK, our Government became sufficiently alarmed to investigate what measures we would have to take to contain an incidence of this disease in Australia. I was sent off as the RAAF representative at an inter-departmental conference at which agronomists and economists emphasised the magnitude of the disaster should foot-and-mouth disease spread out of control. Not only would we lose our herds and flocks, but also our overseas sales of meat, wool, hides and associated animal products which kept this country afloat. By the time we bred disease-free stock, our foreign customers would have found alternative suppliers and we might never recover economically. I had no authority to guarantee specific RAAF support but that was of no consequence as, in an emergency, the Government would order total co-operation by all departments to isolate and quarantine any outbreak.

An interesting job came my way in 1969 when I was selected in a special team led by Group Captain Des Douglas which travelled to Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. As Britain prepared to withdraw its forces from the Far East in 1971 we had to examine and report on the extent of base support which the RAAF would have to provide in order to maintain our operational squadrons in Malaysia and Singapore. My role in the team was to ascertain what support functions the RAF would be removing, and to recommend the size and composition of the various elements we would send in as replacements. This was no doubt the most practical task I had in the two years. I had to return to Singapore later to confer with the RNZAF on the sharing of facilities and accommodation for our small detachment of fighter aircraft at Tengah in Singapore.

In the Directorate I found it very frustrating to sit at a desk after years of flying but have to admit that the experience of organising the details of events stood me in very good stead in later years. My father could not understand why I had to be sitting at a desk in the Department. He had started as a junior teacher, then earned promotions ultimately to school principal and he could not accept that a person who joined the Air Force as a pilot should be doing anything other than flying. I found it hard to convince him that policy and administrative matters affecting the 'sharp end' of the Force had to be dealt with in Headquarters units and, in the best interests of the people out in the bases and squadrons, these matters should be examined and researched by officers who had served on bases and squadrons. The alternative, or the management arrangement which my father thought preferable, was to man all

departmental posts with public servants! Little did he realise that we uniformed people had to fight for every change, every improvement to conditions, every alteration to an organisation, every new concept, especially if it involved increased expenditure which was opposed by the public servant element of the Department. In any case, an officer's career is not complete unless he experiences some of the problems of trying to satisfy the needs within a limited budget. Too frequently, out on a unit, one despairs that those in Headquarters have no understanding or appreciation of one's needs and requests. When you work at the other end of the chain, trying to make decisions or submitting recommendations which are in the best interests of the whole force, looking for the most value for each dollar, then you realise the absolute need for uniformed people in Headquarters to represent those in the field.

For much of my two years in Organisation my Director was Group Captain John Thorpe. He worked closely with the Org 1 section but left me to take on odd tasks set by more senior officers such as DCAS Air Vice-Marshal Charles Read. In most instances I reported directly to our Director-General of Organisation, Group Captain Nev McNamara, to whom I gave the jet refresher at East Sale. DCAS once taught me a lesson in being a better staff officer. I drafted for him a paper on a controversial subject which conflicted with Technical Branch opinion. DCAS agreed with my content and argument, but criticised it as not sufficiently forceful or aggressive in tone. I protested that as a Wing Commander it would be impertinent of me to write to an Air Vice-Marshal in such a style. He countered by reminding me that he, not I, would be putting his signature to the paper, so I should therefore write as though I were an Air Vice-Marshal. When I redrafted the paper to his satisfaction he had a chuckle with me that the addressee would be irate were he to know that the provocative statements were composed by a mere Wing Commander.

During those two years in Canberra our family life was relatively stable. Catholic Girls High proved a disappointment as Jennifer learnt virtually nothing from the elderly nun teachers who should have been retired. We moved her to Watson High where she excelled academically, made many friends and starred as the lead in the school's musical, 'Calamity Jane'. Christopher progressed well at Daramalan College, doing particularly well at technical drawing and like subjects. We should have recognised his talents then and steered him into the manual arts field. But, as so often happened, we were posted interstate again and had to settle him, and the others, into another strange curriculum. His fondest memory of Daramalan is being the pitching star in their champion baseball team. Susan, Lynne and Debbie attended St Brigid's Primary where Joyce had a confrontation with the Principal, complaining that Susan's teacher was such a frightening ogre that Susan was scared to go to school. The classroom situation improved after Susan moved to a desk which was out of striking range of that particular nun. Susan still tried her hand (or feet) at ballet for a while, but got too impatient as she wasn't in a tutu doing a pas de deux in her second month. We had realised by this time that Lynne was not progressing as she should. Tests by education specialists showed that she was a 'slow learner' as well as having a slight spastisity affecting her speech and leg movements. Fortunately for Lynne she was then accepted into Special Schools for the rest of her schooldays. By 1969 we had five at school and two 'ankle biters' at home. There was never a dull moment! Joyce and I found some difficulty keeping up with attendances at school fetes, bottle drives, working bees, school concerts, sports days, P & C meetings, parent interviews, and

the like, but still managed to make considerable improvements to the house and garden.

During those three years our growing brood developed the normal family desire to own pets. One of our cats carelessly allowed herself to become pregnant at a very early age. This was decades before families were being advised to have their pets de-sexed! Eventually the poor little mother dropped her litter prematurely, on the front driveway and in full view of the girls who stood open-mouthed, horrified but fascinated at this dramatic lesson in nature. Unfortunately all the litter were still-born, prompting Joyce to explain that 'she got married too young and couldn't take care of her kittens'. Jennifer accepted that as a warning to all females! Although a cat customarily belonged in our household, Christopher prevailed on Joyce to take in a small fox terrier/cattle dog cross which was quickly named Charlie. The first mistake was taking the dog. The second mistake was that Charlie was a female who, at certain times, attracted a queue of the neighbourhood's male dogs on the front driveway, the frantic screams of alarm from the youngest girls prompting Joyce to rush out and throw a bucket of water over the offenders. Eventually the lovable but excitable little animal bit the small boy next door (Joyce believed that the dog was provoked by the kid) so we had to get rid of Charlie before we were sued for damages. As Christopher was heart-broken at the loss of his dog, Joyce declared, 'That's it! No more dogs in this house!' So we developed an interest in birds. One day Joyce succumbed to entreaties and brought home three brand-new ducklings which regrettably did not last the weekend. The little fluttering lumps of yellow down stumbled along too close behind the heels of the younger children and were all accidentally squashed underfoot! Christopher had no success with pigeons so started breeding finches and quail, which meant that I had to build him a large walk-in aviary along-side the garage. One day in 1969 Jennifer arrived home with a small ball of brown fur in the pocket of her parka, saying tearfully, 'Please can we keep him. He will be destroyed if we don't give him a home'. You guessed it. We kept him! This endearing little pup called Sam grew into a monster weighing 75 pounds (34 kilos), not surprising as he was a Labrador/Beagle cross. Dogs are like children — if you feed them, they grow bigger!

Being in Canberra we endured the bitter winters, though the house was not as cold after we installed oil heating. I joined the St Vincent de Paul Society but found with my busy life that it demanded far more of my 'spare' time than was fair on the family. At the end of 1968 we gamely tried a short holiday on the coast at Narooma but with Allison's teething, lack of sleep, sunburnt children, then days of cold wind and rain, we gave up and returned home. Even the fishing was unsuccessful! Never mind, we said, next year it will be easier. But next year we were off again on another posting!

Fully expecting a move at the end of 1969 back to a flying job — and the one I thought most likely was Commanding Officer of CFS at East Sale — I was deflated to be given Commanding Officer of Base Squadron Edinburgh. No doubt due to my small regard for the majority of COs of Base Squadrons I had known, probably a most unfair and unwarranted stance on my part, I had gained the impression that pilots who had limited prospects were shunted off to Base Squadrons as a sort of purgatory. I must admit to feeling very depressed, this sense of exile being accentuated by my Org 1 colleague Ken Janson moving to 75 Squadron at Williamtown as Commanding Officer. So, though glad to be rid of the Directorate of Organisation desk, I went off to Edinburgh without much enthusiasm. What a surprise was in store for me!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Education at Edinburgh

We all moved to South Australia just before Christmas 1969, and crammed into the best married quarter available. I drove overland with a trailer of household goods and a cage of Christopher's birds, and Sam occupying the rear seat, then returned by air after a fortnight to collect the family, the eldest girls extremely upset to be leaving their friends. The houses in Penfield Avenue, Salisbury North, were built for staff members of the ammunition factory during the war (the premises later became the Weapons Research Establishment, now called Defence Science and Technology Organisation) and were owned by the Department of Supply. A few had been allocated to senior RAAF officers as we had no married quarters on the base, which was situated about four kilometres north. 2 Penfield Avenue, Salisbury North was a comfortable old house with an attractive garden full of fruit trees and grape vines, so we were better off for schooling and facilities than out at Smithfield Plains or Elizabeth North where most of the married quarters were located, all assigned to us by the South Australian Housing Trust.

Without delay I took over from Jack Carter as CO of Base Squadron, not admitting to anybody that I was totally bewildered. Even though a Wing Commander with 19 years of service, I was in command of airmen for the first time. Worse still, although I had been a user of base services for many years, I was unacquainted with the detailed responsibilities of the numerous flights and sections, except for Air Traffic Control operation. I managed to conceal my ignorance (or believed I did) while learning fast. In those early weeks the Officer Commanding, Air Commodore Gordon Steege, would call me in with a question about messing or security or transport or some other function, and I would assure him that I would look into the matter, while thinking to myself, 'What is he talking about?' Fortunately we had a loyal and competent staff of flight commanders with lots of experience in their specialist fields — Accountant 'Snub' Pollard, Equippo 'Blue' Dennison, Air Traffic Controller Joe Strickland, Admino Peter Miles, Chaplain Fred Foley, Communicator John Hughes, and a variety of reliable Medicos and Dentists.

I soon learned that the role of Base Squadron was to provide efficient support service to the resident units — No. 11 (Maritime) Squadron, No. 1 Recruit Training Unit, and No. 24 (City of Adelaide) Reserve Squadron. A year later when I designed our squadron badge I thought it appropriate that the motto should read, 'Support for the Armed'. We provided stores, uniforms, accommodation, messing, fuel supplies, medical and dental services, pay and allowances, air traffic control and fire brigade, transport, security, library and education service, telecommunications, base maintenance, chaplaincy, and allocation of married quarters situated off-base in the suburbs of Elizabeth. It might be easy to envisage the immense quantities of aviation

fuel we supplied to the Lockheed Orion P3B aircraft of 11 Squadron for their long patrols and anti-submarine exercises, but it would not be so simple to estimate the manhours involved in meeting the needs of the Recruit Training Unit. Every few weeks a new intake of males or females would arrive, requiring meals and quarters, issue of their uniforms and work gear, medical inspections, and — the reason for our large team of dentists — all their teeth checked, repaired and in working order by the time they passed on to other bases for further training a few months later.

Much to my surprise, the job became an interesting and challenging task. I realised that the flight commanders were thoroughly conversant with their specialist functions but avoided any ticklish decision-making. So all the problems were referred to the CO, much to their relief. I suppose that was what I was being paid for! At the same time I developed a nice balance by delegating as much authority as possible to the flight commanders, and only stepped in when I deemed it prudent or necessary to do so. I remember that before leaving Department of Air a fellow officer offered his advice from his own experience as CO of a base squadron — stay aloof, don't let anybody know your mind, control absolutely, and rule with a rod of iron. I cannot understand how he ever survived his posting because his philosophy was totally opposite to mine, and he could never have inspired the loyalty and harmonious relations that existed within my team of officers and airmen and airwomen.

Something very noticeable and disturbing to me in early weeks was the absence of social relationships between flights and sections. Medicos rarely conversed with the Equippos; Controllers did not drink with the Accountants. In my flying units we all had a common purpose and related easily to each other, so I resolved to end the clique situation. First I instigated CO's Conferences and brought all officers together, encouraging leaders to report on problem areas as well as successes. Each officer came to realise that as an essential member of the team, he or she ought to know the strengths and weaknesses within the entire team. Rather than operate in isolation, it was better that a section use any opportunity to help out or back up another section so that we provided a better quality of support right across the range of services. Next I introduced informal dining-in nights for all Base Squadron officers, something they had not experienced before. The scheme worked well. We broke down the unseen barriers of ignorance between flights, and developed a happy unit spirit. I found it very reassuring in later years to meet those officers who reminded me that Base Squadron Edinburgh in 1970-72 was the happiest and most co-operative unit in which they had ever served.

1970 was a difficult year for me while I gradually learned that people, not aeroplanes, make up an Air Force. While flying aircraft was our primary role, the flying squadrons had to be assured of efficient base squadron support. That year was probably the best education in people control and resource management I ever had. For the first time I had to hear charges and award punishments for misdemeanours. A short course in Air Force Law at Point Cook provided me with the basis for dispensing justice, but, as a general rule, common sense and avoidance of rushed judgments usually proved the best way of dealing with personnel problems.

In April 1970 Air Commodore Steege left at short notice to take up the post of Senior Air Staff Officer at Headquarters Operational Command, telling me most casually that I would have to sit in his chair until a new OC was appointed. So during the next three months I was suddenly acquainted with a new range of responsibilities and social commitments. Actually it was just as much a new experience for Joyce as

for me. As the Temporary Officer Commanding I received invitations to the Government House levee, a graduation ceremony at Adelaide University, a passing-out parade at the Police Academy, lunch at the Commonwealth Club, attendance at an Industrial Mobilisation Course, a Queen's Birthday reception at Government House, the Opening of the South Australian Parliament, a City Hall reception — and so the social calendar continued. We found to our relief that we fitted in quite easily at these events which were usually attended by the notables and sophisticates of South Australia. As most civilians had no appreciation of the rank gap between a Wing Commander and an Air Commodore, we were therefore simply accepted as the Senior Air Force Officer, South Australia, and his wife, and treated most hospitably wherever we visited. In like manner I found no great difficulty in hosting and entertaining senior officers who visited Edinburgh. We also had visits and inspections by both Air Officers Commanding and Air Board members, and occasionally Members of Parliament who called in for a refuel on their way to or from Perth. My colleague Mick Lyons, the CO of 11 Squadron and also PMC of the Officers' Mess, was always there to share the hosting duties. Between us, and with the loyal support of the other commanding officers, we kept Edinburgh running smoothly until the arrival of the new OC, Air Commodore Ted Pickerd, in late July 1970.

OC Edinburgh Ted Pickerd hands over a cheque to Joyce, in 1970 the President of the Edinburgh Branch of the Air Force Women's Association. The cheque represented the proceeds of a concert given at Edinburgh by the RAAF Central Band, conducted by the Director of Music, Ron Mitchell (on the right).

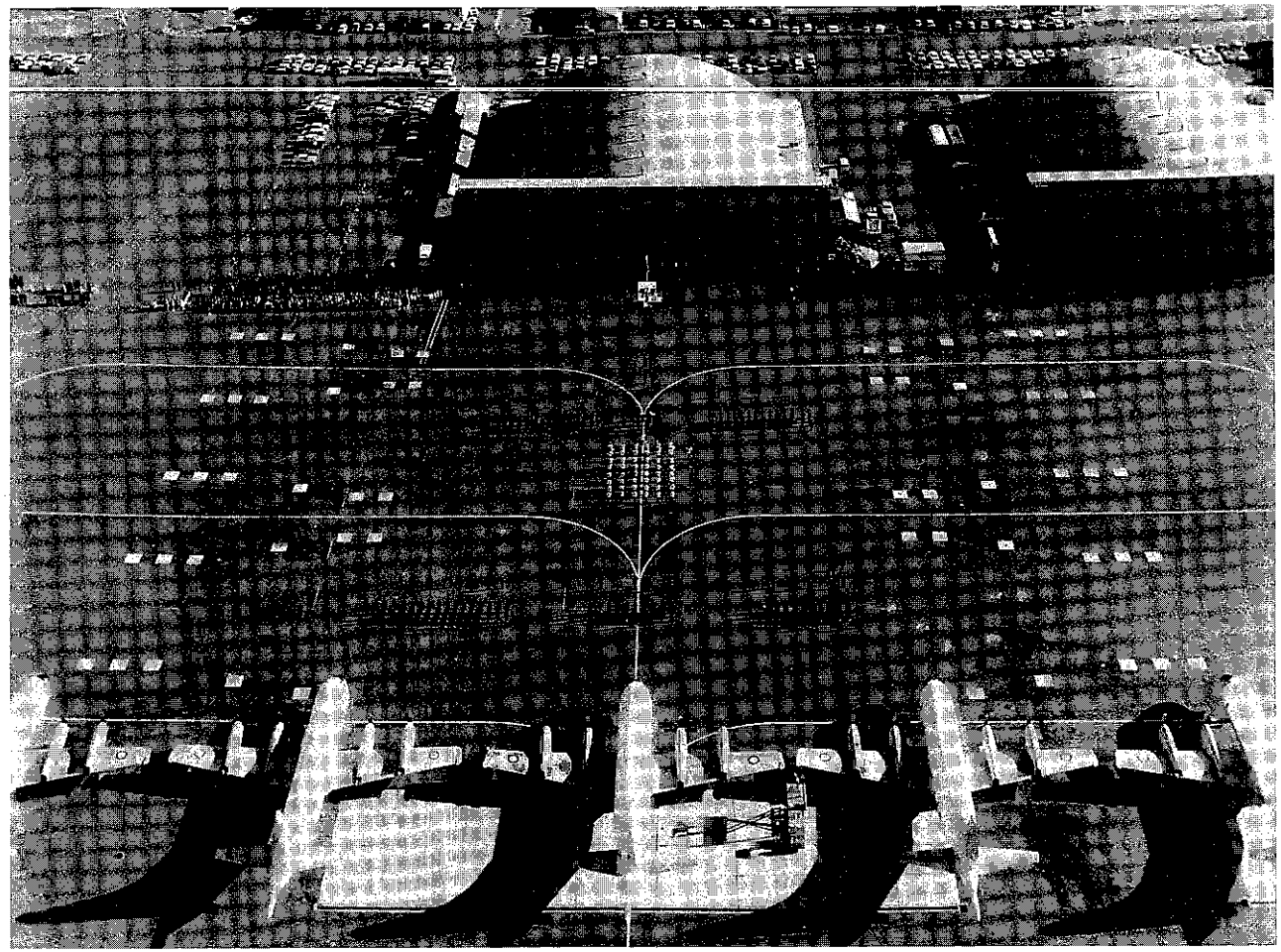
Over the years I assessed my seniors for their qualities of leadership and example. Many, in my opinion, rated disappointingly low, perhaps for their drinking habit verging on alcoholism, or for putting themselves on too high a pedestal, or maybe for their lack of integrity. On the other hand I knew some real gentlemen, people who carried their rank and authority with respect, yet never lost the common touch. Brian Eaton and Des Douglas, one of short stature, the other a giant of a man, both earned my respect and admiration.

Ted Pickerd taught me a lot about being an OC. He had high ideals about fair play and decency, was very approachable, at ease with an airman or with the Governor, jovial and hospitable, yet stern and determined when necessary. I always admired him for being a friendly neighbour across the fence yet in the workplace he was clearly the boss and I his deputy. He sometimes revealed his considerable anxiety about a troublesome matter but he was usually willing to discuss the topic to test out his own judgment and I never saw him make any important decision which was not arrived at studiously and meticulously.

His notable shortcoming was his inability to delegate and to trust people to do their job. He had to check up on what his unit COs were doing, would interfere and have the final say. I used to despair of his striding into my office after driving round the base, and nitpicking about some trivial matter, the inference being that I was not running the base properly and that he should not have to be the one to bring these matters to my attention. We had numerous confrontations, particularly when he would override my directions about base squadron functions. Of course he always won and I had to comply, but I resented his telling me how to run Base Squadron. My flight commanders, aware of the situation, sympathised with my position but we just had to obey. Some years later when I had access to my Confidential Reports, I found that Ted acknowledged my efficiency but criticised me for my ill-concealed reluctance to accept his rulings.

One day Ted was the guest of the Brigadier from Keswick Barracks at a huge Army parade at the Adelaide Cricket Ground. Ted was astounded to find that the Brigadier had returned from leave only the previous day, having left the whole of the planning, organisation and conduct of the parade in the capable hands of his senior staff officer Lieutenant Colonel Neil Paramour. To Ted it was inconceivable that that such detail could be entrusted to a subordinate. This obsession of his was particularly evident during the preparation of our air shows when he used to fuss around, ordering this or changing that, and generally irritating people who were trying to do a job they knew perfectly well. All the same, I am grateful to Ted Pickerd for all the noble qualities of leadership he showed, and always regard him and Jack Cornish as my models.

As PMC, Mick Lyons also grew tired of Ted's continual needling about Officers' Mess management affairs. When Ted phoned Mick's office in 11 Squadron, Mick was often conveniently away flying in an Orion and therefore out of contact. One day Ted wanted Mick urgently and when the 11 Squadron Admino said that the CO was not in his office, Ted drove his car the two kilometres to 11 Squadron Headquarters, strode down the hall to the Officers' toilet and yelled, 'Lyons, come out of there. I know you are avoiding me.'



Parading the RAAF Colours before HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at RAAF Edinburgh on 24 March 1971.

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh reviewing a parade at RAAF Edinburgh marking the RAAF Jubilee in 1971. He is accompanied by Mick Lyons (CO 11 Squadron), Ted Pickerd (OC Edinburgh) and John Whitehead (Equerry). (RAAF Photo)

1971 brought new experiences which called on my ability to organise and direct. That year was the 50th Anniversary of the RAAF, the celebration marked by the arrival in Australia of the Duke of Edinburgh to officiate at numerous commemorative events around the country. We were his first port of call. For weeks we prepared a large formation of base troops, under the command of Mick Lyons, at which the RAAF Colours were paraded before His Royal Highness, followed by a reception in the Officers' Mess attended by the VIPs of Adelaide. The following week we staged a big air show attended by 80,000 people. Air Commodore Bay Adams from Headquarters Operational Command managed the aerial display which was later repeated in other States. At Edinburgh I had the total ground organisation to plan and direct — liaison with the police over traffic control, parking, toilets and catering, as well as looking after all the air and ground crews of the 60 aircraft which arrived from other bases to feature in the air show.

'I have been to London to see the Queen' and 'I have been to Edinburgh to dine with the Duke'. On his way back from Pearce to Canberra the Duke's VIP aircraft refuelled at Edinburgh. Ted Pickerd thought it a nice gesture to offer him lunch in our Air Movements Centre, like a small airline terminal. Having asked in advance what drinks HRH preferred — martinis, pink gins and the like — we reckoned we were totally prepared as perfect hosts. To the OC's embarrassment the Duke requested a beer! We had not allowed for this choice so had to send out hastily for a bottle of beer from the flight steward's stock on the VIP aircraft.

I consider that 1971, our Jubilee year, was a good time to be a member of the RAAF. With our Vietnam commitment coming to an end, our front-line squadrons had reason to be proud of their efforts and achievements, even though our contribution may have seemed puny compared with the USAF performance. We were still awaiting the delivery of the F-111s, but had temporary lease of F4 Phantoms at Amberley. The transport element of Hercules and Caribou aircraft acquitted itself well in all theatres, and successes of Orion operations confirmed a sound choice in the maritime field. As the Air Force was projected into the public eye in 1971 I believe that our response that year always reflected a great pride of service. We even grew a tolerance of irksome aspects of Air Force life such as shortage of funds and 'making do' with poor quality housing and accommodation. For as long as I can remember, we had been 'making do' in many of the supporting aspects of the Service, there never being enough money in the Defence vote to raise the quality of our on-base facilities to match the excellence of our aircraft. As a means of making more efficient use of our fixed assets, the organisation of the RAAF underwent several changes in my time. I remember in 1950 that we were structured geographically, the RAAF stations around Australia belonging to Northern Area, Eastern Area, Southern Area, and so on. During my years in Malta we changed to a three-command system — Home Command (near Penrith) responsible for the fighting squadrons and bases, Training Command for all aspects of training, and Maintenance Command for the other support functions, both these Headquarters situated in Melbourne. Somewhere along the line Home Command became Operational Command (possibly with altered responsibilities which I do not recall) and all other functions were grouped in Support Command. Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne moved to Canberra in 1961 as Department of Air, still retaining some direct command functions such as direct responsibility for our operational forces in Butterworth. In later years our squadrons in Vietnam responded directly to Department of Air, not to Operational Command. So there was always

something in our organisational structure which needed tidying up. Not that it makes any difference to my story. We just became accustomed to changes which were always justified as improvements to command and control. The historians can argue the worth of the various structural frameworks we have seen since World War II.

This may be an appropriate point to reflect on some of the changes I had seen evolve within our Air Force since the day I joined. Those 20 years probably saw a significant change of direction, pointing to the independence of operation which exists in modern times. Since the birth of our service in 1921 the RAAF had studiously followed the example of the RAF. Our organisation and structure were similar. We had a history of flying British aircraft. We accepted for ourselves the manuals of operation used by the RAF. For our promotion exams we studied manuals written expressly for the RAF but regarded as having identical application in our service, even to doctrines relating to use of air power. In relation to personnel our system of ranks and command was borrowed directly from the RAF, as were our guidelines on training and performance standards. Even our uniforms were virtually identical, except for the colour. We sent our people to England on study courses and for advanced training and in most ways developed as a sort of junior model of the RAF, not junior in age, but junior in the way an offspring follows the example and standards set by his parent. We even had an Englishman as our Chief of Air Staff in the early 1950s — Air Marshal Sir Donald Hardman.

As young junior officers we were required to learn the rules of military etiquette from an RAF book called 'Customs of the Service'. Many of us must have queried the relevance of some of these customs, despite the proposition by our seniors that the strength of the service lay in the acceptance of long-established tradition. I have to be careful here in making a clear distinction between matters of common courtesy as taught in any self-respecting Australian home and specific patterns of behaviour dutifully followed by the English officer-class at that time. Without wishing to belabour the point of slavishly following custom, I refer to the matter of visiting cards, just as one example. We were advised to obtain a set of visiting cards (embossed, not printed!), two of which were to be placed on the silver tray in the foyer of the Officers' Mess on arrival on posting, one for the PMC of the Mess, one for the Officer Commanding. As well, we were supposed to make an appointment 'to call' on the OC and his wife at their residence. I do not dispute that such procedures were traditionally observed in English society, but it was soon obvious to me as a junior officer that few of our Officers Commanding in the RAAF were the slightest bit interested in collecting visiting cards. As for the wife of the OC, I never knew one who would have regarded a formal 'call' by a new Pilot Officer as other than a darned nuisance and an intrusion on her household routine. Senior officers in the post-war RAAF did not employ servants, nor did we have batmen in the Mess doing valet duties as was the custom in the RAF. Recommended officer customs even included the wearing of a hat when in mufti so that a junior could raise his hat on meeting a senior officer in the street. I am all in favour of common courtesy, remembering my upbringing when I learned to raise my school hat on meeting a lady. However, by the 1950s in Australia we had developed into a society which saw little value in some of the affectations long observed by the English upper-class. This did not mean that we tolerated any degree of uncouthness: rather it was an expression of intolerance of any caste system while maintaining a respect for each other's worth. I believe that even in our traditionally-structured RAAF we gladly endorsed the widespread Australian

attitude of 'I'm as good as he is, even though I respect his seniority, experience and maturity'.

How did this change of attitude come about? In the first place, we grew up as a nation in World War II, learning independence of will as a people and, soon after, modifying our national culture with the absorption of so many migrants in the years that followed. I am sure that RAAF people gained an altered perspective of service life through association with forces of the United States in the South West Pacific theatre and later in Japan and Korea. In following years, when we showed a preference for American aircraft — Sabre, Neptune, Hercules, Orion — the increased liaison with the USAF through exchange postings, training courses and adoption of their technology led to a strengthening of confidence in our independence as well as a gradual disengagement from the former strict adherence to RAF practices. As a military force we probably had graduated to the ideal situation by broadening our concepts through association with the USAF yet retaining many valuable and traditional qualities of service life inherited from the RAF.

Certainly by the early 1970s our junior officers were a different style of fellow from my young days. Better-educated and -trained, of course, they were more self-assured and ready to accept responsibility. By that time, juniors were allowed, and even expected, to express their opinions, so different from my day when we had to toe the line, often not too sure where the line was. Generally speaking, our young officers were becoming more professionally prepared for their role, without relinquishing the more important characteristics expected of an officer — the potential for leadership, decision-making and good example. I think it mattered not that they did not own embossed visiting cards or hats, nor feel obligated to 'call' on the OC's wife. I hope that there will always be a place for common courtesy and good manners, in the Officers' Mess or anywhere else, although I regret to say that with the emergence of the feminist movement and the so-called equality of sexes, we seem to have left behind the old-fashioned etiquette of opening a door for a lady or offering up a seat in a tram. In acknowledging the changing attitudes within developing society, one has to balance any regrets for abandoned customs against the recognition of improved efficiency and effectiveness. At Edinburgh in the early 1970s I had great admiration for young men crewing the Orion on long missions, often under hazardous conditions, proving in international competitions that they were the tops in maritime surveillance. Yet some of those young officers could not be detailed to represent the RAAF at a formal civic function in Adelaide as they did not even own a suit, considering their designer jeans and zippered leather jacket to be the right attire for a young blade of that era! Some of my Anglophile seniors of the 1950s would have thrown up their hands in disgust!

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, changes in male fashion decreed the wearing of long hair. Young airmen favoured this trend as they felt discriminated by society for having to keep to the traditional military 'short back and sides' style. At some bases airmen owned wigs which they donned for dances or in public places to avoid being labelled as non-trendy. Except for cadets and apprentices, all new entrees to the RAAF passed through our Recruit Training Unit (RTU) at Edinburgh. As all males were required to have short hair in RTU, it was only sensible that airmen in Base Squadron and 11 Squadron should be seen to conform with the traditional image, allowed perhaps a little latitude towards increased thickness rather than length. I do not recall any serious confrontations with Edinburgh personnel over hair styles,

probably because the issue was dealt with in a mature fashion at all levels. In fact, when the Mirages arrived for the big air show, our Edinburgh airmen were quite scathing of the scruffy appearance of the fellows from Williamtown where longer hair was permitted.

One story from 1971 brought many a chuckle. Brian Eaton (BAE), our former OC from Malta days, was by then an Air Vice-Marshal and the Air Member for Personnel. During a review of a graduating parade of apprentices at Wagga, he stopped along the ranks for brief conversations with some of the graduates. In answer to BAE's question about how he found Air Force life, one young man expressed his dislike for the short hair cuts. When BAE asked him how long he would like to grow his hair, the answer was immediate — 'About as long as yours, sir'.

Gradually, and sometimes at short notice, I learned to cope with all sorts of administrative responsibilities, such as staff inspections from both Operational and Support Command, annual visits from both Air Officers Commanding, occasional disciplinary charges and courts martial, deaths and funerals, refuelling calls by VIPs and Federal Ministers, parades, equipment breakdowns, shortages of stores, and complaints from above and below. Always the ready hosts, Joyce and I greeted Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck on the tarmac one day as he passed through to the West. All this activity was good training in management. At the end of two years no posting arrived. Children were asking why we were not packing up and moving again. By the third year (1972) I had seen it all, was prepared for anything, programmed or unexpected, and handled it all with confidence, even another open day and air show for the public. We had the usual run of staff visits and inspections, and even conducted an Industrial Mobilisation Course on base. We also saw the introduction of the new blue/grey uniform which replaced the distinctive dark blue worn by the RAAF since 1921. I am not alone in regarding that change with regret. It was reasonable, perhaps, to alter the cut of the uniform to a belt-less jacket, but inexcusable that we were henceforth clad in the same colour cloth as railway porters and Commonwealth drivers, and therefore no longer distinguishable as members of the Royal Australian Air Force. For a few months I had a heap of trouble contending with an extended national fuel strike, at about the same time as we organised for 600 Edinburgh personnel to march through Adelaide on Anzac Day. Actually we had wanted to lead the march in 1971, our Jubilee year, but Anzac Day 1971 celebrations in Adelaide were completely washed out by flooding rain.

One of my perpetual headaches was dealing with the local Department of Works. By way of explanation, Edinburgh is in two sections. The airfield was built post-war to service the trials programs at Woomera. Quite separately is the domestic part of the base, actually a converted wartime cordite factory. Many of the brick factory buildings were altered to become offices, barracks blocks, classrooms, gymnasium, and other such facilities. Others such as the Officers' Mess were purpose-built by Department of Supply to meet RAF (not RAAF!) specifications during the 1950s and 1960s when Woomera trials were in full swing. In 1968 Edinburgh Field, part of the immense Weapons Research Establishment, was handed over to the Defence Department and renamed RAAF Base Edinburgh. Eventually to become the home of our maritime force, 92 Wing, we began initially with 11 Squadron flying the P3B Orion.

During my time there I tried with limited resources to change what was obviously a group of factory buildings into a functional RAAF base. As all work and

maintenance had to be done by Department of Works, we soon detected a deep-seated antagonism from the local Works people, almost as though the change in ownership of Edinburgh had grievously disrupted their long-standing association through WRE. Consequently my Barracks Officer (Rolf Hansen) and I seemed to be always at loggerheads with Works. Of course they had the final say about when or if they started a job we had requested. Within the limits of our budget we on base could handle small jobs, such as erecting street signs after I named all the roads and main streets. But anything larger, from a slab of concrete in front of a doorway to a new main entrance to the base, we waited impatiently until Works condescended to look at the request.

My first brush was with Matt Fitzgerald, curator of WRE (later a good friend through the Lions Club) when I directed the removal of the WRE sheep which had been grazing all over the airfield and domestic area since the 1950s. This allowed us to roll up the wire sheep fences spread across the airfield, thus affording free access for emergency vehicles, and to rid the area near the single men's quarters of the overpowering aura of sheep manure.

Later we had a confrontation with Works over the resurfacing of the runway. A specialist firm in Adelaide won the contract to lay 100 mm of hot asphalt on a runway 2500 metres long and 50 metres wide. I had good amicable dealings with the firm's foreman who was extremely co-operative, but had to stand up to Works. The local supervisor wanted to close down the base for three weeks to do the resurfacing but I had to ensure that the job was done in progressive stages which would always permit a take-off or landing by an Orion. 11 Squadron was on permanent one-hour standby to respond anywhere in or around Australia to a Search and Rescue alert.

The ultimate in absurdity was the painting of Building 391. Works annually inspected all buildings and listed those in need of painting or repair. Our Barracks Officer showed me a list which included Building 391, a disused ramshackle timber gate-house near the northern gate which we opened morning and evening to give access to those personnel living in married quarters in Elizabeth. We advised Works that 391 was a worthless wreck and that the cost of painting should be saved by deleting it from the list. However, Works were not about to be told by the RAAF which buildings they would paint and which they would not. As the costs came out of our Air Force maintenance budget I protested at the waste but got nowhere with officialdom.

Fortunately one weekend we had a severe storm which blew down trees and caused a lot of damage. On the Monday morning Building 391 was found to be flattened to a pile of splintered timber. I had much pleasure in informing Works that they could now delete 391 from their painting list. It occurred to me later that Works may have wondered if the Barracks Officer or I helped demolish Building 391 during the storm.

By August 1972 Ted Pickerd was gone, appointed Administrator of Norfolk Island at short notice. Again I took over as Officer Temporarily Commanding (and Senior RAAF Officer South Australia) until the end of the year when Sam Dallywater arrived as the new OC. The appointment again involved Joyce and me in more official functions such as the Opening of Parliament, attendance at Government House, and reviewing the graduates at the Police Academy. We also attended Air Training Corps celebrations and the country show at Renmark, and were guests of the Lord Mayor at John Martin's Christmas Pageant. During this period my posting arrived — back to

Canberra on the Directing Staff of the Staff College. Again no flying job, but at least we could return to our own house in Downer which had been leased for the three years. In that time I again had no flying, apart from a few passenger trips with 11 Squadron, once to Cocos Island and Singapore, and once to Auckland. A sympathetic instructor allowed me a few circuits in the Orion, but I was seriously out of flying currency by then.

Leading the farewell parade for OC Edinburgh Air Commodore Ted Pickerd on 19 August 1972.

While on an official call at Government House I noticed that the young English subaltern, the Governor's aide, wore the badge of the Cavalry unit which we once or twice visited in the Libyan desert during our 78 Wing days in Malta. During our conversation I mentioned my imminent posting back to Canberra. To our surprise, a week later Sir Mark and Lady Oliphant invited Joyce and me to lunch at Government House, an event which we thoroughly enjoyed with such charming hosts. Quite an honour for the former Sergeant and Mrs Jacobs to have climbed this far up the social ladder in 20 years!

On the domestic front we had quite an eventful three years. The house was really too small for such a large family, with four children at high school. The problem worsened during visits from Nana and my parents. By 1972 all seven children were in the education system. Jennifer won a scholarship to do an Arts degree at the University of Adelaide and become a teacher. Christopher and Susan attended Salisbury High. Lynne was fortunately in a special class at Salisbury Technical High. Debbie and Catherine were at Salisbury North Primary, and Allison had started at kindy. Imagine all those school lunches to cut, and the fetes, concerts and sports days to attend!

Governor of South Australia (Sir Mark Oliphant) signing our Visitor's Book at RAAF Edinburgh, 19 July 1972.

Gerry Gunton and I greeting the Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck when he passed through Edinburgh on 7 October 1972.

Probably no other family had to cope with so many disruptions to education. We found it an ongoing problem as we moved from State to State, trying to minimise the effect of the incompatible education systems. Some children had to repeat a year, some had to go back to primary instead of moving on to secondary school, others found that languages learned at one school were not taught at the next, and the Leaving/Matriculation system in South Australia was totally out of step with the Years 11 and 12 curriculum of NSW/ACT. Two of our children experienced significant setbacks, especially Debbie who was, unluckily, a victim of that ridiculous cuisinaire method of learning arithmetic. The fact that most of our children survived the many disruptions without too much ill effect I attribute to that extra worldly knowledge, self-confidence and mind-broadening which they developed through our extensive travel. My teacher father suggested that this ludicrous incompatibility between the States' education systems would never be remedied as long as each State continued to jealously defend its own program as the best. Another example of "States' rights" being an impediment to compromise and development of a standardised national curriculum! In like manner we cannot even standardise on traffic regulations!

The Jacobs Family in 1970.

Through those years we had the biggest range and collection of pets — dog, cat, finches and quail, fish, chickens, and lizards. Joyce brought home a couple of chickens from Adelaide. Named Fred and Barney, they became popular pets while still at the cute stage. However, when they grew into adult fowls they were past being treated as pets and turned into a pair of nuisances. One weekend I quietly executed them, told a lie or two about their fate, and had them in the oven a few days later.

Several of the junior members retained a suspicion that we ate Fred and Barney but apparently thought it wiser not to ask. Sam grew to be a huge animal, actually too strong for the children to restrain during 'walks' on a lead. Although our back garden was spacious he really needed wide open space to run free. Eventually he snapped at a tradesman who entered the yard after declaring that dogs did not worry him. This fellow threatened to sue, so again we had to send another dog off to the pound.

Although we lived in the extreme north of greater Adelaide at Salisbury, we got to know the city well, made plenty of excursions to beach, hills and the Barossa Valley, and even became accustomed to the wet, cold winters when the State is clad so colourfully in Salvation Jane and Soursobs, as well as the blistering dry summers when even immersion in the base swimming pool did little to cool us. We resumed our contacts with the Spilsburys and spent a few happy holidays with or near them at Victor Harbor. Adelaide must have exerted a special charm, as four of the children , now adults or parents, are today well-entrenched there. After Christopher progressed well in the Air Training Corps I had faint hopes that he might be interested in joining the RAAF but he decided that he would not find the 'discipline' very agreeable. His major event was emergency surgery to his thigh after a football accident. Joyce had to fly off to Queensland when Nana was rushed into hospital for surgery for cancer, and shortly after Joyce had a serious operation herself. I developed my usual springtime hayfever, but otherwise we survived South Australia fairly well. Our Rambler served us well for eight years but finally gave up in South Australia so we traded in for a Holden HQ Station Wagon. Even this would not have met our space needs had wearing of seat belts then been compulsory.

Holidaying at Victor Harbour, January 1972 with my six daughters – Jennifer, Lynne, Catherine, Susan, Allison and Debbie.

While living at Salisbury I was invited to join Lions International, a move which I have greatly appreciated for 26 years now. Being a Lion enabled me to find a place in the local community, to offer my services to the needy, and to find a break from the strictly military life. In the Lions Club I was just another Lion, doing my share of charitable works, and nobody even caring that I was a RAAF officer.

I look back on the three years at Edinburgh as a very satisfying posting. I learnt much about the non-flying side of the RAAF and found out what it meant to be a manager of resources. The main requirements were to be able to make responsible decisions and to relate to people in a way which earned their respect. How absurd that I felt so despondent about that posting three years earlier! While my children were occupied at school I was getting an education at Edinburgh.

By Christmas 1972 we were back in Canberra, experiencing the first shrinking of the family unit when Jennifer stayed in Adelaide to continue her University studies. Actually, Jennifer was not there alone for too long as early in 1973 Christopher decided that the Year 12 subjects in the ACT syllabus were too alien for him in his last year. We agreed to his returning to South Australia, boarding privately while he did his Matriculation at Salisbury High. I am sure that his absence from our family unit contributed to his unsuccessful final year.

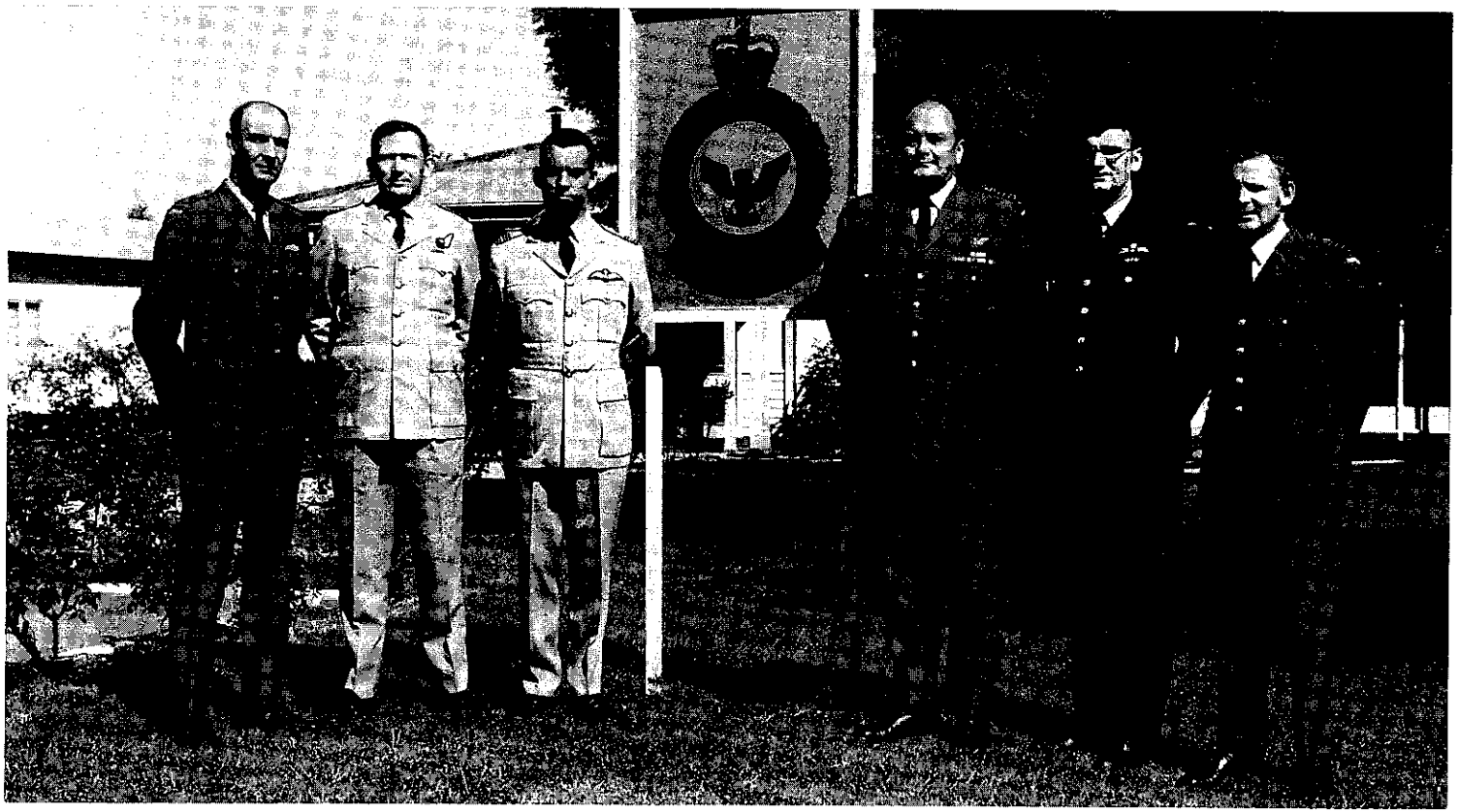
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Staff College — The Other Side of the Desk

Early in 1973 I was back at Fairbairn on the Directing Staff (DS) of RAAF Staff College. Each of the DS, supposedly an experienced staff officer, looked after a syndicate of five students of Squadron Leader rank. We were not teachers as such, but mentors to assist the students in improving their potential for staff appointments. Remembering my own treatment as a student six years earlier, I was determined to be a useful DS. My qualifications were probably as good as any. In fact I later found out that my staff work at Edinburgh was so well regarded at Headquarters Operational Command and at Department of Air that some of my reports and staff papers were kept on file to show junior officers how staff work should be correctly handled and presented.

The posting to Staff College lasted two years. Though certainly less of a strain being on the DS side of the desk, the job nevertheless demanded a lot of dedication, time and appreciation of the students' efforts. By that time we had approval to incorporate 'Management' as a new serial in the curriculum of studies. As well as including a certain amount of theory on the subject, we tried to bring the students close to real management, as practised by big business. Having been denied an overseas trip, thanks to Defence cuts in the budget, we devised a round-Australia tour by Hercules to get a first-hand appreciation of management problems. I organised this project, one that turned out to be very informative and enjoyable.

We visited the Zinc Corporation at Broken Hill and toured underground, then the Naval Communication Station at Exmouth, examined a 'bare base' at Learmonth, then flew on to look at all aspects of iron-ore mining at Mt Newman and the export facilities at Port Hedland. After checking on the hopes and failures of the Ord River Scheme in the Kimberleys, we went on to Darwin and made a day trip by Dakota out to Jabiru where uranium was to be mined. At Townsville we were shown copper refining, then came home via Amberley. In the following year the tour was similar but included nickel refining at Perth and the sugar industry at Mackay. At every stop the authorities seemed delighted to find the Air Force interested in their business and were eager to show us how well they operated. Of course many facets of manufacturing or primary industry had no similarity with running an Air Force, but aspects such as training schemes, overhaul of techniques and industrial relations all had some pertinence to our use of resources. Where appropriate, such as at Broken Hill, we also heard the views of Union representatives. I am sure that the students, and the staff, felt privileged that we had been allowed this exposure to details of Australian industry normally not available to the average citizen.



At RAAF Staff College in 1974 Arthur Pickering was Commandant, I was Assistant Commandant, and 'Blue' Darley (on right) the senior RAAF student. Also in the group are the students from New Zealand, England and Canada (RAAF Photo).

We still made the same trips away as on my Staff Course, to see for ourselves all elements of the RAAF, as well as acquainting with Army and Navy life. For example, at Jervis Bay we squeezed through the confines of a submarine and examined the missile launcher and other armament on a frigate, then the next month were sitting on a hillside watching how an Army platoon attacked an enemy defended position. At Canungra Jungle Training Centre some of the Army staff more or less suggested that Air Force chaps were too soft and pampered to withstand the tough Army fitness training. Inter-service relations remained a little strained after Vietnam where the Army roughed it in the jungle face to face with the enemy while the Air Force enjoyed comfortable beds each night at their air base. Just to prove a point, or maybe to uphold Air Force honour, two of our students volunteered to do the commando obstacle course, and I nobly (stupidly?) declared that I would join them to show that the DS were not geriatrics either. We dived into the muddy ditch, crawled through the slush, clambered over the walls, through the mud drains, up the assault ropes and leapt into the river — all in the allotted time! It was reassuring to get the 'Well done' from the Army supervisors who were genuinely surprised at our accomplishments, but for the next two days I tried very hard to conceal the fact that I could hardly move my shrieking muscles and joints. What was I trying to prove at age 45? Joyce told me that it served me right!

1974 was a repeat year — same syllabus, different students. However, I enjoyed the change of moving up to the position of Assistant Commandant. Our Commandant was Group Captain Arthur Pickering, a jovial and fatherly figure who always had my respect for his composure, impartiality and quiet professionalism. He made no bones about his view that he was the figurehead, the 'front man' to offer the greetings and to provide the hospitality to our many distinguished visitors and guest speakers, high ranking officers, public servants and politicians, from Canberra and overseas, even the Governor General. He therefore left the conduct of the course to me, a situation which was challenging but satisfying.

In my seventh year as a Wing Commander I felt a little anxious at my prospects, or lack of them. On seeking an interview with the Director General of Personnel (Air Commodore Fred Barnes) I became acquainted with comments made in my annual reports by my immediate superiors during preceding years, and concluded that my acknowledged efficiencies were offset by what might be labelled as personality clashes. Accepting that further promotion might be a long time off, I was astonished and delighted later that year to find my name on the Group Captain list, effective 12 December 1974. Shortly after came my appointment as Commandant of the Staff College in 1975, but that posting was cancelled after nine days. Somebody had influence with the postings people! Instead, John Gibbons got the Commandant job, and I was posted into his departmental desk as Director of the Project Coordination Office.

On the home front at Downer family life was fairly stable for those two years. Lynne spent some time at the Special School at Lyneham before being selected at age 15 for a position in the Public Service at the Government Printing Office in Kingston. We had only five children in the house as Jennifer and Christopher shared a flat in Adelaide. We made two car trips to Adelaide in 1974, one after Jennifer was injured in a car accident, and one to celebrate her 21st birthday. In Canberra the rest of the family endured the customary freezing winters, lasting from Anzac Day to Armistice Day, with its attendant doses of tonsilitis, flu, and other childhood illnesses. Joyce

went back to hospital for another major operation, and I started having to wear glasses for reading.

Never without pets, the children had to learn to endure the occasional tragedy. Debbie accidentally freed her budgie while cleaning its cage. Lynne carefully laid her goldfish on the table while she cleaned the fish bowl, then wondered why they all floated belly up when she returned them to the water. Catherine was disturbed during the night by peculiar sounds which turned out to be Sylvia producing her latest litter of kittens under the bed. Lynne had a white rabbit which apparently scratched its ear on a sharp object. Before we became aware of the injury the infected ear turned gangrenous and hard as a rock. I took the animal to the vet for disposal but he used the problem to demonstrate his surgical skill by removing the ear and neatly stitching up the scalp, then presenting me with an unwanted bill. The rabbit continued to live happily in our back yard. Visitors to the house would suddenly stop speaking in mid-sentence and then exclaim, 'You know, I'd swear that rabbit has only one ear!', hardly believing their eyes when shown the real thing. Early one winter morning I found the rabbit lying dead on the driveway. As it was never seen again, Lynne decided that it must have run away overnight. Actually it became good 'blood and bone' fertiliser under the lilac bush.

Having transferred to Canberra Valley Lions Club on return from South Australia, I was never short of Lions projects at weekends or Lions meetings to attend. One of our major projects occurred just after Christmas 1974 when we organised and conducted a massive appeal for relief funds to help the people in Darwin devastated by Cyclone Tracy. The response by the whole nation demonstrated the Australian generosity in time of disaster.

Jennifer and Christopher joined the rest of us in Canberra for Christmas that year. Jennifer had finished her Degree course and her Diploma of Education and had a part-time job. Christopher worked as a public servant while he studied for his Matriculation at night school. Joyce and I found it strange that the eldest two no longer lived in our household but we recognised that the children were all growing up and would eventually make their own futures. Susan finished school at Watson High that year, deciding that she wanted to become a nurse. As Lynne was by then in the Public Service, we were suddenly reduced to three at school for 1975, Debbie at Watson High, Catherine and Allison at Downer Primary. Although the burden of family and school commitments was starting to lighten, we still had no spare time or money for fancy holidays or luxuries. Perhaps that is why we were still a close-knit family, eking out our resources, sharing what we had, and never holding on to crazy expectations of affluence. If we envied other 'ordinary' families with only two or three children, such feelings were short-lived when we realised the joys of our own family cohesion and achievements.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A Directorship

By the time I arrived for duty at Russell Offices in January 1975, the restructuring of the Defence Department was well under way. Previously the three Armed Services were controlled by independent Departments, each with its own Minister. Now they were incorporated in a new Defence Department, headed by one departmental secretary, a military chief and one Minister. Department of Air (Depair) as I had known it in earlier postings, now became Department of Defence — Air Force Office (Defair).

Theoretically the three Services were on the rim of a three-spoked wheel with a co-ordinating body called Defence Central at the hub. In reality, the three Services formed the base of a three-sided pyramid, with Defence Central at the apex, holding superior authority. Central staffs contained some service officers, but mostly comprised senior public servants, many of whom transferred across from other government departments, remarkably ignorant of the operation of the services but regarding this unenlightenment as of no consequence.

I replaced John Gibbons who was Director of the Project Co-ordination Office, an element of Defair. This changed to Directorate of Project Co-ordination (DPC) and moved to Central to assist the newly-created post of Chief of Air Force Materiel (CAFM). Here we had the strange situation of an Air Vice-Marshal representing the equipment and aircraft needs of the RAAF, but organisationally and physically located in Defence Central. I do not know how it came about that DPC was moved into Central. It actually took about six months before we could determine what was our role in the link between Air Force Office and Central. Fortunately the first CAFM was Air Vice-Marshal John Cornish, one of the finest officers I have ever known. He was finding his way as well, trying to establish a Materiel Branch with no staff except a steno/secretary. I had Wing Commander Rex Ramsey and Squadron Leader Jim Redman on my team so, by default, I became a sort of staff officer to CAFM and we all worked together as a close group.

Materiel Branch in each Service theoretically had two divisions. One examined the needs and put forward detailed proposals for new equipment. If and when the Government agreed to a proposal, the second division was responsible for the contractual arrangements, purchase and manufacture of the equipment, up to the point of delivery to the service. In 1975 all the research, investigation, analysis and production of the initial paperwork had to be handled by staff officers in Defair, these people thus being responsible to their own Branch Head as well as to CAFM. A very unsatisfactory situation indeed, and one that pertained to the Chiefs of Materiel in Army and Navy as well! The average citizen could not possibly envisage the tortuous procedures involved. Proposals had to be developed in a particular format, subjected to the scrutiny and criticism of various committees, and were frequently dumped or deferred either through shortage of funds or through opposition from Defence Central.

For most of my three years as DPC I acted as assistant to John Cornish, helping him draft submissions to Central or reframing them after rejection by the all-powerful Assistant Secretaries who always knew better than we what the RAAF should have in the way of new equipment. I will never forget the day at Staff College when our guest speaker was a certain First Assistant Secretary from Defence Central who actually boasted to his audience that he saw his role as countering proposals put forward by the Service Offices. If he could be instrumental in deferring a submission for further examination or sending it back as improperly presented, he took the credit for saving the Government that amount of expenditure! In my daily dealings with civilians in Central, I found so irritating the opposition and contrariness exhibited by influential individuals who should have been helping us rather than hindering our bids for new equipment. It was a case of frustration upon frustration, yet John Cornish maintained his optimistic outlook and a cheerful disposition which made him an ideal champion for the RAAF cause. I enjoyed working for him.

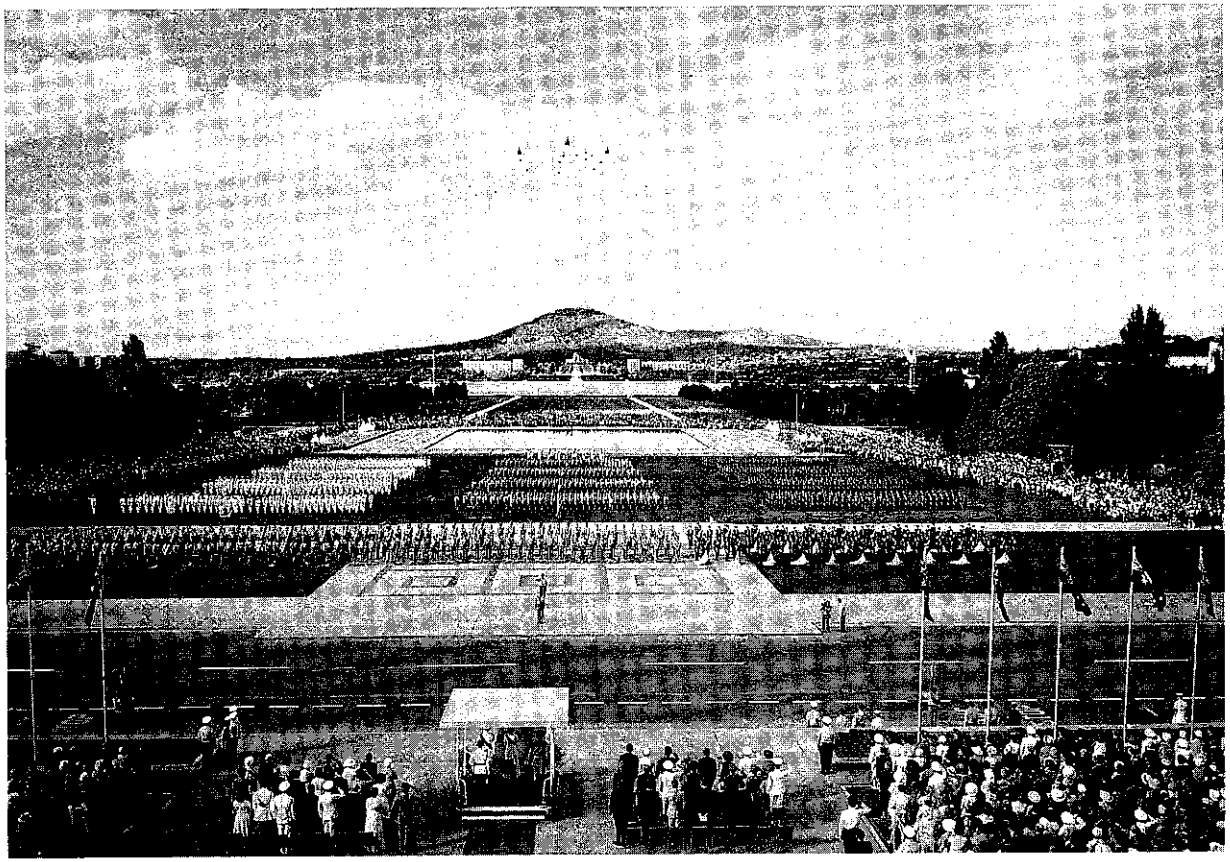
I imagined that, having reached Group Captain rank, I should have some standing in the organisation. However, tucked away in my office near CAFM in Defence Central, I was certain that others of the same rank must be deriving more satisfaction from their job. Trying to leave something useful behind, I rewrote the Air Force Manual which detailed all the steps to be endured by a new project — how to frame the original proposal, the method of getting its endorsement in Air Force Office, the procedures for refinement or revision, the steps involved in its progress (or lack of) through Defence committees, right to the point when it became a successful bid for funds in the Defence submission to Cabinet. This route could take five, six or seven years, by which time something better was probably being manufactured or on the drawing board!

At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, I should explain that the new equipment which the three services bid for generally fell into three categories. At the top of the expense list might be a new squadron of Hercules aircraft, or replacement submarines for the Navy, or perhaps battle tanks for the Army — all likely to cost the nation billions of dollars over the agreed years of payment. Next came less expensive proposals such as a specialist workshop for new radar equipment, or major refurbishment of a Naval store, or a new line of off-road trucks. Lowest on the list were relatively minor items such as a better type of flying helmet for pilots, a backpack radio for the infantryman, or a safety modification to Navy's helicopters. It always seemed so absurd to me the hours spent in the Defence committees haggling and nitpicking over items costing less than $100,000 whereas carte blanche approval would be given to major aircraft bids, even though everyone knew that the figure quoted would eventually bear little resemblance to the final cost by the time the goods were built and delivered years later. A simpler system would have been for Central to say, 'Here, Air Force Office, are ten million dollars for your minor equipment needs. Make up your own list, allot priorities, but don't expect more money'. Knowing many of the civilian staff personally, I regret to say that the pervading public service conviction was that uniformed people could not be trusted to make such decisions. I acknowledge that there was a place for people with commercial expertise in Central to negotiate terms of purchase with overseas vendors or to offset purchase price against local manufacture of items. However, after my close association with the system in those years 1975-1977, I have reason to be critical of the bureaucratic bottlenecks that were common in the equipment acquisition business.

Considering that this posting lasted most of three years, it may seem surprising that it occupies so short a space in the telling. Actually there were no high points. Life consisted of writing and rewriting submissions, quite a lot of committee discussion, and an occasional visit to a base. Having a minor role in developing and moving submissions through the system, I belonged to the Air Force Requirements Committee which found it an advantage to know at first-hand how desperately new equipment and facilities were needed out in the field. I always relished these trips to the bases as opportunities to re-acquaint myself with the real Air Force. In the job in Central we were even required to wear civilian suits instead of uniform! Although our work was tedious by nature and frustrating through opposition from public servants, I believe that my little Directorate played a worthwhile part in those early days of the Materiel Branch.

Just to emphasise the sameness of this posting — writing, committees, visits to bases -- the only notable event I have recorded in the three years which directly concerned the Air Force was the visit to Canberra in March 1977 by Her Majesty, then celebrating her Silver Jubilee. I had nothing at all to do with the huge military parade in front of Parliament House, or with the massive flypast of Air Force, Navy and Army aircraft that zoomed overhead, but, being a Group Captain, was allotted two tickets in the official grandstand for Joyce and me. My mind went back to a somewhat-similar event in Coronation year when I flew in the Queen's Review at RAF Odium. The huge parade on the lawns in front of Parliament House was a stirring and colourful spectacle. I am sure Her Majesty was impressed. She certainly would have been stirred during the Royal Salute and playing of 'God Save the Queen' when the perfectly executed formation, ranging from F-111s to helicopters, approached with a deafening roar over Mt Ainslie, along Anzac Avenue and over the top of the throng. What a memorable occasion! I cannot imagine anyone daring to mention, or even thinking about, the word 'Republic' at that time.

On the domestic front we were thankfully spared another move, allowing us to reside in peace at Downer for five years straight, a remarkable change from the norm. Those years were packed with significant family events which marked the transition of some of the children to adulthood. Jennifer's graduation from the University of Adelaide in 1975 after four years of study was not only a great achievement for her but a joyous occasion for her proud parents who marvelled at how quickly 22 years could pass. Christopher stayed in Adelaide doing a course in Surveying which he later changed to Town Planning. Susan began nursing at Woden Valley Hospital in 1975, living in the nurses' quarters and earning enough money to buy a small second-hand Datsun sedan. Some time during 1975 Barry Byrnes appeared on the scene as a suitor, their association culminating in the engagement of Susan and Barry in 1976. At their engagement party our house was packed with nurses and footballers, the latter being responsible for plying Debbie with orange juice spiked with vodka. About midnight Joyce realised that Debbie was 'out of this world' and led her off to bed with as little effort as towing a helium-filled balloon. Lynne became proficient at her job at the Printing Office and began buying her own possessions such as a radiogram. Her next move was to buy a cocker spaniel pup named Peppy, a good-looking dog but unpredictably cantankerous and snappy, possibly a consequence of in-breeding. For many Sunday mornings I had to take them to dog-obedience class which eventually both Peppy and Lynne failed. I do not believe that Peppy had any intention of being obedient, certainly not under Lynne's ineffectual discipline.



Her Majesty reviewing the Australian Defence Forces at Parliament House, Canberra on 8 March 1977.

At some point in 1976 Lynne thought that she would like to join the RAAF. We questioned whether she had the educational or intellectual qualifications for acceptance, even for clerical duties, but we encouraged her to try. When Lynne was summoned to the Recruiting Office in Sydney, Joyce thought it advisable to accompany her as she knew nothing of the big city life. Perhaps this was a wrong move as the recruiting interviewers may have wondered why Lynne needed to have her mother with her. Anyway, Lynne was not accepted and is still a public servant. Debbie was not studiously inclined, showing no aptitude to learning or passing tests in her early high school years, but ready to indulge in pranks and fun. Joyce eventually reached the limit of her patience and arranged for Debbie to take up a hairdresser apprenticeship in 1976. Catherine and Allison, then the only two left at school, continued at Downer Primary.

Joyce always maintained that ours should never be 'latchkey' children, arriving home from school to a house without a welcoming mother to greet them and to ask about the day's events. However, she used some initiative and found a part-time clerical job at the Australian National University, partly to bring in a little extra cash and partly to make a break from years of nothing but household chores. As she needed regular transport to go to work and occasionally to collect children, I left her to drive the Holden and found myself an old Morris Major which, despite its age and frequent repairs, proved adequate for my daily run from Downer to Russell Offices. What a pity that these days our vehicles are not as simple to repair and maintain! We also borrowed from the bank to put an additional room on the back of the house. Maybe we could have better used it in earlier years when all the family lived at home, but we still felt a need for recreational space for teenagers and their friends. In Adelaide Christopher developed a liking for motor bikes, working his way from a putt-putt Suzuki through increasingly powerful machines to a roaring Triumph (and later a Harley Davidson). At one stage he and four 'bikie' mates rode over from South Australia. Joyce fed the hungry mouths for a week and bedded them down in the new room which she turned into a makeshift dormitory. We found them a polite and grateful group of guests, but Joyce was wondering what impression the neighbours had of a team of black-clad 'bikies' revving their machines on our driveway.

We enjoyed two good holidays during that posting. One summer we rented a beach- front house not far from Batemans Bay. The Adelaide pair joined us and Susan even had leave from her nursing course. The next year (Christmas 1976) those of us who were not otherwise committed towed a small campervan north to Queensland, mainly to spend time with my parents who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in January 1977. Fortunately my sister and two brothers were there too, as we were not to know that it was my parents' last celebration.

In mid-1977 John Cornish suggested that I should have earned an Officer Commanding appointment for my next posting. I agreed with him, fully expecting that with my background I was a logical choice to return to East Sale as the OC. Imagine my astonishment when called for an interview with the Chief of Personnel (Ian Parker, once more!) to be asked if I would be prepared to go to Butterworth! I could not have been more surprised. The Air Force normally expects that an OC should fly at least one type of aircraft being used on his base. I had not flown since CFS days, 11 years earlier, and had never flown the Sabre or the Mirage. Furthermore, the OC post at Butterworth was for Air Commodore rank. Lastly, I knew many 'fighter jocks' who would kill for that particular job, and therefore could hardly

believe the privilege being offered. All pilots yearn some day to be OC of a base. Many would regard it as the icing on their career cake. However, to be given the job of OC on our only overseas base — well, that must be the candle on the icing, particularly for a Group Captain of only three years! Joyce and I discussed the prospects and decided that, despite the disadvantages of another awkward family disruption, it was too attractive an offer to decline.

Fortunately we were given months of warning of the next change. Susan and Barry hastily brought forward their wedding plans, our first wedding in the family being celebrated at St Christopher's Cathedral in Canberra on 2 July 1977. Susan, who had only just turned 20, assured us that nothing would interfere with her continuing and finishing her nursing course. Barry, at that time, had not long completed his apprenticeship as a builder. Our happy celebration that weekend produced a surprise when Jennifer announced that she and her swain Ernie would also marry before we left Australia. So, ten weeks after Wedding No. 1, we all trooped over to South Australia for Jennifer's marriage to Ernie at St Stephen's in Adelaide. Ernie was an architectural draftsman and Jennifer was then teaching at Urrbrae High School. 1977 was turning into a whirl!

In September I handed over my DPC duties to Jock Thompson and went to East Sale for a jet-refresher course. The Vampires had long gone, having being replaced with the Macchi. Despite my 11 years at the desk, I found I could handle the Macchi almost as well as the CFS instructors (much to their surprise), except during instrument flying when my responses were a bit rusty. That was followed by a week of specialist briefings at Defair which, at that time, relinquished direct control of Butterworth and passed it to Operational Command. Next I went to the Operational Conversion Unit at Williamtown for a Mirage conversion. This was not particularly successful, to say the least. I joined a group of about eight pilots who had previous experience on Mirages and needed this short course only as a refresher. I should have done a proper three months conversion, with complete and thorough explanation and demonstration of all systems. There was no time for this and in any case, I was not required to become a 'hotshot knucklehead'; an ability to fly the Mirage safely in reasonably good weather conditions was all that could be achieved in four weeks. I admit to feeling very uncomfortable about my cursory treatment as well as my mediocre flying performance during that detachment to 'Willy'.

Like so many pilots who are away from regular flying for years, I was out of touch with procedures and the monitoring of radio calls, took a long time to learn check-lists, and felt totally unfamiliar with this strange aircraft. I was like those senior officers who came through CFS for jet refreshers during my days as CFI. One day when I was strapping in to the rear seat of the Mirage trainer for an instrument flying sortie, still fumbling with harness and connections, the young staff instructor in front showed his impatience to be away by commencing the engine start drill. After several tries the engine failed to fire up. By then I had caught up with my pre-start checks and found the low-pressure fuel switch in the OFF position. Drastic repercussions followed as the error necessitated an expensive engine change. The Flight Lieutenant was duly admonished for neglecting to ensure that all checks were completed before starting. Nobody openly blamed me for the incident but I am sure that, out of my hearing, the instructor's comments about me were not very charitable.

My parents visited us during my break between the detachment to East Sale and the one to Williamtown. They were obviously delighted at our good fortune and

my promotion to Air Commodore, and were pleased to meet Ray Trebilco, the then OC of Butterworth, who came to us for lunch one day during a short visit to Canberra. Three weeks later, while I was at Williamtown, my Dad died quietly in his sleep in Toowoomba. I flew up for the funeral, the details being arranged by my brothers who were there on the spot.

Susan and Barry moved into our Downer house, agreeing to provide a home for hairdresser Debbie while we were overseas. It may not have been an ideal arrangement for them as newly-weds but was to their financial advantage. We sold the Holden and the Morris, the three-digit early-Canberra number plate on the Morris being worth more than the car. Peppy went to South Australia to live with Jennifer's in-laws who already owned two dogs. Catherine and Allison, being still at school, came with us to Butterworth, as well as Lynne whom we thought might feel our absence too much of an emotional strain. So off we flew by Qantas in December 1977 to something really different.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Butterworth — The Top Banana

An obvious start to this chapter is an explanation of how the RAAF happened to have fighter squadrons based in Malaysia.

The airfield at Butterworth belonged to the RAF before World War II. It is situated a few miles north of the town of Butterworth, on the west coast of Malaysia in Province Wellesley, immediately opposite the island of Penang. During the war it was occupied by the Japanese who built a second runway. The RAF returned post-war and used the airfield to engage the communist terrorists during the Malayan Emergency. During this period of jungle warfare the RAAF contributed a Lincoln bomber squadron and a Dakota transport squadron, both operating from Tengah in Singapore. Arising from a subsequent Commonwealth Security Agreement, forces from Britain, Australia and New Zealand were committed to the defence of the Malaysia/Singapore region until such time as these two nations, granted independence in 1957, built up their own defence capability.

Australia was allotted Butterworth for our RAAF contribution to the Commonwealth force. During 1956-57 No. 2 Airfield Construction Squadron rebuilt the base for jet operations, laying down a new long runway and hardstands, and building hangars, workshops, messes, and numerous stores. The RAF continued to provide most of the base services until the British withdrawal from the Middle East in 1971. In 1958 the base was ready for our No. 2 Squadron of Canberras to fly in to Butterworth, followed by two squadrons of Sabres. The Canberras eventually transferred to Vietnam in 1967 for operational duties then returned to Australia in 1971. In the late 1960s Mirages replaced the Sabres which were later given to the fledgling Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF).

When the British forces withdrew from Malaysia, that piece of Malaysian real estate called Butterworth airfield could not be handed over to Australia so it became known as Air Base Butterworth, clearly the property of the Malaysian Government. However, the RAAF continued to run the base and to provide all the support facilities, the cost of these services conveniently offset by the rental we would otherwise have paid for our occupancy. We therefore had the paradoxical situation where the RAAF operated on a Malaysian air base commanded by an RMAF Colonel, yet the senior officer was an RAAF Air Commodore commanding the RAAF element and providing all the base services except front gate security.

We were still there in 1978, ostensibly to provide air defence for the region. Considering that there was no identifiable threat to Malaysia at that time, I doubt if our government was the slightest bit apprehensive about our becoming involved in a shooting war. We could probably have returned home with surprising alacrity if Malaysia found itself on a warlike footing, such as a counter to internal racial strife,

which was not in Australia's political interests to support. We did, all the same, have a continuing and major role in the frequent air defence exercises with Malaysian and Singaporean forces. These were masterminded at Headquarters Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) which was conveniently situated in a remote corner of our base. The IADS commander was traditionally an Air Vice-Marshal of the RAAF, while his planning staff comprised specialist officers from the Air Forces of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. In our time there Jim Flemming was Commander IADS.

As well, the two Mirage squadrons provided continuation training for the young fighter pilots who arrived on posting from Williamtown. We had an additional commitment to maintain a detachment of six Mirages at Tengah for training with the Singapore Air Force. As for air defence in the theatre, I am sure that the local authorities knew we had no immediate capability of defending anyone as we had no munitions in store, other than a token supply at Butterworth. All the same, Butterworth was a darned good posting. There was hardly anyone in the RAAF who did not hope to get there on a posting, detachment or visit.

On our arrival in December 1977 our family's first unfavourable impression was the oppressive heat. We soon learned that in the tropics, and we were very close to the Equator, there were two seasons, one hot and wet, the other hot and wetter. In spite of fans and air conditioners we never became entirely accustomed to the humid conditions. Even after two years Joyce found writing a letter home a problem as her perspiration dripped off her arm on to the paper. For a few days we stayed in the E & O Hotel (residence of novelist Somerset Maughan) in Georgetown, capital city of Penang, while I took over the reins from Ray Trebilco, the tenth RAAF Air Commodore since 1958. When Ray and his wife returned to Australia we occupied the OC's two-storey house on base, inheriting a couple of mongrel dogs which Mrs Trebilco asked us to take. One was a vicious brute which she had saved from a nasty death by strangulation. It terrorised the neighbours and any passers-by, yet gratefully accepted us as its new owners. After several months of domestic stress caused by this animal we eventually had it taken away, but not before it had threatened the little boy next door, knocked several Malays off their bikes, frightened numerous visitors and came close to seizing the leg of a female police inspector who was making a social call on Joyce. The only advantage in keeping Sandy was that our house happened to be the only one in our patch not burgled. Even invited guests were hesitant about entering our house.

The OC's residence was the only two-storeyed building in the married quarter area. It was simple in design — kitchen, dining room and lounge downstairs, bedrooms above. Most of our waking hours we spent in the open-sided patio area which looked across the lawn through the security fence and over the strait to the mountain peaks on Penang Island. We did most of our informal entertaining there, surrounded by crotons, bougainvillea and palms, a delightful setting except when the heavens opened and the tropical deluge came down in buckets. Heavy rain or sudden storms became routine to us, even to the extent of a six-inch (150 mm) rainfall overnight, but it rarely bothered anybody as it ensured the permanent lush tropical growth, and even if we were caught in a downpour, such as on the golf course, it did not last long and we dried out very quickly in the heat. During our stay we improved the front garden and expanded our beautiful display of orchids in the shade-house out front.

Having been a short-term OC at Edinburgh, I felt reasonably familiar with the responsibilities and knew what type of control I preferred to exercise. The main difference from any OC job in Australia was keeping an amicable relationship with Colonel Fauzi, the real OC of the Base. Circumstances had changed significantly since 1958, mainly in the growth of Malaysian forces since independence. On Butterworth the RMAF had a squadron of F5E Freedom Fighters and a squadron of army-support Nuri helicopters. Only 40 miles away on the Thai border hid the remnants of the communist terrorists. As Malaysian forces were frequently engaged in bloody skirmishes with the rebels, Butterworth was normally the forward base for these operations. The ground-attack Tebuans from another Malaysian base used to make their offensive sorties from Butterworth, and often we would see the returning Nuris unloading wounded troops into waiting ambulances. We still trained their air-defence radar people but otherwise the RMAF — I can comment only on that element of it stationed at Butterworth — was a well-established efficient force.

By 1978 the RMAF logged more aircraft movements out of Butterworth than we did, and their personnel strength equalled ours — about 1,100. Consequently, the Malaysians developed a growing irritation that 'their base' was still being run by Australians. We still made the rules, set the standards and generally expected everyone to behave as if on an RAAF base in Australia. If I had been a Malaysian I would probably feel irked about the situation too. I sensed that they were secretly anxious for us to go home, although they did not have the resources or expertise to provide all the base services. Despite this unusual situation, Fauzi and I maintained a friendly association and always managed to resolve the ticklish matters which inevitably arose from time to time. The management of the Officers' Mess was a prime example of Australian custom often disregarding the sensitivities of the RMAF officers, or more particularly, those of the Islamic faith who did not drink alcohol and would not eat pig meat in any form. On the third night after our arrival, the Mess had a Christmas dinner dance, an occasion to farewell the Trebilcos and Bay Adams, the Commander of IADS. I was embarrassed when the stewards served a delicious Christmas meal of roast chicken, ham and vegetables to every diner, even to Colonel Fauzi and his wife sitting next to me. I would have expected that, after 20 years at Butterworth, we Australians should have shown more forethought and courtesy than to offend Malaysian nationals in that manner. Thenceforth I made a point of trying to minimise any 'ugly Australian' image by promoting correct behaviour from all our people.

My job as OC RAAF clearly fell into four categories.

First I needed to fly occasionally with each of the two Mirage squadrons, Nos. 3 and 75, to gain first-hand appreciation of how the squadrons operated. My deputy was a Group Captain Air Staff Officer who was responsible for overseeing the squadron training and exercises but I wanted personal association with the squadron commanders and all the pilots to know for myself how they were performing.

Second was the time-consuming job of keeping constant familiarisation with all units. Apart from the two Mirage squadrons, we had a Transport Flight with Dakotas and rescue Iroquois helicopters, an Aircraft Maintenance squadron, a large Base Squadron, and the biggest hospital in the RAAF. In my opinion an OC had no right to report on personnel unless he was acquainted with each job and knew how well each officer performed. In this regard I made it my business early in 1978 to visit every flight and section. Of course I could not remember every name, but at least I

knew where each person fitted in to the organisation, and I wanted everyone to know that I was not some mystery person sitting aloof in my Headquarters. As well as our 1,100 RAAF people we used over 1,000 locally employed civilians, some of whom had been loyal employees for 20 years or more. I was amazed after doing a tour of the base and meeting lots of these LECs when word filtered back to me that many of the Malaysians had never before shaken hands with an OC!

The third category was not easy to define — somewhat of a mayoral capacity perhaps. Including wives and children, we Australians comprised a group of about 3,200 foreigners in an Asian community. Only about 150 of them occupied single quarters on the base. As the rest were married we hired 900 houses as married quarters on the mainland or on the island of Penang. We even ran our own school on the island, staffed by 30 Australian teachers for 1,000 children up to age 15. Fortunately the Australians had been tolerated and even liked during the years we had lived in the Penang area. After all, we must have been one of the biggest 'industries', our people putting $22 million a year into the local economy through rents, foodstuffs, jobs, fuel, fares, vehicle purchase and recreation. Generally speaking, we had good rapport with the local community even when, at international level, a rift or disagreement occurred between our respective Governments.

Nevertheless, there were occasions when we had to defuse tension between Australians and Asians, often a reflection of the racist attitude of some of our people. I once had occasion to lecture our officers and SNCOs on the expected behaviour of Australians in a foreign country. We certainly had no cause to continue the old British colonial policy of treating the locals as inferiors just because we were 'white' and earned more money. Many Malaysians were better educated and better behaved than some of the RAAF fellows. Even some of our young caddies on the base golf course could speak three languages. When I mention 'behaviour' I am referring mainly to unruliness as a result of over-indulgence of alcohol, common enough and tolerated in Australia, but offensive to nationals in another country.

The fourth category was as senior Australian representative in the region. Actually, Jim Flemming was senior to me, but as Commander IADS he had nothing to do with the operation of the base, and worked and lived apart from us. The OC job brought Joyce and me into contact or association with many of the notables such as the Governor of Penang, the Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu, the Catholic Archbishop Fernandez, the Chief Justice, the Commissioner of Police, the Mayor of Butterworth town, and senior military chiefs. I also had periodic meetings with the Australian, British and New Zealand High Commissioners at Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, and with their military Attaches. My old friend Gerry Gunton, Australian Air Attache at Kuala Lumpur, often obtained convenient access to the Malaysian Ministry of Defence on our behalf. I also found another helpful and hospitable friend in the Singapore area — our Military Attache, Captain David Thomson (RAN).

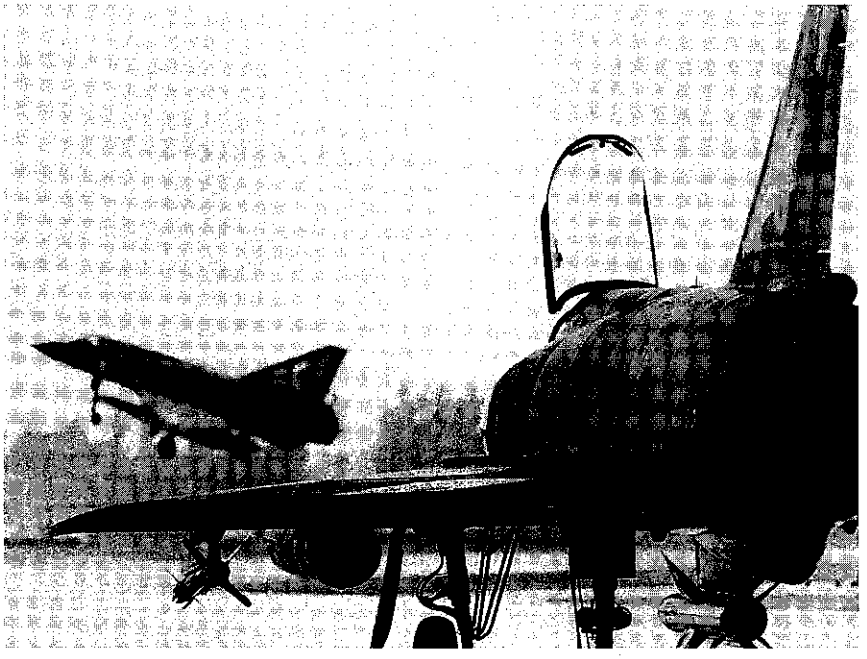
I could add a fifth category — host! Everybody and his staff wanted to visit Butterworth — Minister for Defence Jim Killen, the Deputy Secretary of Defence, our CAS Air Marshal Jim Rowland, AOC Operational Command Air Vice-Marshal Fred Robey and the following year Air Vice-Marshal Bay Adams, the Chief of the Defence Force Staff General Macdonald, the Chief of the General Staff, dozens of officers from Defair and HQ Operational Command, Uncle Tom Cobley and all! I am sure that most came for the shopping but they had to have the Guards of Honour, be extended the proper courtesies, and usually were dined at our big house — as our visitors' book

records. I know that in most cases there was a genuine reason for the visit but am not being cynical when recalling that the visit programs included adequate time for shopping in Penang. In those years the Malaysian ringgit (dollar) was worth 40 cents Australian. Items selling for ten dollars in Australia cost only ten ringgit in Penang, so the savings on electrical goods, clothing, jewellery and other touristy items were considerable. The advantage has since disappeared as the respective dollars are now almost at par. Incidentally, when Fred Barnes visited as Deputy Chief of the Air Staff in 1979 he said to me, 'You never guessed in 1974 that you would be here, did you?' He was referring to my private interview with him when, as Director General of Personnel, he told me that I had little prospect of promotion beyond Wing Commander.

After 11 years at the desk this posting permitted me to fly again, an exciting but somewhat daunting prospect for an out-of-touch 50-year-old! I had become master of my aircraft in my younger days but have to admit never feeling happy in the Mirage. The experienced fighter jocks raved over it but I found the systems so complex (only the French could design such a beast!) that I was always underconfident about dealing with an emergency. The inadequate 'conversion' at Williamtown contributed to this feeling of apprehension. There was nothing difficult or strange about flying the Mirage, which I acknowledge must have been one of the top fighter aircraft of the century. Although it was much heavier and more powerful than the T-38 which I flew in Oklahoma, the two performances were similar in many respects — engine in afterburner for take-off, a rapid climb rate, levelling at 30,000 feet in two minutes, supersonic performance, light on the controls and extremely manoeuvrable. The small wing area of the delta-shaped Mirage meant that we kept a very high speed even in the circuit. We buzzed on Initial at 400 knots, pulled tightly on to the Downwind leg for lowering of the undercarriage and pre-landing checks, then turned on to Base and Final legs at not less than 210 knots. After a touch down at close to 200 knots (equivalent to 370 kilometres per hour!) we would have burned out the brakes and shot off the far end of the runway, if not for the braking parachute which we deployed when the speed dropped to 160 knots. Allowing for these characteristics of a high-speed fighter with the Atar engine producing 13,000 pounds of thrust, the straight-forward handling in non-combat conditions was therefore only a few steps advanced from anything I had mastered in earlier years. In fact, when I flew with the squadrons on gunnery and bombing exercises at Song Song range my scores were as good as the average young fighter pilot's, mainly as I had taught the basic techniques of weapons delivery way back in my Vampire days. The only difference during firing of guns at a target on the beach or dive bombing a moored target in the sea with practice bombs was that I was flying at faster speeds in the Mirage.

My main problem was handling high-altitude intercepts, often at supersonic or near-supersonic speeds, at 40,000 feet or higher. The old Malta days were long gone when we were vectored towards the target by ground-based radar, then peered ahead looking for the 'bogeys', yelled 'Tally ho' and dived to attack. Ground-based radar still gave headings to steer to effect an intercept with the target aircraft, but the final attack profile was the responsibility of the Mirage pilot. The Cyrano radar in the needle nose of the Mirage was old-fashioned by the late 1970s, usually unable to detect a target aircraft beyond 12 to 15 miles. The pilot had to manipulate the radar control with his left hand, aiming to 'paint' the target as a clear blip on his small radar scope, and then fly a converging S-shaped path to bring him in behind the target. At

some point in this manoeuvre, the Sidewinder missile would lock-on to the target, ready to be fired by the pilot's trigger at the correct range. As the Mirage was an all-weather interceptor, the pilot was required to operate entirely in cloud or in darkness, engaging a target with his radar and flying into the correct position to release a missile, without even seeing the other aircraft. Unfortunately I had no previous experience of these techniques, no tuition in tactics and use of the radar, and only a cursory lesson or two in the weapons systems. Rarely could I manipulate the radar deftly enough to achieve a lock-on or fly the correct interception pattern to make an acceptable attack.



Mirages on a defence exercise at Butterworth, 1979.

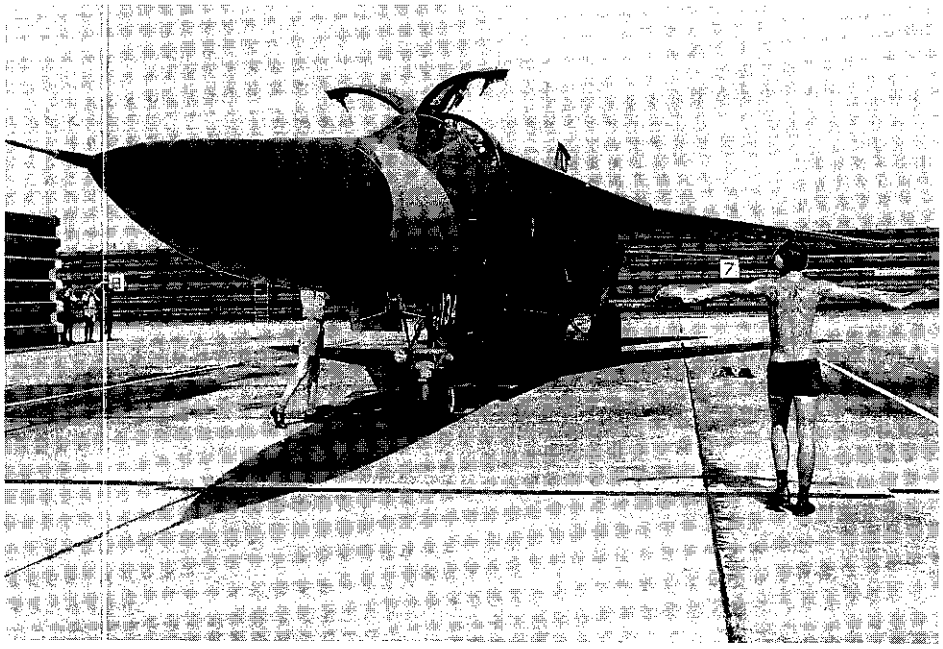
One day my Air Staff Officer, Bill Monaghan, and I were engaged in practice intercepts under the control of the RMAF air-defence radar station on our base. We were operating in dense cloud all the way up to 45,000 feet, not unusual conditions in the tropics. At one stage I was flying in afterburner at Mach 1 (speed of sound) in a turn, trying unsuccessfully with my left hand to direct my nose radar on to Bill's Mirage, aiming to put a blip on my scope which would show his relative position in heading and range. With all my attention concentrated on the radar and diverted from instrument flying, I suddenly realised that I was in a spiral dive in cloud at Mach 1.6 passing through 25,000 feet! Mentally cursing my ineptness, I hastily throttled back, extended the speed brakes, levelled the wings and pulled out of the dive somewhere around 20,000 feet, and this time using my instruments climbed hastily back to 40,000 feet, at the same time radioing some feeble excuse as to why the ground controllers had lost me off their radar screen.

After that I flew around more sedately. In air-defence exercises I volunteered to be the intruder or target aircraft, thus freeing younger squadron pilots to practise their roles as interceptors. My predecessor, Ray Trebilco, and my successor, Bernie

Reynolds, had both been CO of Operational Conversion Unit at Williamtown and were therefore highly experienced on the Mirage. It would have been fairly stupid of me to pretend that I was other than a novice on this type. I suspect that the flight-line crews in both squadrons expected me to do something silly to one of their charges but I managed never to break anything, even though I experienced a few systems failures in flight.

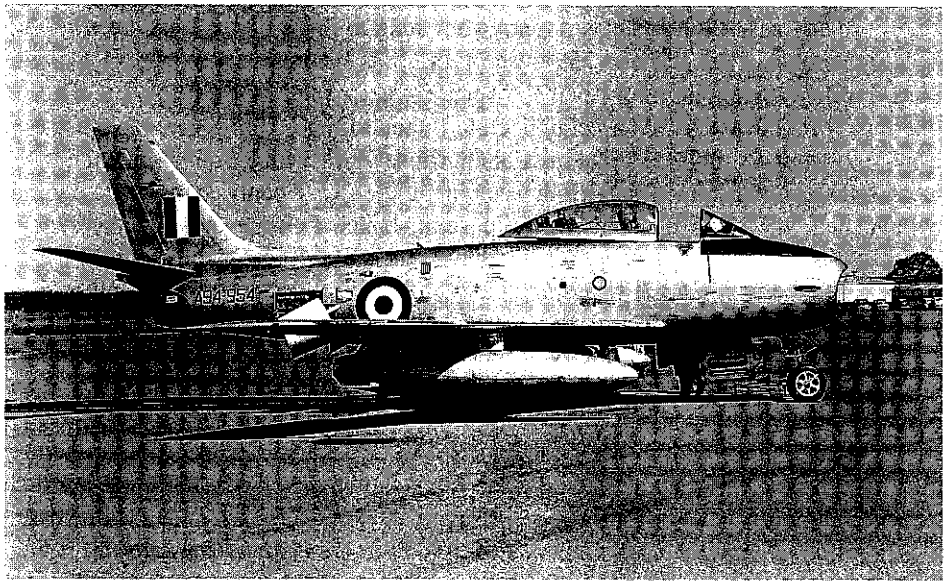
In any case I did not have to prove anything to those pilots. I had been flying in 3 Squadron in Canberra and 75 Squadron in Malta before many of our pilots were born. Furthermore, AOC Bay Adams, a veteran fighter pilot himself, told me that he did not expect me at age 50 to feel obliged to fly the Mirage. Things came to a head in May 1979 after a simulated strike mission on China Rock with 3 Squadron. On a low-level return flight from Tengah our section of four was bounced by a defending Mirage near the town of Ipoh. In the ensuing melee I had a system emergency, misread the symptoms, and frantically threw the aircraft back on the runway at Butterworth, believing that I was running out of fuel. That decided it! After my earlier years of competence, prudence and a good record, I was not about to become a statistic on the fatal-accident register. Back in Point Cook days a veteran instructor named Ted Whitehead used to tell us that 'there were old pilots and bold pilots but no old bold pilots!'

So I stopped flying the Mirage, except in the dual-seat version with another pilot, and learned a bit about handling the Iroquois helicopter. My log book is ruled off at 4,335 hours, not a bad effort considering that 96 per cent of it is hands-on flying or instructing. Some of my peers amassed 10,000 hours or more but only by flying Dakotas, Hercules, Orions, and other multi-crewed aircraft, where for hours of long flights they just watched the dials while the automatic pilot 'George' flew the aircraft.



An F-111 visiting Butterworth for a defence exercise, 1979.

Being the OC brought an occasional privilege or perk. When a section of F-111s visited Butterworth for a defence exercise I was offered a familiarisation flight. What a thrill! The fantastic bit was hurtling over the Malaysian jungle ranges at 500 knots in dense cloud, with hands off the controls, while the Terrain Following Radar maintained us at 200 feet above the ground.



Sabre A94-954

Members of the public attending air shows at RAAF bases since about 1980 would have been delighted by the flying demonstration by the Sabre. Around the 1967 period the RAAF introduced the Mirage to replace the Sabre, most of the latter being given to the fledgling Air Forces of Indonesia and Malaysia. When I arrived at Butterworth the RMAF had bought the F5 Freedom Fighter and the old Sabres languished out in the weather at the far end of the airfield. The CO of the RMAF squadron made a personal gift of the least-deteriorated Sabre to Wing Commander Mick Parer, CO of 75 Squadron. Mick had his new toy towed into his squadron hangar where his maintenance people worked on it for several months, gradually restoring it to flyable condition. Parts were 'cannibalised' from other derelict Sabres and I am sure we still kept available spares in the Stores Depots in Australia. I took an unobtrusive interest in the progress of the rebuild in the hangar, having a reasonable prediction of Mick's plans. Fortunately he did not ask me for authorisation to fly 'his' Sabre. One morning I heard it take off and left my office to watch Mick's short display overhead. On return he climbed out, grinning from ear to ear, obviously delighted at the chance of renewing his association with a fine aircraft, and no doubt recalling his earlier years as a member of the Sabre aerobatic team at Williamtown. With the co-operation of Operational Command we shipped the Sabre home to Australia inside a Hercules. It underwent a thorough overhaul by No. 2 Aircraft Depot at Richmond, and, as far as I know, is still featuring in air shows as A94-954.

No doubt the most interesting and memorable aspect of that tour was living in Asia, experiencing all around us the customs and lifestyles of the Orient. Though

partly segregated by living in a married quarter on the base (a situation which guaranteed our security), we enjoyed constant association with Malaysians at all levels of society. I am sure that all five of us benefited from the experience. Our cook and amah were Chinese, my driver Abdul (known as 'David') a Malay, and the stewards at our dinner parties Indian. The Mayor of Butterworth was a Malay (a Bumiputra — literally, 'son of the soil'), the Chief Minister a Chinese, and the surgeon who removed Joyce's tonsils in the Penang Clinic an Indian educated in Edinburgh. The most difficult problem in Malaysia must be trying to establish a national identity among a trio of ethnic groups whose differing strong religious beliefs and customs govern their distinctive daily lives. As the Malays predominate at all levels (Royalty, parliamentarians, public servants, and the general population), it seemed to me that the minority Chinese and Indian element could have contributed more to the national welfare and prosperity had they not been restricted in their career and management fields. Even in the RMAF we found that those of Chinese and Indian origin were not likely to be promoted past Major rank. Some years earlier, in the 1960s, Malaysia endured a horrifying episode of racial rioting and murder. The undercurrents of racial disharmony were still evident in our time, sufficient for we Australians to be prepared to safeguard our own people should the local population again become embroiled in a deadly fracas. Fortunately the mood in the Penang region seemed to centre more on profiting from tourism than on stirring up antagonism between ethnic groups. In fact, the pro-Australian sentiments in our region of Malaysia were typified by the official twinning of Butterworth town with Fremantle in Western Australia, this link enabling the happy exchange of a number of school students. Nevertheless, as a precaution we kept a company of Australian Army infantry resident on our Base for three-month intervals. The Army valued the opportunity for some tropical jungle training but we valued their presence as potential protection for our families who might otherwise have been innocently caught up in nasty racial violence, unlikely though it appeared at the time.

Joyce and the girls relaxing in our Butterworth house.

Mentioning 'profiting from tourism' reminds me that the local traders in Penang had three prices for their goods — one for their fellow Malaysians, one for we RAAF residents, and the highest one for the thousands of tourists who visited the region each year. Many of these tourists were Australians who, one might think, could have been mistaken for RAAF people. The traders were too astute to make this mistake! We at Butterworth wore tropical uniform of khaki shirt and shorts and long socks. After a short time in this rig the hairs on our kneecaps grew, identifying us as resident RAAF, whereas the tourist who had forsaken his regular long trousers for a pair of holiday shorts still showed hairless kneecaps!

We had official functions galore, either in our married quarter or in the Officers' Mess, mainly to welcome the flow of high-ranking or distinguished visitors. Entertaining in 'the big house' became a regular feature of our life but fortunately our cook Kim and amah Ah Chat, sometimes with support from other servants, were always able to serve delicious meals. On one occasion we had 32 guests for dinner, and 150 people called in on our Open House on Boxing Day 1978.

Travel to interesting and exotic places was relatively easy. Joyce and I travelled to Singapore on numerous occasions, usually in the Dakota of Transport Support Flight, and once in an Iroquois to Kuala Lumpur. Our small Support Unit at Tengah looked after the detachment of Mirages which trained with the Singapore Air Force on week days, alternating with the other Butterworth squadron each weekend. As this unit was responsible directly to our RAAF Headquarters, I tried to ensure that they felt part of the team by frequently calling in at Tengah, either by Dakota or by Mirage. Our three children enjoyed their frequent short holidays, once to Singapore where we visited Sentosa Island, the famous Singapore Zoo, Chinatown and Haw Par Villa (the Tiger Balm Gardens). We also had a week at the seaside resort of Pangkor Island off the Malaysian west coast, and did a few shopping trips by bus to Songkla and Hat Yai in Thailand, only a few hours' drive to the north. Joyce, Lynne and I took an enjoyable package tour by train to Bangkok and Pattaya in Thailand, and later in 1979 Joyce and the girls had a novel holiday at Phuket in Thailand while I was in Australia at a conference.

As OC RAAF Butterworth I was an honoured guest at a ceremony in the local Hindu Temple.

For Joyce and me, our highlight was our trip to Europe in July 1979. When I brought home in the mail an invitation from the General Dynamics aircraft company to visit their display at the Paris Air Show at Le Bourget, Joyce said, 'Good. When are we going?' After negotiating with a travel agent in Penang we booked on the French airline UTA to Paris, with an ongoing short flight to London. We planned a few days with old friends Alan and Barbara Marsh before setting off on a 12-day coach tour through some of the European countries. On the day we left Butterworth our plans looked like coming unstuck. At Singapore the French airline clerk told us that our flight had been cancelled, the consequence of grounding their DC10 airliners after a couple of fatal accidents. 'But do not worry, Mr Jacobs', he said, 'We have transferred you to another airline'. 'Which one?' I asked. 'Garuda', he replied, referring to Indonesia's international airline. 'And what type of aircraft will we be flying in?' I asked him. 'A DC10', was his answer. Anyway, Garuda's DC10 got us to Paris without anything falling off and before long the Marshes greeted us at Heathrow Terminal in London. A few days later our Insight coach tour took us over the Channel by hovercraft, then to stops for one or two nights at Amsterdam, Heidelberg, Innsbruck, Venice, Como, Luzern and Paris. There Joyce and I left the tour, spending two days at the Paris Air Show and another four savouring the sights and pleasures of Paris before flying back to Penang. It was really only a shopfront view of Europe but better than never seeing it at all. Although we had to agree with one of our fellow coach passengers that we all suffered from 'visual indigestion', our recollections of that trip are very important whenever we see TV footage of events such as flooding in Venice or riots in Paris, and we say to ourselves, 'We've been there so can visualise the situation'. What do we remember best? The charm of Amsterdam canals, the short cruise up the Rhine past crumbling castles, the millions of pigeons in St Mark's Square in Venice, the journey through the snow-covered Alps, the mediaeval bridges in Luzern, or the choir during Mass in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris?

The girls had an easy life at Butterworth. Catherine and Allison attended the RAAF School on the island, travelling each day by RAAF bus which was transported the four miles across the strait by the huge vehicular ferries plying non-stop between Butterworth town and Georgetown on the island. The girls had many Australian friends but rarely met any Asian children and found no occasion to learn any local language. Catherine shone at athletics at school and also excelled at basketball in one of the ladies' teams in our base competition.

Her recollections reflect childhood impressions of Air Force life which were probably not appreciated or comprehended by Joyce and me. 'Being an "air force brat" never figured highly in my conscience until we moved to Butterworth. Unlike my older brother and sisters, I had spent much of my life growing up in suburban Canberra, thanks to Dad's consecutive years at the Department; the only other place I remember was Adelaide for three years in the early seventies The few things which distinguished me from my "civvy" friends were seeing Dad go off to work each day in his shiny, neat RAAF uniform and cap, and our attendance at the occasional air show or staff Christmas party, and sometimes handing out the nibbles at dinner parties at home. I also have vivid memories of hanging around watching Mum and Dad get dressed up for formal evening functions, helping Mum choose her clothes and jewellery, and whistling at Dad when he appeared in his cropped white mess jacket, high-waisted blue trousers and cummerbund. It was standard RAAF formal wear, but he always looked so sharp in it. They made a handsome couple, and I always felt a

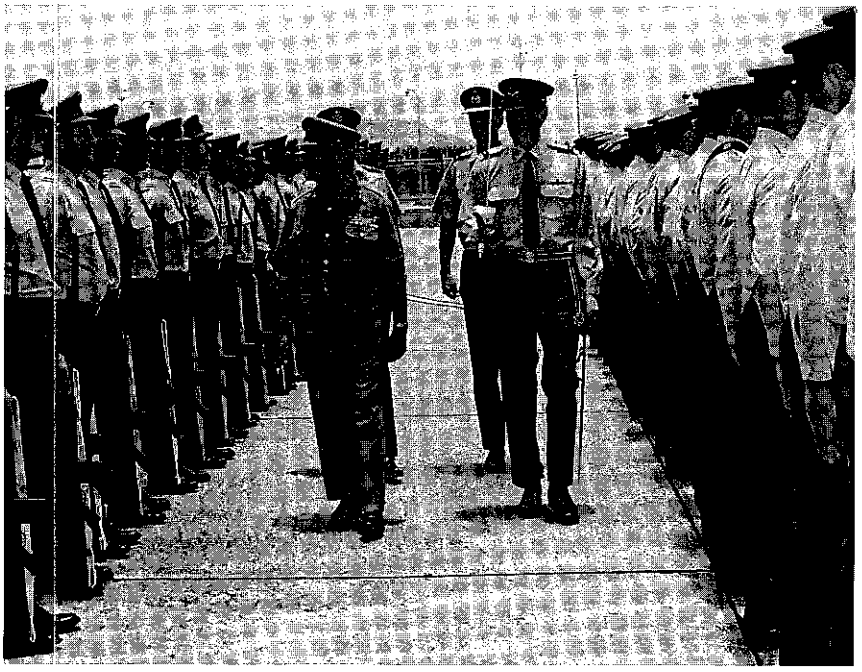
sense of excitement for them as they left for the evening, even though for them it was probably just another social duty to be endured as part of the job.

'Everything changed when we flew to Malaysia. Adapting to life in tropical Asia was a major cultural experience; adapting to life in a closed air force community, where your father's rank shapes your lifestyle, was a major cultural shock. In hindsight, my two years in Butterworth provided me with fantastic opportunities for sporting, academic and cultural enrichment, and I look back on that time as a wonderful period of my life. I was very proud of my father's achievements, but at the time I did not show it. I was an impressionable 13-year-old who placed too much importance on peer approval, and consequently found it difficult to carry the badge of "the OC's daughter". I had to cope with the strange situation of being pre-judged as "stuck-up" by the children of many airmen and lower-ranked officers, even before they met me. Fortunately I won them round once they got to know me and most became good friends. But I never really overcame the embarrassment of being reminded that Dad was "the top banana", and I would go to great lengths to avoid being seen in that context by my friends. For example, whenever we were driven in or out of the base in the LTD staff car, I would duck down, pretending to tie my shoelaces, in the hope that nobody walking by would see me. Whenever outside visitors or new arrivals inquired about what Dad did, I would say enigmatically, "Oh, he's in the air force". My egalitarian ideals are firmly rooted in my experiences of air force life in Malaysia. I know I was no different from the other kids, and I resented having to prove it, but prove it I did. As a result, I have never been intimidated by, or been judgmental of, people in high places, certainly not before I have met them! I don't know just how aware the RAAF parents were of the parallel hierarchy among their children. On the other hand, I was oblivious to the pressures on my parents who, while presumably gaining much satisfaction from such a marvellous career opportunity, must have wept in frustration at the constraints on their friendships and freedom imposed by the air force rank system.

'I think it is fair to say that being an air force brat in Malaysia helped me to mature faster than the average civilian teenager. I had much more contact with adults from all walks of life through sport, cultural and social functions, and that helped to develop my social skills on a more sophisticated level. I was exposed to the richness of Malaysia's cultural and racial diversity – although I probably did not appreciate it enough at the time. I learned a lot about the importance of maintaining good relations with others, and that has been a great advantage to me in my adult life. And I have, ever since, had a great soft spot for the Orient. To this day, I can't smell a frangipani, drink fresh lime juice or eat a rambutan without being transported back to my childhood days in Butterworth. Dad is right – it was an easy life for his girls!'

Lynne was long past school age but fortunately found a volunteer job as record custodian at our Base Radio Station which transmitted news programs and music specifically for the large Australian population. This radio service was a great boon to us since the local TV and radio stations broadcast mainly in Malaysian. All our equipment was old gear donated by the Australian Broadcasting Commission and each of our staff a volunteer. I seem to recall that our output power of half a kilowatt was just sufficient for the signal to reach our married personnel on the island.

Welcoming General Sir Arthur MacDonald (Chief of the Defence Force Staff) to Butterworth in 1979; and below inspecting a RAAF Guard of Honour.



Joyce was not entirely at ease being 'the OC's wife' with the attendant social and entertaining responsibilities of her position but she earned friendship and respect from Australians and Asians alike for her kindness and unpretentiousness. Despite the teeming traffic of cars and trucks, bikes and motor scooters, trishaws and pedestrians, she enjoyed driving over to Penang in our little red and black Ford Capri, and prowling around the curio shops looking at Asian wares. I had the Ford LTD staff car (sometimes driven by David on official occasions) but Joyce needed her own transport as soon as she felt confident in the bustling traffic. David took her in the Capri to the old tarmac area to practise using a manual gear change again, then she was off into the stream with all the crazy voluble tooting Malaysian drivers. She has a vivid memory of the day David lost her and the three girls in Georgetown.

'We arranged to meet him at a particular corner after lunch. Of course David went off to a Malay café for his lunch. We must have had a misunderstanding about the corner and were waiting at different locations. As time went by I realised that a mistake had been made so I left the girls at a restaurant used by Australians and went looking for David. As I moved up one side of Penang Road, David was coming down the other. I called out, "David" and he saw me as he yelled out "Mam" with such obvious relief. It was like a scene out of a play. He was in a panic as he said he could not face the OC if he went back without us. It all turned out well and I laugh now when I think about the concern at the time.'

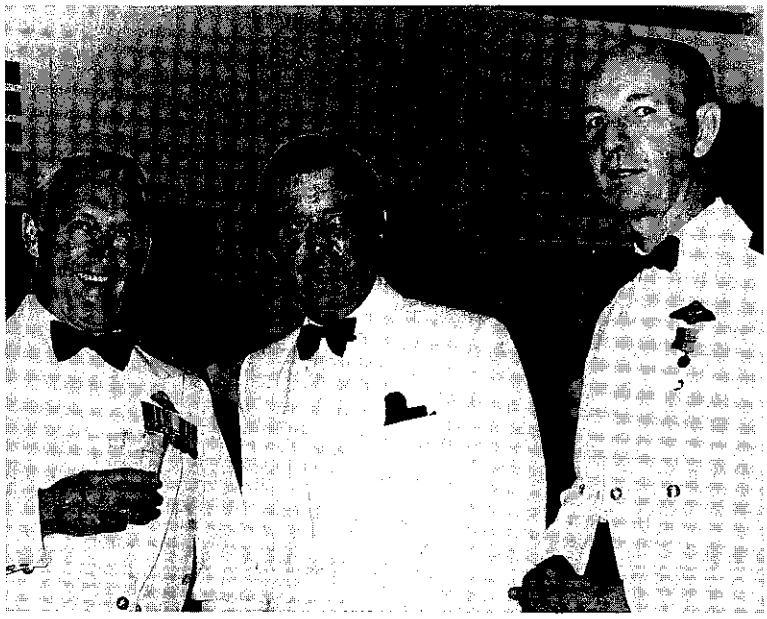
A farewell drink for departing Air Staff Officer Bill Monaghan with 75 Squadron at Butterworth. Pictured: Noel Furber, Dave Bowden (CO 75 Squadron), myself (OC), Joe Jopling (General Dynamics representative), Ken Tuckwell (incoming Air Staff Officer) and Bill Monaghan.

Thanks to David and to numerous Malaysian friends we obtained good exposure to the mixture of cultures around us. Joyce and I were honoured guests at a Tamil wedding, a Muslim wedding and a Sikh wedding, and were spellbound spectators at a Hindu ceremony where devotees walked across a bed of hot coals. We needed to take care at some of these ceremonies as the accompanying meal usually consisted of curried chicken or mutton — difficult enough to swallow but destructive to our digestive system! Joyce recalls that, by chance, we had greater exposure to Chinese culture than to the others. 'The RAAF rented a lot of married quarters in an estate close by, owned by the Teh family. The head of the household, Teh Chooi Nai, was a millionaire who originally supplied the quarried rock and building materials to the Airfield Construction Squadron back in 1956, and later built the adjoining housing estate. He continued to befriend the senior Australians and was always extremely hospitable despite his lack of good English. We got to know the family very well, being the frequent guests of Lily, his first wife (he had two wives and two families) and their eldest children John and Pixie who had been sent to UK for their education. John studied Engineering in Dublin and consequently spoke his English like an Irishman — so strange coming from a Chinese person. They were regular guests of ours, either at home or in the Mess for official functions such as Australia Day or Air Force Week celebrations. For Chinese New Year in February they used to invite us to their restaurant in the nearby town of Bukit Mertajam, but the girls could never get through all of the ten-course banquet which was the standard menu for the festive occasion.'

Joyce appreciated the relaxed living, but was never quite at ease in having servants to do her bidding as we had never been in such a domestic situation before. She found herself with a lot of time on her hands but fortunately made many friends among the Australian and Malaysian wives nearby. All the same, she regretted being so distant from our loved ones back home. We had visits from Debbie, Christopher, Susan and Barry, but there were no means of returning to Australia except in extreme emergency. Even then we had to obtain approval from Canberra just to use empty seats on the two Hercules supply flights per week from Richmond in NSW.I was one who made an emergency trip back to Australia in November 1978 after my Mother suffered a stroke in Brisbane. I made it back to her bedside in the Mater Hospital in time but she survived only nine more days in a coma. Her funeral was in Toowoomba where she and Dad lie together in the Garden of Remembrance. During the two years in Butterworth I was recalled four times for conferences chaired by the Chief of Air Staff or the Air Officer Commanding. Travel was no fun, sitting for two days each way in a Hercules between Butterworth and Richmond, just the conditions to induce piles.

Although the routine of flying and provision of support functions continued at Butterworth much as they would in Australia, many aspects of our lives had to be tailored to meet Asian customs. For example, our normal expectation of taking the Australian ten public holidays each year, such as Easter, Queen's Birthday, Labour Day, Anzac Day, had to be modified to accord with locally declared holidays. Being on a Malaysian base and employing more than 1,000 LECs, we had to observe public holidays on the Governor's Birthday, and on the numerous religious celebrations, such as Thaipusan and Deepavali for the Hindus, and Hari Raya at the end of Ramadan for the Muslims. Our fellows grumbled a bit at losing Good Friday, Easter Monday and Labour Day but they enjoyed as many public holidays in the year as they

would have back home. We retained Christmas Day and Anzac Day as not to be surrendered for any reason. In fact, for a predominantly non-Christian country, it was interesting to note how widely Christmas was celebrated as a festive occasion. In Base Squadron we had three or four Chaplains to attend to the spiritual needs of the Australians, plus a chapel on base and an Anglican church on the island. At our Sunday Mass in the base chapel the majority of the congregation were local people of obviously Indian or Chinese origin. I never knew a Malay to be converted to Christianity. After long discussions with David, I accept that the Islamic faith exerts a very strong hold.



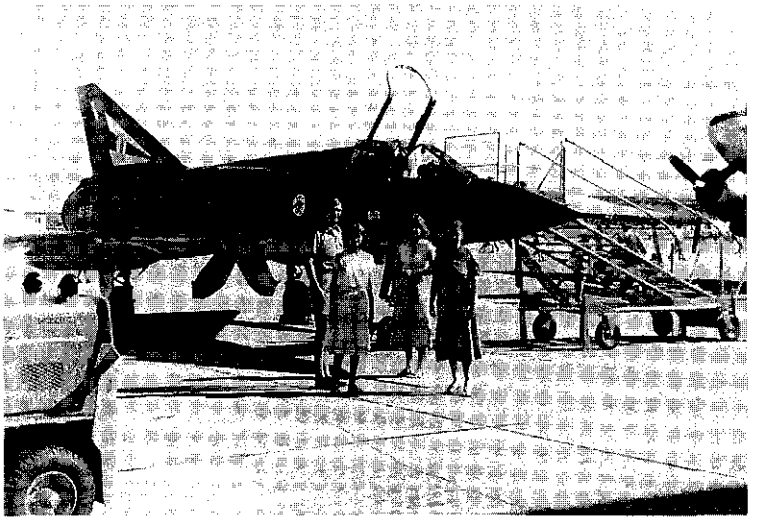
AVM Jim Flemming (Commander IADS) and Sir James Killen (Minister for Defence) with me in the Officers' Mess at Butterworth.

Although I felt honoured to hold the post of OC RAAF at Butterworth, one aspect of this posting was a bit unsettling. On other postings there were always people our own age or rank who were long-standing acquaintances or even good friends. At Butterworth I was 'top banana in the bunch', everybody called me 'Sir', and I had nobody on whom I was not making annual confidential reports. I had a happy working and social relationship with the unit commanders and senior officers, but found out that it is lonely at the top. My Headquarters staff were a great bunch of people. The Senior Administrative Officers were most efficient — Keith Manning and Ron Marschke, whom I knew on the Senior Officers Admin Course at Point Cook in 1961. My Air Staff officers were respected pilots I had known for many years — Bill Monaghan and Ken Tuckwell — both having considerable Mirage experience. I knew well enough from my Edinburgh years how to keep close contact with the CO of Base Squadron without interfering with his authority, although I had no cause for concern while 'Brick' Bradford and later 'Og' Worth held that chair. The RAAF Hospital had a huge job looking after the health of all the Australians, men and families. I am sure that for the many doctors, dentists, nurses and medics, this posting was particularly

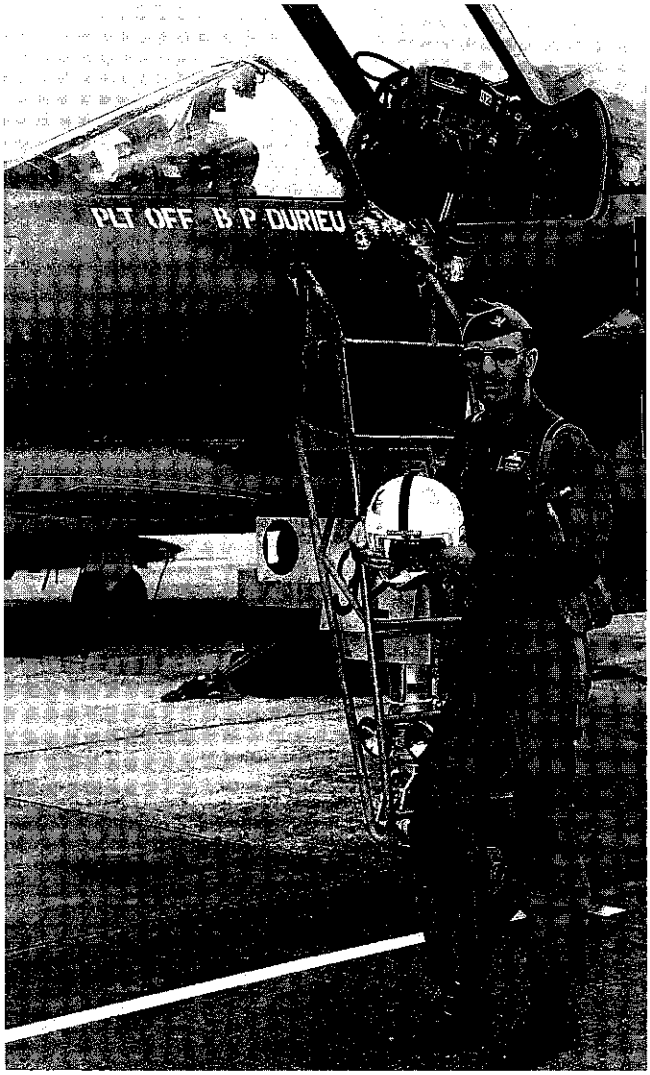
attractive because treatment of the family patients permitted wider scope for medical care than in a RAAF Hospital in Australia.

Our major perpetual problem was keeping sufficient Mirages serviceable for squadron training, Tengah detachments and exercises set by Commander IADS. The aircraft were old and suffering deterioration in the severe tropical environment. While some optimists back in Defair were writing proposals to upgrade the Mirage weapons systems, they were overlooking the geriatric problems such as leaking fuel bladders, worn hydraulics, malfunctioning pressure switches and cracks in the airframe. Our Maintenance Squadron under command of Colin Spitzkowski, and later 'Chummy' Wade, worked wonders in the servicing hangars and workshops, ensuring that the RAAF never missed its quota of sorties. How long we could have continued had we been required for a genuine air defence of the Malaysian theatre is another question! At least in those years our squadrons were fully manned with the approved number of pilots, although their individual monthly training was restricted to about 15 flying hours, all that our Air Force allocation of money would permit. I despair at the present situation where defence cut-backs have reduced our capability, through loss of funds and personnel, to a token force which has no sustainability beyond a few weeks of operation.

On reflection, Malta was a picnic, Canberras were a delight to fly, instructing was rewarding, the USAF exchange was a unique experience, but being OC RAAF Butterworth was definitely the icing on the cake. It could not last forever. In September 1979 a posting arrived — back to Defair to be Director General of Personnel Services. What a sombre prospect! So we packed up our light-weight clothing, our Asian artefacts, teak cabinets and rattan furniture, and made our farewells to Australian and Asian friends. One of my valued gifts is a presentation set of Penang pewter ware from the Chief Minister who expressed his appreciation of my commitment to good relations between our Australian force and the Malaysian community. On a hot and sticky morning I officially handed over the OC job to Bernie Reynolds on a base parade, and we returned home by RAAF Boeing 707 just before Christmas 1979, in time for the arrival of our first grandchild Megan, daughter of Susan and Barry.



Allison, Catherine and Lynne inspecting a Mirage with me at Butterworth, 1979.



Air Commodore Jacobs, a Mirage pilot at Butterworth in 1979.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Finale

The post of Director-General of Personnel Services (DGPS) in Personnel Branch of Department of Defence (Air Force Office) was far from being the most sought-after job in the RAAF. I was soon to find out why, shortly after taking over from Jeff Blackwell early in 1980. My office was on the third floor of Building E in Russell Offices, the same room occupied by DCAS back in 1962. There I sat at the desk used by Colin Hannah, while adjacent in my former office sat my secretary, Sandra. What a strange coincidence!

DGPS was responsible for all conditions of service except promotions and postings. Primary, of course, were Pay and Allowances. Other areas of responsibility included Uniforms, Ceremonial, Chaplaincy, Housing and Accommodation, Inter-Service Sport, the Canteen Service, Honours and Awards, Discipline, Holiday Hostels, and the Legal Service — this latter dealing with Air Force Law, offences and punishments, wills and legal representation. It was all very well being handed these responsibilities, but the catch was that I had no authority at all to introduce any improvement in service conditions.

The general public is probably unaware that the services have no money of their own. They have to bid each year for funds to cover everything — new equipment, pay, fuel , maintenance, travel, rentals, and everything else — then must trim their activities during the next twelve months to the limits of funds decreed by the Government through the Defence Vote. If a service finds a need during the year for additional expenditure, it has to make a convincing submission to Defence Central which holds the money bag. Rarely will the Government produce more money, unless for political advantage. Usually it has to be found within the Defence Vote, compelling the deferment of some other project or program considered to warrant a lower priority.

Within the first few weeks in my new post I found myself as the Air Force Office representative on a Defence Central committee which considered submissions from the Service Offices for improved pay and allowances. By sheer chance there was probably no Air Force member better qualified than I to have experienced the trials and stresses of frequent postings and the additional costs involved over and again in providing for family needs each time we moved. The service provided a travel allowance, a mileage allowance for driving the family car to a new posting, a settling-in allowance and so on, but these never covered all the expenses. The average service member was always out of pocket, having to meet outlays which are unknown to the citizen static in his steady job in the same town — travel expenses over and above the allowance, driver's licence and car registration in the new State, new school uniforms

and books, power and telephone hook-up fee, new curtains and drapes (the ones from the previous house never fitted!), plus the multitude of costs in trying to make the new home more livable and comfortable. Also, in the workplace, we had a uniform to maintain (only the initial issue is free) and people in specialist jobs such as kitchen staff, aircraft maintenance tradesmen, firemen and medical staffs, all had specialist clothing to keep in good order. I remember many instances when the standard-issue protective clothing was not adequately protective, such as the so-called wet-weather gear worn at East Sale in winter by the flight-line airmen who had to wear personal non-issue clothing underneath to keep from freezing. In regard to skill factor and productivity, each airman in the broad scale of musterings from highly technical electronic experts down to assistants in barracks or kitchens expected a wage which truly recognised his training, his rank, his value to the organisation, his constant availability for rostered duties, his unvolunteered drafting from his duties for a Guard of Honour or a funeral, and his vulnerability to unexpected posting and family upheaval. Without a Union to represent the Serviceman in the field, every person relied on 'those B's in Defair to get off their backsides and get us a better deal'. Well, I was 'the B in Defair' who tried my best to improve conditions of service, but I should have known from my years with John Cornish as Director of Project Co-ordination that it was likely to be a battle.

The committees were chaired by public servants of Assistant Secretary level and included Treasury officials. There was just no way that servicemen were going to win an improved allowance unless the Public Service already had it granted or under consideration for its own members. We would apply for a better mileage allowance, or an increase in the allowance which supposedly offset the costs of moving a family on posting, or an increased reimbursement of the costs of maintaining a uniform. If the Public Service, who generally did not encounter the problems of service life, did not have a similar allowance approved or under consideration, we had Buckley's chance of our recommendation proceeding to higher levels for approval.

Something good came out of this ridiculous confrontation. During my earlier postings in the department it was always obvious that the three services persisted with absurd rivalries, each one jealously trying to win some financial advantage over the others. I believe that this was mainly a hangover from wartime. I am not talking about inter-service rivalry on the football field on one hand, or, at the other end of the scale of importance, the dissatisfaction by the Army with the RAAF's employment of helicopters in Vietnam. I am referring to Force Management at Departmental level when, in order to seek an advantage in securing more of the scarce dollars in the Defence Vote, one service would decline to support another's submission or even attempt to dis-credit it. In my time as DPC I was heartened to see that our first Chief of Air Force Materiel, John Cornish, made brave moves to liaise with his counterparts in Navy and Army, aiming to develop a realistic understanding of each other's requirements for equipment. In my new job I found an urgent need for liaison and co-operation with my counterparts, Brigadier Lou Brumfield in Army Office, and Commodores 'Nobby' Clarke and, later, David Orr in Navy Office. Before a Committee meeting we would confer, share differing views and work up convincing arguments in support of our cases. In most instances a proposed increase in an allowance would benefit members of all three services. Even in specialised cases such as a submariner's diving allowance, we in Army and Air Force ensured that we fully

understood all the reasoning behind the Navy's submission so that we could defend and support it as well.

Generally this technique worked to our advantage. No longer did one service representative have to argue alone against the stone-walling opposition of the civilians. We gradually had a few wins on allowances. The most satisfying aspect of our new inter-service harmony was that we three Directors General and our staffs developed a relaxed working and social friendship. This certainly paid off when, in August 1980, Minister for Defence Jim Killen directed Justice Coldham to investigate the pay and allowances for servicemen. The study by the Judge and his associates lasted nearly 17 months. Eventually, late in 1981, the Government accepted the Coldham Report which found that the services, by nature of their employment conditions, the impositions on their freedom of choice, and the itinerant aspect of their lifestyle, were a distinctly separate element of society called the 'Profession of Arms'. We were awarded our own salary ranges and specialist allowances, and at last were disconnected from the Public Service. In my opinion, the distinction was long overdue. Compared with a public servant like my brother who spent his working life in one department, moving from one office to another, researching matters of trade agreements and pushing pieces of paper around in the hope of convincing his superiors and his Minister, any typical General Duties officer had wide experience as aircrew on different types, as an instructor, a staff officer, a unit commander, a college lecturer, an aide, an attache, a departmental director, a project manager, and anything else that he might be directed to do. Except when we were sitting in a Departmental desk job, our Air Force livelihoods bore little resemblance to those of public servants. Although I have heard criticism in later years that servicemen's conditions are still lagging against community values, that could reflect a deficiency in concept-management rather than a condemnation of the perception of a Profession of Arms. In any case, as a contributor and participant at that time, I consider that this was the greatest change for the better in all my RAAF career. All the input which the Coldham Committee needed was provided by my staff and similarly from Army and Navy, or was derived from personal visits to bases and ships organised by our staffs. It was one of the happiest examples of inter-service co-operation I have ever known, and I was delighted to have been a player in the game.

The inter-service goodwill established during that time enabled us to persuade the Army to admit RAAF personnel as members of the Army Health Benefits Society. The Army had this organisation in operation for many years, but we were in no position financially to set up from scratch a contributor health scheme solely for RAAF members and families. In leading the way by becoming the first RAAF member of the Army Health Benefits Society, I am gratified in knowing that hundreds have followed suit, to the extent that the RAAF is now represented on the Board of Management.

One special task which I initiated stemmed from my time in Butterworth. It always seemed absurd to me that we had transport aircraft, mainly Hercules and Boeing 707, flying from point to point with empty seats which would cost the Government nothing if filled by a serviceman passenger. In Butterworth, when a member needed to return to Australia in response to a bereavement or other family emergency, we had to contact Defair, provide all the details, and await approval for air passage from the Chief of Personnel. Although the approval usually arrived promptly, it applied only to emergency travel. I devised a plan to permit service members (Air

Force, Army or Navy) and their immediate families to use spare seating capacity on request. A clear priority would be given to those with compassionate grounds for travel, but thenceforth seats should be available to one and all. Furthermore, I proposed that the authority for travel should lie with the OC of the base where the application was made, the legitimacy of each application being readily confirmable at its source. It took many months before we won 'free travel' approval. Although I had plenty of verbal support, the proposal bogged down with Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Nev McNamara who was mindful of the episode some years earlier when certain politicians were disclosed as using the VIP squadron as free transport for their mates. Also CAS was concerned that he might be faced with a complaint from the airlines that we were depriving them of income. At last the objections were satisfied and with Ministerial approval we introduced the new travel scheme. It worked well in my time and I had great satisfaction in knowing how widely it was used and appreciated by the three services. Actually, most of the subsequent travel applications were for flights within Australia although my goal initially had been to ease restrictions on overseas trips. As far as I know, the system, perhaps modified, is still in existence.

When I was Director-General Personnel Services in 1980, Brigadier Lou Brumfield welcomed me as the first RAAF member of the Army Health Benefits Soceity (RAAF Photo).

My responsibilities included the production of an Honours and Awards list twice a year, for Australia Day and for the Queen's Birthday. Each Service Office had a quota of OBE, MBE, BEM, AFC, and, at the changeover from the Imperial system, the various grades of the Order of Australia. Recommendations from unit commanders ended up on my desk for vetting and selection. There were many dedicated people out in the field who deserved recognition of their outstanding performances but they came to notice only if their commanders felt inclined to

nominate them. Then of course we had to make comparative judgments based solely on the conviction of the recommendations. With the help of my stalwart deputy, Group Captain Peter Grigg [Director of Personnel Services (A)], I always produced a list for the approval of CAS, but I often wondered if the truly deserving names were on it. Back at Butterworth I was once phoned by the AOC Operational Command to tell me that not enough nominations for our quota of the Air Force Cross were forthcoming and that I should submit at least one from Butterworth. I was obliged to recommend one particular pilot who was later awarded his AFC, but I felt uncomfortable about the circumstances. In any case I am not particularly enamoured with the Honours system which awards race horse trainers and pop singers but allots quotas for the genuinely deserving.

Mentioning 'genuinely deserving' reminds me that I had a seat on a particular committee of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit Authority which met periodically under the chairmanship of a senior public servant to review the disability pensions of discharged or retired servicemen or women. There was probably no other adjudicating body which demanded so much diligent research and objective scrutiny of the many submissions we received, usually for an increased pension. In most cases the deteriorating health or increased degree of incapacity, always certified by approved medical officers, clearly justified a more generous allowance. On the other hand we had to deal with a few submissions from cranks who were out 'to screw the Government' for a few more dollars to compensate for what were undeniably the effects of advancing age.

For the first time in my Air Force life I had an insight into the promotion system which had been controlling my advancement for 30 years. I sat on the Promotion Board which sifted through the entire officer corps at each rank level, examining the annual Personal Reports, listing the candidates according to personal scores and value of supporting comments, and arriving at a promotion list for the coming year. I have great admiration for the Officer Evaluation Reporting System and for the dedication of the people in the Directorate of Personnel (Officers) who prepared and presented the material which we on the Board had to peruse. The Air Force philosophy is to promote, not on seniority, but on defined degrees of performance, attitude and perceived potential. The system even incorporated a weighting factor to restore credibility to a report from any superior officer with a reputation for being over-critical or for showing personal animosity. Having access to hundreds of reports and becoming acquainted with the idiosyncrasies of certain reporting officers, I was enlightened and encouraged by the fairness of our system, and had renewed faith that I had been dealt with fairly in my younger years.

When we returned from Malaysia we moved back into our Downer house, and Susan and Barry found a rented house in the suburb of Evatt. A year later they were able to put a deposit on a new house in Holt. Early in 1980 Lynne was accepted back into the Public Service, starting work as a clerk in the photocopying section of Russell Offices and later moving to the Defence Library in Campbell Offices. She felt the need, at age 21, to show some independence and found a small unit not far from us in Downer. As Debbie had transferred herself to Adelaide during our absence in Malaysia, we now had only Catherine and Allison at home — quite a dramatic shrinkage of dependent children! With time on her hands, Joyce ventured into the real-estate business for a few months, with some success, then found a very satisfying clerical job at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (which administered post-natal care) in

Canberra City. For transport she had a second-hand Toyota Corona, while I drove an elderly Holden Sunbird.

The RAAF owned a block of holiday units near the beach at Coffs Harbour, available to any serving member. As I had been responsible for appointing a new caretaker I took a week's leave to drive to Coffs Harbour to see the setup for myself and to gauge how the new man was performing. Our two girls preferred riding in the rear of the Corona so we set off for what should have been a simple drive to the north coast of NSW. First we ran into solid drenching rain as we passed through Sydney. By Toronto on Lake Macquarie we could go no further in the deluge at night, so resorted to the first available motel. Next day we headed north, only to be held up for hours by the flooded Macleay River at Kempsey. On finding a detour through the back blocks we dared to ford through a low-lying stretch of road, much to the horror of the girls in the back seat who were worried when water flowed in below the doors and floated their shoes off the floor. At last we made it to Coffs and enjoyed our holiday, but on return we had the long task of removing and drying out the car carpet which smelled of mud and farm produce. Fortunately the Corona chassis was well anti-rusted. I doubt whether the Sunbird would have shown such resistance. A month or so later I traded in the Sunbird for one of the new Commodores just on the market.

Actually our household took a sudden increase again in 1980. Despite the edict of 'No more dogs!' in 1968 and again in 1971, Joyce took Allison one Saturday to look at a puppy. I almost expected them to come home with a dog but they bought TWO, unable to decide which one they preferred. These pups were playful Dachshund brothers, one black, one tan, which the girls named Scotch and Soda. As the months passed we admitted that we could no longer stand the constant fighting over food and everything else the dogs played with, so thankfully we transferred Scotch to the care of Barry's parents, Ed and Nancy Byrnes, and we settled down to a much calmer household with only Soda to contend with, apart from Sylvia, the cat.

Thanks to some dedicated work and persistence by members of my DGPS staff, we had a few wins during those two years. In the clothing line we saw the introduction of the short 'battle dress' jacket and the blue pullover, as well as the airmen's rank slides on the epaulettes (replacing the unpopular chevrons sewn on the sleeve). I do not know the repercussions in recent years but at that time we considered it an achievement to gain approval for the establishment of the post of 'Senior Warrant Officer of the RAAF' as a representative of all SNCOs and airmen.

Perhaps the subject I was most deeply involved in during those two years was the quality of housing available to our married people. Since World War II we had got by with converted wartime huts, obsolete pre-fabs and sub-standard Housing Commission cottages. I was confronted by a 'that's good enough for them' attitude by the Works and Housing Section in Defence Central, so my housing specialist, Wing Commander Jim Moore, and I set out to hammer on the doors until we got some fair play. There were always psychologists and other experts ready with reasons why trained personnel chose to resign from the Forces or elected not to sign up for another stint. Few ever faced up to acknowledging the dissatisfaction which so many members, and their wives, felt with the miserable dwellings they were allocated.

In the 1980s it was inconceivable that we put a young family into a small uninsulated cottage which had no kitchen cupboards or built-in robes, no carport or garage, no hot water to the outside laundry, no hot water system inside — just an instant water heater. Many of the married quarters at Smithfield Plains in South

Australia could be so described. I recall one friend describing his house as a 'scale model'; the hall was so narrow that when he opened the front door to greet a visitor he had to step back into the bedroom doorway to let the visitor past. We maintained that any member of the Forces was entitled to the same quality of house as was available to a comparable civilian worker, for example, a simple Dixon or Jennings-type home. We were not asking for mansions, merely the features of a standard home of the times. I was disgusted at the opposition from the public servants from Defence and Treasury who sat on the housing committees. It was the same old story I had known for years — confronting civilians who seemed hell-bent on not spending money, by delaying consideration of proposals, deferring them for further examination, or rejecting them as 'inconsistent with current policy'. We certainly had some heated clashes in that particular committee as I objected to their regarding servicemen as of a lower caste. I was more outspoken than my Navy and Army colleagues, and probably earned a reputation for doggedness, even though I had personal knowledge of the housing situation on many bases and presented factual arguments. However, I was there to improve conditions of service, of which housing was of prime importance, and was not worried about my image in the eyes of senior public servants. Eventually, after my time, our efforts were rewarded. Married quarters of respectable quality were gradually provided on and off base. Of course, Treasury had the last word by imposing much higher rents, a higher percentage of pay than in my day when we lived in pre-fabs.

Many of my comments might suggest that I bore a widespread grudge against public servants. This is far from correct. On my staff of about 40, one-third were public servants, a cooperative bunch of hard-working people who were no less dedicated to the betterment of conditions than were our uniformed members. After Peter Grigg the next senior staff member was Mr Alvin Chapman, the Director of Personnel Services (B), who was responsible for the research and submissions on pay and allowances. He and his staff knew from interviews and visits to bases the financial problems of the men in the field posts, and they gave me outstanding support in my quest to improve allowances. The civilian element with whom I clashed, in both the DPC and DGPS postings, were the senior Defence Central staffs who seemed to regard themselves as obdurate authorities. Perhaps what riled me most was the arrogance and insensitivity, particularly from those who, in their career climb, had transferred from another government department, with no knowledge at all of the operation of an armed service or of the disrupted lifestyle experienced by service personnel.

Not all my frustrations could be blamed on public servants. I always felt that technical and aircraft aspects dominated the thinking of our hierarchy and that personnel aspects were not given deserved support or attention. Whenever problems arose within the force we just had to find the personnel or to increase the pressure on people to get the job done. In my opinion we should have been modifying our tasks to keep within the reasonable capacity of our work force. Our manpower ceiling was set by the Government, yet we were always being called on to undertake some new commitment. One day I felt totally 'browned off' with the head-in-the-sand attitude of our bosses. Chief of Air Staff Nev McNamara called a conference of all officers of Air rank, a brainstorming session to discuss the current worrying state of affairs. We were in general agreement that as a force we were at risk of becoming inefficient through our manpower resources being stretched so thinly. Inefficiencies and shortcuts led to

mistakes, and mistakes caused wastage, accidents, loss of life, and fading morale. When CAS asked for ideas for lifting ourselves out of the mire, all the Air Vice-Marshals looked at the fingernails in silence.

Finally I decided to speak up, suggesting that the Air Force was in many ways no different from a household trying to achieve goals but tied to a strict budget. Drastic but unpopular decisions might have to be made, such as buying a Holden instead of a BMW, cancelling the trip to Disneyland in favour of a holiday at Batemans Bay, or doing without the proposed swimming pool. I added that traditionally the RAAF had prided itself on owning a bit of everything — bombers, fighters, transport, helicopters, trainers — and operating them all with recognised efficiency. Under existing pressures on our resources we ought now to look at eliminating or modifying some of our roles so that we could continue to maintain our high standards within our budget limits.

Such a suggestion was absolute heresy and I copped an immediate blast from CAS who stated that he did not want defeatist comments such as that, and he promptly closed the meeting. Later he privately confessed to the Chief of Personnel, Kev Parker, that he should not have reacted so violently by jumping on me. However, I never received any apology. The ironic ending to this is that my recipe for survival was eventually followed when the RAAF closed down bases and stores, disbanded squadrons, and consolidated functions at various levels. So much for my brilliant career! Our helicopter force was transferred to the Army, an action vehemently opposed by some of our Air Force leaders who believed that the Army should march, the Navy should sail boats and the Air Force should do all the flying. I will not start arguing philosophies about roles and purposes, particularly over the helicopters and the role of air support to the Army. There has been enough bitterness and acrimony already, and I am sure that historians and defence analysts will continue to argue over the wisdom or otherwise of many decisions that come out of the Defence Department from time to time. Modern forces are no longer static in purpose or function. Changes are inevitable, and we must accept that 'we cannot win them all'. In any case, while refraining from criticism of Army's venture into aviation, I cannot accept that the amputation of the helicopter force was so disabling that it crippled the RAAF's professionalism. In the United States the Navy flies the maritime patrol element with the Orions, and the Army owns its own helicopters for battlefield support, without diminishing the efficiency of the Air Force.

Anyway, decision time arrived in mid-1981 when I weighed up a number of factors. No longer was I getting satisfaction as an Air Force officer. I felt that my usefulness to the service had peaked, although if higher authority had given me some credit for my efforts and dedication, I might have persisted a little longer. The strain was showing as I was on medication for hypertension. Having organised the funerals of two Air Commodore colleagues (Ken Janson died in his sleep, John Pulston-Jones lingered for months with cancer), I had no wish to be the next statistic, receiving full military honours at a funeral service at Duntroon Chapel. Further promotion was unlikely as by the end of 1982 I would be almost 55, the compulsory retiring age for Air Commodores. Having to travel to Queensland early in 1981 to re-settle Nana, Joyce was anxious about her Mother's welfare. We took mid-year leave to Queensland in 1981, and happened to find a house we liked in Scarborough and suitable schools for Catherine and Allison, so I made the decision to take early

retirement in December that year and move to the Redcliffe Peninsula. Lynne by then occupied her own unit in Campbell and wished to stay at her job in Canberra.

On 8 December 1981, with far less fanfare than when I joined, I quietly separated from the RAAF, after 31 years and three months.

At this point of my story one might expect a summary. Sufficient to say that I had a career which would be the envy of many people on this earth. I came in to the RAAF to learn to fly, hoping to become a Sergeant Pilot. How could I have foreseen back in 1951 that I would retire as the senior General Duties Air Commodore in the RAAF? In 1951 I did not even know what an Air Commodore was!

Would I suggest that my story is typical of the life of most RAAF pilots in my time? Probably not! In some respects that might be so but considering all that occurred over the 31-year period, I believe that I had a more interesting and memorable life than most. Certainly most pilots could expect the usual variety and frequency of postings, many of them to desk jobs if they served long enough. Of our 6 Course starters in 1950 only two of us, Ken Janson and I, stayed on to promotion beyond Wing Commander. In my career I was very lucky to be involved in flying at interesting times — our early days of operating jet aircraft at high altitude, the evolvement of long-distance travel by Canberra aircraft, the introduction of student training in jets, and the experience of supersonic instruction with the USAF in Oklahoma. In the light of modern aircraft developments such as computerisation, precision guided weapons, in-flight refuelling and satellite navigation, our operations in the 1950s and 1960s might seem primitive. Yet we flew the latest aircraft available and recognised that we had advanced a long way beyond the Wright Brothers and strides ahead of World War II aviation. Everything is relative. Thanks largely to my instructor/testing role while on the staff of CFS, I managed to fly (and land) almost every type in the RAAF. Apart from the specialised aircraft of 34 (VIP) Squadron, the only types in which I did not get into the cockpit to try my hand were the Neptune, Sabre, Caribou and Chinook.

For a serving officer of 30 years I probably am not typical. Many of my colleagues spent time in operational squadrons in Malaysia, Korea and Vietnam whereas I have not one combat or campaign medal to wear. To use a well-worn USAF comment — 'That's the way the cookie crumbles'. Old diggers at the RSL look at me as a curiosity — 30 years of service and no medals or awards to show for it! Certainly I was promoted way beyond my expectation, but promotions are not rewards. They have to be earned through dedication and application, and are not necessarily a consequence of combat experience. If you are perceived as having a talent and devotion to the job, the Air Force will use you as long as you are available, even if your only reward is satisfaction for a job well done.

On the other hand I had three exciting and interest-packed overseas postings with my family, as well as command of two operational bases. The desk jobs were not my choice but somebody had to do them, and I believe that I performed as well as any other. Although I no doubt ruffled a few feathers along the way with my bluntness, and probably made as many mistakes as any, I know I left some good impressions and was noted for efficiency, having often received commendatory statements from people who worked with me in various postings.

We made lots of friends, not the ones you see every day, but people we were glad to greet again when we met on subsequent postings. Air Force folk were dedicated, ready to respond whatever the call, excelled at teamwork, and were proud

to be in the service. There were always avenues available to those who wanted to advance, and everyone counted on fair and honest treatment by his superiors. There cannot be many civilian careers which offer the thrills, education, travel, responsibility, achievements, and pride of belonging, which flow from being a pilot in the RAAF. Yes, I would do it again! But next time, I hope I would be paid a salary commensurate with similar employment in civilian industry, and not have to spend a lifetime of financial struggle!

The major aspect of our lives which identifies us as non-typical was our large family size. People often ask us in amazement, 'How did you possibly manage?' Sometimes we wonder! Without doubt, the raising of seven children while complying with 'the exigencies of the Service' was a constant test of our organisation and resources. Joyce and I never regarded these difficulties as an unfair challenge. We chose to have the children so we were responsible for their welfare and we never sought any special consideration. As the eldest and the one with the strongest recollections, Jennifer sums up the nomadic life endured (or enjoyed) by our children.

'I feel privileged to have been an "Air Force brat" and I am sure that the experiences this sort of life provided me have been instrumental in forming my character. Always being "the new kid at school" taught me to overcome my natural shyness, adapt quickly to new environments and become the sort of person who makes friends easily. I learned that it was up to me to make things work by getting involved and making a contribution because if I stood back and waited for it to happen, I would be left behind. I believe I have had a good all-round education and have benefited from a wide variety of experiences and different locations, and that I had a chance to try lots of different things, even if I never stayed long enough to get really good at any of them. I had friends all over the place and even though it got harder to leave them behind as I grew older, I learned that true friends are not parted by distance. Many of my experiences have been unique. It is hard to explain to "outsiders" that certain special atmosphere of an Air Force base or what it means to have been part of that particular sort of Air Force culture. It makes me feel special and interesting to have this family background.

'I was always proud to say my Dad was in the Air Force and happy to boast about his fine job and his prowess as a pilot, although I must admit to often being unaware of exactly what it was he did! I was also proud of the fact that my Mum seemed to take it in her stride when required to make frequent moves with lots of children and never once do I remember her complaining about it! She always seemed to be totally supportive of my Dad and very involved in all the duties required of an Air Force wife. My family was a close-knit unit and I always felt safe and secure, despite being always on the move to a new place. I loved being part of a big family, and my brother and sisters are the best gifts my parents could ever have given me. It's always been fun to tell people about them and how we were all born in different places. As a child I was quite oblivious to the fact that this itinerant lifestyle must have been very difficult for my Mother and it is only as an adult that I have appreciated the sacrifices she made for all of us. Significantly, my Dad's income must have been sufficient to support all of us, meaning that my Mum was always there for us when we came home from school or that she did tuckshop duty and other important school events. This is something that stands out in my childhood memories.

'On the down-side, I have to say that life on the move left me with a vague and jumbled memory of parts of my childhood. My long-term memory is not good to this

day. I think that those people who grew up in the same town, in the one house, attending the one school with the same set of friends have a much more concrete basis for building durable memories. I never attended the same school for more than two consecutive years and thus it was difficult to maintain any sort of consistency — of friends or place or knowledge. Perhaps it explains why I have chosen to live in the same city now for 25 years. Another significant aspect of Air Force life, as far as my family is concerned, is that we gradually became separated and spread across the country. As each child was born in a different place, so too were they were deposited along the way as time passed. Consequently I missed out knowing my youngest two sisters during their childhood years, and my parents have never lived in the same city as me since I left home. But then, that means that they are all the more precious, because when we do see each other it is a very special time and I never take them for granted as I might if we lived next door.'

In 1951 Joyce and I married 'for better or for worse', never envisaging that the 'betters' would include the opportunity for widespread travel, the privilege of seven years living in foreign countries, and the joys of raising a large family, all successful in their own fields. Married to school teacher Rodney, Jennifer is also a teacher and school counsellor, with three children. Christopher qualified as a Town Planner but now flies with a Commercial Licence. Though Susan and Barry are raising three children, she obtained a degree in Applied Science and is a specialist community nurse. Lynne is a public servant in the Defence Department. Debbie is a hairdresser with two sons. Catherine and husband John have one child and both work in London as a TV news producer and radio news editor respectively. Allison and husband Stephen own a fitness centre and have three children.

If we had foreseen the 'worses', how otherwise would we have directed our lives? When we reflect on the frequent moves (26 different changes of address), the long distances we travelled and not by choice, the ordeals with babies and bottles, the problems of settling into new localities and schools, the perpetual drain on finances for new curtains, new uniforms and new books, the upheaval of parting from friends, the lack of funds for those little extra comforts, usually living from pay to pay, plus the demands on my time by Air Force duties at the expense of family togetherness, then we are astounded that we managed to cope with all the predicaments and to survive the pressures.

Yet we did survive it all, the flying dramas, the trials of travel, the household stresses, and we look back in wonderment at the things we saw and did, thanking the Lord for caring for us all during those years we were 'Up and Away'.

Index

S

T

U

W

Y

From a multitude of wartime stories and exploits, the image of a RAAF pilot emerges as a flamboyant adventurer sporting a bristling moustache, a silk scarf knotted casually at his throat and a map tucked carelessly into his flying boot.

If this portrayal were the slightest bit representative of wartime aircrew, the image changed significantly in post-war years when the RAAF gradually re-established as a peacetime force, equipping with jet aircraft, training for possible involvement in the Cold War, and developing a sense of professionalism within its ranks.

This story tells of the experiences of a pilot who joined the RAAF in 1950 to learn to fly on Tiger Moths, retiring 31 years later as an Air Commodore. Like most aircrew making a career in the Australian Defence Forces, he experienced a frequency and variety of postings to numerous squadrons, as well as the obligatory administrative and staff appointments expected of senior ranks.

In these memoirs John Jacobs tells of his adventures and thrilling episodes flying in jet aircraft, his experiences living in three foreign countries for seven years, and his occasionally frustrating 'desk jobs'. As well as being a career officer involved in all facets of a peacetime Air Force, he was also the bread-winner and father of a large family, all of whom were subjected to frequent postings and domestic upheavals which fortunately provided a broader education to offset the stresses of packing up and moving away.

For a reader ignorant of the lifestyle of servicemen in the Armed Forces, this is a surprising revelation of the sort of exciting and challenging career open to RAAF aircrew in the few decades immediately post-war.

John Jacobs joined the RAAF in 1950 to train for his pilot wings at Point Cook in Victoria. After service in Malta flying Vampires with 78 (Fighter) Wing, he flew Canberra bombers for three years, then became a flying instructor. During his eight years in this capacity he enjoyed an exchange posting with the United States Air Force in Oklahoma. After being confined to a non-flying desk for several postings, he spent two satisfying years as the commander of the RAAF forces at Butterworth in Malaysia where he flew the Mirage supersonic fighter. As Director General of Personal Services (Air Force) in the Department of Defence, he retired from the RAAF in 1981. His family of seven children, who shared the ordeals of frequent postings, are now adults and parents with no desire to continue the nomadic lifestyle of their childhood.

APSC
Air Power Studies Centre

Defence Publishing Service
DPS: 34827/99