



# My Story

**Ken Marks.**



I joined the RAAF in July 1964 and served for 9 years. During that time I experienced mateship, training and travel. At Radschool I trained first as a radio mechanic and then as a radio technician and worked on aircraft systems. As a radio mechanic I was stationed at Townsville with 10 Squadron and enjoyed working with 618T-3s and the associated Antenna coupler fitted to the SP-2H Neptune. As a tech I was posted to Maintenance Squadron East Sale and experienced the joys of Vampire, Dakota, Winjeel, Macchi and HS748 aircraft maintenance. In late '68 it was on to 1 BOCU at Amberley and the "queen of the skies" the Canberra.



**Ken, hard at work on a foreigner,  
Phan Rang 1970** (Click the pic for a better view)

You guessed it! I was posted Phan Rang, South Vietnam with 2 Squadron working on Canberras. Turbulent times and Jock Penn and I were awarded Mentioned-In-Dispatches (MID). Noel Mills, Graham Jenkins and I designed and built an AM broadcast station operating on 833 kilohertz. This provided some alternative relief for airman at Phan Rang. Many became announcers, technicians etc; to help them while away those off duty hours.

Boosting the morale of the troops was an important objective of the units' leadership. In September 1970, I broached the idea of building a studio and transmitter to rebroadcast Radio Australia Programs (Such as the all important Cricket Test Series) and to allow members of the unit to program and play the role of announcers. The idea was received enthusiastically and Noel Mills and Graham Jenkins and I worked out the design for the transmitter, modulator, antenna, landline connection, and studio electronics with its associated equipment.

**Ken, at the controls of radio Phan Rang**  
(Click the pic for a better view)



Because we were Airman and thus having no brains, the Commanding Officer assigned Flight Lieutenant Copley as Station Manager, Flying Officer Smith as Program Director and me as Technical Director. The two officers were pilots and thus knew everything about radio. All normal duties and tasks for all were still carried out without compromising the squadron's efforts. A call was made for volunteers to be announcers and Technical support and maintenance staff. The list of volunteers topped 30 or more.

I took my R&C down at Vung Tau and also over in Butterworth and used the time to examine the radio facilities of Radio Vung Tau and RAAF Radio Butterworth. The basic hardware for the station was purchased, such as turntables, microphones and a good quality amplifier for the studio. In addition a record collection was purchased. RAAF Butterworth supplied us with a number of records they had as seconds.

Upon returning to Phan Rang it was time to design and build the equipment needed. The American Army Supply people provided a lot of the parts needed for the transmitter as well as wood and tiles to “quieten” the studio. The rest came through our own stores system. The ground radio section (sometimes called telecommunications section) gave us a very good but old radio receiver and we rigged an antenna and were able to receive Radio Australia very clearly.

Padre Wheeler had an air-conditioning system in his chapel, and since our studio was being built next to the chapel, we decided the Padre wouldn't mind if we took a little of his air. We cut a small circular hole in the wall between the two areas and installed a small fan to suck some of “the cool, chapel air” into the studio. Thank you Padre Wheeler.

I still have fond memories of that time.

During our time at Phan rang we lost two aircraft and A84-231 was only found in 2009 and the aircrews bodies repatriated to Australia. The other crew ejected, they were recovered from the jungle the next day.

### **Phan Rang Radio Section 1970.** (Click on the pic for a better view)



**Rear L-R** Laurie Griffiths, Garry Olsen, Graham Nielson, Geoffrey Neill, Noel Mackrill, George Clark, Thomas Ball, Robert Carpenter.

**Front L-R** Phil Williams, Noel Mills, Richard Grief, Graham Jenkins, John “Jock” Penn (F/Sgt) Phillip Mole, Francis Lepinath, Gregory Turpin.

## Phan Rang Radio Section 1971. (Click on the pic for a better view)



**Rear L-R:** ....Bruce Purcell, Dave Weeks, Peter Nicholls, Noel Mills, Graham Kingston, Dave Miller, Peter Maher, Ken Marks  
**Front L-R:**....Ian Cox, Bob Rose, Robert (Roy) Dash, Tom Bevan, Cyril McPhee, Roy Egginton, Dave Weeks

After Vietnam I was posted to RAAF Richmond. I served with 486 Maintenance Squadron for 6 months and then onto 37 Squadron and the C-130E Hercules. At 37 Squadron had a trip to the Lockheed plant at Marietta to recycle some of our C-130Es.



9 years had passed and it was out into the "world". First completed a one year day matriculation course and matriculated to Sydney Uni for a degree in Applied Science and then onto Macquarie Uni for a BA. I was employed by Philips Industries as a commercial engineer and wrote the colour television service manuals and trained technicians around Australia on servicing these sets.

In 1978 I was employed by Plessey Australia as a commercial engineer rising to Marketing Manager and travelling overseas to solve engineering problems that various divisions had with components such as CMOS for military applications and scattered infra-red imagery devices for heaving industry mining applications.



Graham Jenkins, George Clark and Bob Carpenter, Bomb Dump, Phan Rang.  
 (Click the pic for a better view)



In 1980 I became a company director of [All Systems Electronics](#) and J H Jark Electronics. We manufactured electronic devices and supplied services to engineering companies such as Mine Safety Appliances (MSA). I was appointed Divisional Manager of MSA's Instrument Division during this time and oversaw the introduction of the first underground computer gas monitoring system at Bellambi Coal mine on the south coast of NSW. We also designed and assembled the equipment for gas monitoring of the Navy Hyperbaric chambers.

In 1983 I worked at Electrical Equipment Ltd and finally started to do some part-time teaching in NSW Public Schools. In 1984 I was also to work at AWA as a technical writer for Defence and Commercial manuals for engineers down to operators.

1986 saw me working in the NSW Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) and the Aboriginals after school program. I taught for between 2 and 4 hours at four high schools and five primary schools per week. In 1989 I undertook a full time post grad in Adult Education at UTS Sydney and graduated in 1991. During that time I taught 18 hours per week on the Advanced Certificate of Industrial Electronics. This involved teaching Plant Robotics, Process Control and Integrated Circuit Applications at the Sydney Institute of TAFE.

In 1991 I was employed to teach Science and Electronic Media at St Columba's High School Springwood NSW. During the previous 4 years I was also the Bandmaster of Parramatta City Band.

I was affected by the Vietnam War but would not admit it, and in 1992 during the break at the end of the second term suffered a mental breakdown and was later granted a Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (TPI) pension. I of course retired from teaching. The following years were difficult and I spent time in St John of God mental hospital at North Richmond and met many other men with similar problems.

In 2005 I enrolled in a Graduate Diploma of Music Education (Instrumental) and graduated in 2007 at UWS Western Sydney. It was in 2007 that I decided to write a unit history of 2 squadron's involvement in the Vietnam War. This involved accessing the unit history from Canberra and collecting memories of a range of airmen who served between 1967 and 1971.



**Jock Penn George Clark Noel Mills  
and Roy Dash, Phan Rang, Christmas  
Day. 1970**

(Click the pic for a better view)



**Playing last post at Gooloogong  
NSW, 2009**

I had a collection of 22 sets of recollections of the time from a commanding officer (John Downing) through to a padre (Bill Wheeler) including Pilots, Navigators, Motor Transport Drivers, Ground Crew, General Hand, Wife and Son of a Vietnam Veteran to name a few. Many veterans sent photos and other material. I digitised the aircrew records and analysed the unit history.

Eventually the stories, the facts and the photos were put together and the book "Remembrances – A History of 2 Squadron RAAF 1967 to 1971" finally was ready for publication.

In 2011 the book was published.

My contact with members of the RAAF with whom I served and

the experiences we shared has been of importance to me and my family.

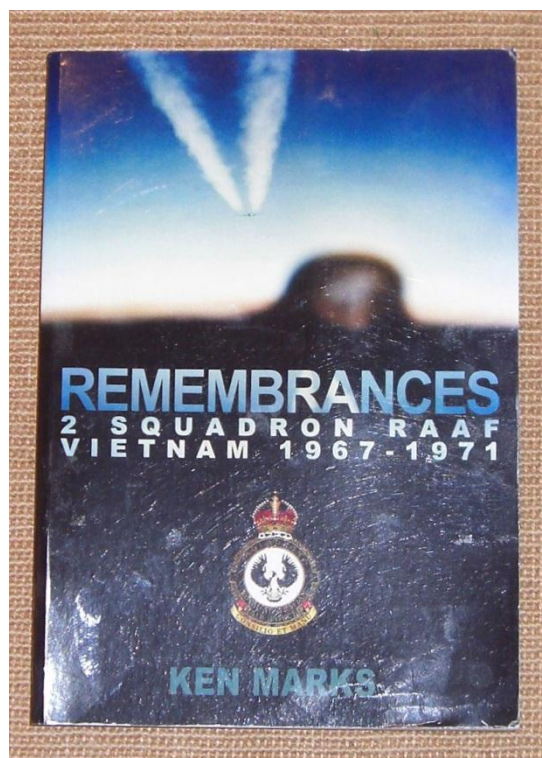
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Ken's book, *REMEMBRANCES*, is still available, we've got a copy and it is an excellent read. If you were at 2 Sqn at any time, you should have a copy.

The book is framed around the memories of seventeen 2 Squadron blokes. Their remembrances are in chronological order. A Chronology of significant events is included as well as nearly 200 photographs and illustrations.

Each year contains annexes that include members who served during that year, tables of bombing BDA statistics, Aircrew Sorties flown and more. The final annexes contain Primary Source resources for academics and students alike.

If you want a copy, you can order one from [HERE](#)



Tom, Dick and Harry were in their local pub on the East side of Hobart, enjoying a few quiet drinks one Friday night, when they decided to get in on the weekly footy raffle. They bought five \$1 tickets each, seeing it was for the team trip... The following week, when the raffle was drawn, they each won a prize. Tom won the first prize - a whole year's supply of Heinz gourmet spaghetti and sauce. Dick was the winner of the second prize - six month's supply of Woolworths gourmet coffee. Harry won the sixth prize - a toilet brush and holder. When they met in the pub a week later, Harry asked the others how they were enjoying their prizes. "Great," said Tom. "I love spaghetti." "And I'm really loving the coffee," said Dick. "So how's the toilet brush, Harry?" "Not so bloody good, I'm really sore" Harry said, "I reckon I'll go back to toilet paper..."

## The Mighty Mustang.

Recently, two mates of mine drove up from the central highlands area of NSW to the small airfield at Caboolture, about 50 klms north of Brisbane, to take a flight in one of the few fully-restored war-time Mustang P-51D aircraft still flying – and of course, we went along to have a look. The aircraft is operated by [Mustang Flights](#), a syndicate of 11 people who all have shares in the aircraft and who all love flying the old girl. (Click the images for a better view). And of course, as is usual in Queensland, the weather was perfect.



In late 1939, with the likelihood of full scale war in Europe a major concern, the RAF was looking seriously at methods of quickly increasing its fighter strength. They approached North American Aviation and asked them to build the P-40 for them, but, as the P-40's design dated from 1933, "Dutch" Kendelberger, the president of North American offered to build them an entirely new fighter using the same Allison V-1710-39 engine used in the P-40. Dutch had visited the UK and Germany in 1938 and saw aircraft being built in those countries and even though his company's only experience in building fighter aircraft was the NA-50A (left), what he saw on his tour had given him ideas.



He put together some ideas and the British agreed on the new type on the stipulation that a prototype be on hand within 120 days. North American designers set to it and a prototype was finished in 117 days – but it didn't have an engine. Wheels also had to be borrowed from an AT-6 trainer. Six weeks later, and after several modifications, the aircraft took to the air in October 1940 and production models reached the RAF in November 41. These aircraft became known as Mustang Mk I (P-51) and Mk II (P-51A).

The original 1,150 hp Allison engine lacked performance at high altitude so the RAF employed the early Mustangs on low-level armed tactical reconnaissance sorties. Development continued and the biggest improvement was the replacement of the Allison engine with the Packard V-1650-7 which was a license-built version of the Rolls-Royce Merlin 60 series with a two-stage two-speed supercharger. This became the P-51D.



Early in 1943, the US were losing far too many B-17 bombers in their day-light raids into Germany and they soon realized that

sending un-escorted bombers into enemy territory in broad day-light was not the smartest thing to do, so they looked around for an appropriate escort fighter. They had their twin engined Lockheed P-38 Lightnings which had the range, but these were only available in very limited numbers in the European theater due to its Allison engines proving difficult to maintain. The P-51D proved to be ideal, In general terms, it was a simple aircraft, it used a single, well-understood, reliable engine and had internal space for a huge fuel load. With external fuel tanks, it could accompany the bombers all the way to Germany and back.



The aircraft at Caboolture is an ex RAAF P-51D (Australian nomenclature CAC 18 Mk21) which was built at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (which built 200 Mustang aircraft) in Melbourne in 1947 – too late for service in WWII. It came out of the factory as A68-110, was delivered to 1AD/ARDU at Laverton then after acceptance, was sent to 78 Wing at Willytown then down to East Sale where it worked from 1950 to 1956. It was eventually Board of Surveyed and ended up in the USA in private hands. While in the US it was involved in a taxiing accident and although the airframe had done only about 500 hours, it was 'retired'.

Some years later, it was found by the syndicate, purchased and brought back to Australia where it was fully restored over a 7-year period by Sandora Aviation at Caboolture and had its first post-restoration flight in January 2002. It was decided to restore the aircraft as A68-769, which were the markings of the 82 Sqn CO's personal aircraft. It has been modified into a 2 seat configuration so a passenger can be carried behind the pilot and is now based at the Caboolture Warplane Museum at Caboolture Airport and regularly takes up passengers for the flight of their lives.

***Bit squeezey in here!!***

The two pilots, both syndicate members, who flew the aircraft the day we were there were Mike McConnel, who flies the Boeing 747 with Cathay Pacific and Mark Hall who flies the Airbus. Both these blokes are based in Hong Kong and fly back to Oz just to fly the 'Stang.



For us, it was worth the drive to Caboolture just to hear the magical sound of the big V12 engine at full chat on take off, and my mate's only comment after his 20 minute flight, was "Wish I'd have taken a 40 minute flight!!!"

If you're interested in taking a flight in the 'Stang, or if you just want to go and have a look at it and hear that magical sound, you can get further details [HERE](#).

The last RAAF squadron to finish with the Mustang was 24 Sqn, the Adelaide Week-end Warriors, who flew it until June 1960.

The Specs are:

Description:	Single seat, long range fighter. All metal stressed-skin construction
Powerplant:	1,490 hp Packard Merlin V 1650 7.
Maximum speed:	437 mph at 25,000 ft.
Rate of climb:	13 minutes to reach 30,000 ft
Service ceiling:	41,900 ft.
Range:	950 miles normal/1,700 miles max
Armament:	Six 0.50 calibre machine guns, two 1,000 lb. bombs or up to 10 rockets.

Click [HERE](#) to see more photos of the P-51D at Caboolture.

A man was telling his neighbor, 'I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me four thousand dollars, but it's state of the art.. It's perfect.' 'Really,' answered the neighbor . 'What kind is it?' 'Twelve thirty..'