

## My Story.



### MY SERVICE YEARS.

**Jock Cassels.**

**RAF - 1941-1966**

**RAAF - 1966-1979**



#### RAAF Time.

About 2 weeks into my retirement in the UK I was reading the Sunday Express when I saw an advert about the Royal Australian Air Force "wanting pilots up to the age of 43" and offering them a 4 year Short Service Commission. I discussed this with Maureen and as she had no objection I replied and 2 weeks later I was at Australian House in London being interviewed. I had previously given the RAAF permission to access my RAF Service documents, so the interview panel knew my Service history. They advised me that should I be accepted I might have to serve a tour of duty in Viet Nam. I replied that while I would not volunteer, if I was posted there I would of course go.

About 3 weeks later I was advised that I had been accepted and given the choice of proceeding to Australia by air or by sea. I chose the latter. In the meantime I had received a 'phone call from the Flight Training School at Hamble offering me the flying instructors job which, of course, I couldn't accept.

With the gratuity from my Service in the RAF I settled the loan on the house and had no trouble in selling it, making a slight profit in the process. We sold some of our furniture and the remainder of our possessions were packed for uplift and transportation to Australia by the RAAF. All our travel costs were provided by the RAAF. After our farewells to all the family in Scotland we left Glasgow on 31 October 1966 for Southampton via London. I had to report to Australia House to officially join the RAAF and on 1 November I became Flight Lieutenant Cassels, RAAF (O316966). and was posted to RAAF Base Richmond. That afternoon we travelled to Southampton and sailed on the P & O liner ORIANA.



### **Voyage to Australia.**

As a family we were no strangers to a long sea voyage and we soon settled down to life aboard. Maureen and I shared a large two room cabin with Anne and Charles and Carol was in a separate cabin with another girl. The voyage took 3 weeks calling at Naples, through the Suez Canal to Colombo then onto Australia calling at Fremantle, Melbourne and disembarking in Sydney. After 3 weeks by boat and 90 minutes by car we finally arrived at our destination, Richmond, a town 70 kilometres NW of Sydney where the RAAF had booked us into a hotel.

### **RAAF Base Richmond - 38 Squadron**

I was posted to the training flight of No. 38 Squadron for conversion onto Caribou aircraft which was a twin engined, short takeoff and landing aircraft built by de Havilland of Canada.



After conversion I began operational duties with 38 Squadron which mainly involved tactical air support to Army operations within Australia. The Squadron also had a detachment based in Port Moresby in New Guinea which provided air support for the Government of New Guinea. I spent 2 months in New Guinea, which, because of the mountainous terrain and weather conditions in that part of the world, I considered it to be a very dangerous place to fly. With the limited radio aids on the Caribou at that time, we avoided clouds like the plague.

Flying in 38 Squadron was never dull or routine, there were many detachments to various parts of Australia, the downside being the many weeks spent away from home. In April 1970 there



was one 3 month detachment overseas which I enjoyed. This was to West Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, and at a place called Pontianic which was located right on the equator. The task was to support the Australian Army Survey team which was mapping the area for the Indonesian Government and involved us making frequent trips to Singapore, a 3 hour flight away to the RAF base at Changi. Our living conditions were rather spartan (Army style), being a tented camp near the airfield, so the trips to Singapore were a welcome break and I must confess that we contrived, as much as possible, to make them a night stop, staying at RAF Changi and exploring Singapore. An interesting detachment



When Prince Charles and his sister Anne visited Australia in 1970 he wanted to pay a visit to his old school at Mansfield and 38 Sqn had to fly them from Melbourne to a small airstrip near his school (30 min flight)

As on these occasions everything has to have back-ups so two aircraft were tasked so that in the event of the lead aircraft having engine problems and failing to start the passengers are immediately transferred to the back-up aircraft. Both aircraft were provisioned with identical refreshments - sandwiches, drinks etc. I was flying the back-up aircraft but as there was no problem I didn't get to fly the Royals. On return to Melbourne the catering staff removed all the drinks from the aircraft (lots of miniature bottles of alcohol) but left the sandwiches. On the way back to Richmond the other aircraft called me to ask how we were doing and we told them that we were having a great time eating the royal sandwiches.

### **35 Squadron – Vietnam.**

In August 1968 my posting to No. 35 Sqn in Vietnam came through but the CO told me that if I wished he would arrange for someone else to go. I told him what I had said at my interview in London, i.e. that if I was posted I would go. Fortunately, in July I had bought a block of land and was having a house built so Maureen and the children would be settled in a permanent home before I left. Up to this point I think Maureen had been a bit unsettled with our move to Australia

but was happy now that she was in her own home. We moved into the house in mid September and I only had 2 weeks to clear away the builders' rubble and make some sort of garden before I left for Vietnam. While leaving the family was a bit of a wrench, I was happy that Maureen had her new home to organise and that the children were settled in their new schools.

I mentioned the making of a garden, in fact there was little I did and it was Maureen who undertook that task and she did a great job of it all on her own.





The Cassels' domain - 176 Francis St, Richmond.

My appointment on the squadron was as Flight Commander and I soon settled into the job. The Squadron operated as part of a United States Air Force Transport Wing and we were tasked by that formation. The tasks involved flying set routes carrying military personnel and supplies to various units throughout the Mekong Delta and other parts of southern Vietnam. A lot of our time was spent carrying fuel for helicopters operating in the more remote operational areas. The fuel was carried in 44 gallon drums and while this was a highly volatile load when they were full, it was even more so when they were empty and we were conveying the drums back to source. I didn't like flying with a load of empty drums full of fuel vapour!



While there was no enemy aircraft to contend with, care had to be taken when flying into and out of remote air strips, for the VietCong (VC), the enemy, would often target low flying aircraft with rifle fire. While on the ground the aircraft were particularly vulnerable to VC attack. One aircraft was totally destroyed when hit by a mortar attack. Another received a near miss and although damaged managed to immediately take off, however the damage to the hydraulic lines meant that the wheels could not be retracted and finding more damage when airborne the aircraft had to land at the nearest major airfield.



It wasn't uncommon for the aircraft to return to Vung Tau with the odd bullet hole somewhere in the fuselage.

On another occasion a pilot was wounded when just after take off a rifle bullet entered the cockpit ricocheted off the nose wheel steering control and struck the pilot on the cheek.

The tour of duty in Vietnam was 12 months with one weeks leave back in Australia, half way through the tour. This was a welcome break and most appreciated by all. We also had the opportunity to occasionally take a Caribou to the RAAF Base at Butterworth in Malaya (a 4 hour flight) to perform a Compass Swing on the aircraft. This provided a week-end break of 4 days to relax in a pleasant environment and I managed to do this twice.



It was during my tour in Vietnam that I applied to transfer to the Administrative Branch for I knew that when my 4 year Short Service Commission in the General Duties (Flying) Branch ended in August 1970 my flying days would be over and I would be retired at the age of 47. I had no desire to seek employment in civilian life and wished to remain in the service, using the experience I had gained in my Administrative appointments in the RAF. Much to my relief I was granted a Permanent Commission in the Administration Branch wef 12 August 1970.

While in Vietnam I flew 880 hours (1499 Operational Sorties) without incident, which was in complete contrast to my previous period in a war zone when I flew 31 hours (30 Operational Sorties) on Spitfires in Italy with 1 very major incident (described earlier). My tour of duty in Vietnam ended in August when I was posted back to No. 38 Squadron at Richmond, much to





the relief of myself and my family. Later, in March 1970, I was awarded a Mention-In-Despatches for my service in Vietnam. This came as a bit of a surprise for as far as I was concerned all I did was my job.

### **No. 38 Squadron.**



On return to Richmond and after a spot of leave I resumed normal flying duties in September and spent the next 10 months on routine tasks and various detachments including the 3 months overseas detachment to Indonesia in April – June 1970. But my flying days were coming to a close and my final flight was from Broken Hill to Richmond on 10 August 1970. On 11 August, my 47th Birthday, I took up my new appointment as Admin 1 at No. 2 Aircraft Depot and my flying days were over.

### **No. 2 Aircraft Depot, Richmond**

No 2 AD was a unit which provided major technical support to the flying squadrons based at Richmond. The senior Administration Officer was a Wing Commander who was my boss. My job of Admin 1 was akin to that of an Adjutant and it didn't take long to settle in although I found the job a bit boring, particularly compared to my previous flying appointments. However, it was a job and I had a family to support. At that stage I still had not returned my flying clothing, so one morning I donned my flying overalls, my flying gloves and flying helmet (Bone Dome) and sat at my desk to await the arrival of the Wing Commander. To his question "What the bloody hell are you doing Jock", I replied that I was "flying my desk". Being ex aircrew himself (Navigator) he saw the funny side and after a good laugh suggested that maybe it was now time to return my flying gear to the Equipment Store. As I said the job was somewhat boring and routine and I was glad when nearly a year later, and quite out of the blue, on 19 July 1971, I was posted to Base Squadron Richmond

### **Base Squadron, Richmond.**

My appointment was Admin 1, with duties similar to those I had at 2 AD but with a little more variety, so it didn't take much effort to settle in. The good point about this posting was that, like



my move from 38 Sqn, I remained at Richmond so there was no disruption to my family and the children's schooling. While at Base Squadron I sat the 'C' examination which was a requirement for promotion to Squadron Leader. This bore fruits for on 27 November 1972 I was promoted to SqnLdr and posted to Headquarters Support Command in Melbourne to take up an appointment in the Air Force Recruiting Office.

### **Headquarters Support Command, Melbourne.**

My task within the Recruiting Office was to run a small team responsible for visiting Secondary Schools, to give lectures and presentations on life in the RAAF and the many opportunities available in the various trades, both on the ground and in the air. It was an interesting job, but still a desk job, although I did have the opportunity to get out of the office quite often. The big snag was that I had to leave my family in Richmond because of the childrens' schooling, and I found the separation from my family quite trying. I lived in the Officers Mess at RAAF base Tottenham, a non flying base about 20 minutes drive from my office in HQ Support Command, and commuted daily by a bus provided by the Service.



I decided that I would go home every week-end, in spite of the distance involved (600 miles), rather than live a complete bachelor's existence. It was an overnight journey, leaving Melbourne by a COBB & CO coach at 19 00 hours, but I didn't travel all the way to Sydney; I got off the bus at Camden, (30 minutes drive from Richmond) where Maureen would meet me in the car. I would arrive home about 10 o'clock, have Saturday night at home and on Sunday afternoon Maureen would drive me back to Camden where I would catch the overnight bus to Melbourne. While sleeping at the back of a bus, or trying to, for 2 nights every week was hardly an ideal situation, I accepted it, for my week-ends at home were important to me. Occasionally I managed to get a lift to Richmond by a Service aircraft on a Friday afternoon, but not very often and never from Richmond back to Melbourne.

I can't say I enjoyed my time at HQSC, mainly because of the separation, and it was with great relief that in April 1974, and after 17 months in Recruiting, I was posted to RAAF Headquarters in Canberra to take up the post of Commanding Officer Headquarters Support Unit.

### **Department of Air, Canberra (DEFAIR)**

Being posted to Canberra was a great relief as it meant that I was only a 3 hour drive from home and I could spend every week-end with my family without having to endure two 12 hour bus journeys to do so. The adjacent RAAF station at Fairbairn provided accommodation for unaccompanied members at DEFAIR so I moved into the Officers Mess at Fairbairn and continued my separation. My duties were similar to the ones I had when I was OC Administration Wing at RAF Kia Tak in Hong Kong so I had no difficulty in settling in. While at Canberra I was attached to RAAF base Point Cook for 5 days to attend a short course in Air





Force Law. At this stage, having spent over 32 years in the Air Force, and having served in command positions in the RAF, I considered this unnecessary. I didn't learn anything new but it was a break from routine. After I had been in the job for 12 months I found out that a friend of mine, who was the CO of the Operational Command Headquarters Unit at RAAF Glenbrook, near Penrith, was shortly retiring from the RAAF. RAAF Glenbrook was only 20 minute's drive from my home. so I took advantage of the fact that I worked adjacent to the Officers Postings Branch at DEPAIR and let it be known (unofficially) that I would love that job. My lobbying paid off, for in July 1975 I was posted to RAAF Glenbrook to be CO of the Operational Headquarters Unit. At last the separation from my family was over.

### **Headquarters Operational Command, RAAF Glenbrook.**

As I have said, HQOC at RAAF Glenbrook was only 20 minutes drive from Richmond, so after nearly 3 years I could at last live at home and drive daily to work. Needless to say, I was delighted with this posting and the prospect of living a more normal life, particularly as I was approaching retirement. The job was similar to that which I had in Canberra in that I was CO of a unit providing Administrative support to a Command Headquarters which in this case commanded all the Operational aircraft in the RAAF ie. Fighter, Bomber, Maritime and Transport aircraft.



The Headquarters was located in a large building which had in previous years been a Hotel (The Lapstone Hotel) and the rooms had been converted into offices. My unit was housed in huts adjacent to the main building. While serving at Department of Air in Canberra civilian clothes were worn but at OPCOM Headquarters I felt I was back in a Service environment, as uniform was worn while on duty and I held a unit colour hoisting parade once every month. I enjoyed my time at OPCOM Unit, for while the work was fairly routine it had its interesting moments but the big bonus was being able to live at home. While at Glenbrook the Air Officer Commanding Air Vice Marshal Robey visited Lord Howe Island to open a memorial to the crew of a Catalina Flying Boat which just after the war, crashed into a hill when attempting a landing in the islands lagoon. He himself had previously flown Catalina's and knowing I had been a flying boat pilot he gave favourable

consideration to my request to accompany him. We flew to Lord Howe by a Caribou aircraft and over the week-end, when the Ceremony was over, I had the opportunity to explore this isolated island in the Pacific.

During my time at HQ OPCOM Unit there was a change of the Air Officer Commanding and AVM Robey was replaced by AVM Adams known in the Air Force as ["Bay Adams"](#). This was the second time I had served under Bay Adams when, as a Group Captain, he was the Base Commander at Vung Tau in Vietnam while I was on 35 Squadron. He flew fighter aircraft during the 2nd World War so we had something in common and we spent many evenings chatting over a beer. At that time, if my memory serves me correctly, I think we were the only RAAF pilots at Vung Tau who had served during the second world war. I was the Flight Commander





on 35 Sqn. and quite often had to make sure that I included "Bay" on the flying programme. On one trip I made to Butterworth (Malaya) he insisted being on the crew as co-pilot but it was he who did all the piloting while I did the navigating. He was being treated for Gout at that time but it didn't deter him and we had a very pleasant time in Penang.

It was while I was at HQ OPCOM that my daughter Anne got married and I requested permission from the President of the Officers Mess Committee (PMC) to hold the reception in the Officers Mess. It was on 10th September 1978 and being a Saturday there was little normal activity in the Mess so the PMC gave me approval to liaise with the Mess Sergeant to arrange the function, with the stipulation that there was to be no confetti showers at the Mess entrance when the married couple departed. The Mess Sergeant and staff provided a first class function, with band, and the guests, including the PMC, were most impressed. It was with pleasure that I settled the bill, making sure that Confetti was not on the menu. No doubt when the Mess was the Lapstone Hotel it was the scene of many similar functions.



Prior to discharge in the RAAF members were given 28 days resettlement leave during which they could attend a course of training to facilitate their transition to civilian life. As I planned to do some renovations to my home and to gain some building experience I elected to work with the builder who had built my house in Richmond. He of course was only too pleased to have an "apprentice" for a month at no cost. I was due to retire from the RAAF on my 55th Birthday (11 Aug 1978) but was asked to delay my retirement until January 1979 to fit in with the RAAF promotions and postings schedule, which normally took place at the end of the year. I agreed to this and I was formally discharged on retirement on 15 January 1979.

Thus ended my Air Force career which had begun on 9th September 1941. A career of 37 years and 4 months.

## **Retirement**

While I had been serving in Vietnam I had saved a bit of money and on return I purchased the adjacent block of land and extended the house. Later, when I did retire, I had a further extension built by my builder, and under his supervision I worked on this extension.

Boldened by my building activities I went solo and added two verandas to the house and my final effort was when I designed and built a family room with the help of Carol's husband Derek.

The garden of course took up a fair time of my retirement and under the supervision of Maureen, a knowledgeable gardener, we did quite a bit of landscaping. However, grass cutting and digging holes was my main contribution.

Travel was high on the retirement agenda and we made several trips to the UK (mainly Scotland) and Europe. On one visit to Germany I managed to visit Stalag 7 at Luckenwald, the



camp which the Russians over-ran and from where I ended my POW days. Unfortunately, I had to view it from a distance and only managed to see a few of the huts but little of the camp as I knew it. Our travels also took us to many other parts of the world – North and South America, China and several countries in South East Asia and the Pacific. Needless to say, we have spent quite some time exploring Australia by train, plane, bus and caravan and still have many parts to see.



### **Conclusion**

I'm ashamed to say that this narrative of the events in my life had taken several years to complete. Originally my only intention was to put on record my knowledge of the family tree for the benefit of future generations but I then realised that as I was the link between the old family in Scotland and the new family in Australia a more detailed explanation would be required. That link was of course the Air Force, or rather two Air Forces. When finished in June 2015, it was time to investigate how I could get it turned into a small book before the 92 year old computer between my ears gives up.

Finally, let me say that my career in the two Air Forces was one of fulfilment, travel and excitement, with both good times and bad times, but a career I am glad I experienced and over which I have no regrets.

The other day a friend asked me how much I spent on a bottle of wine.  
I replied – about 45 minutes.