



**AS IT HAPPENED
BY**

ERIC CATHCART

WHO AM I AND WHY?

In 1942 at age 18 I volunteered for RAAF aircrew. I was placed on the Aircrew Active Reserve until the RAAF was ready to begin my training. Almost immediately I was called up for Army service, serving five months in tan boots waiting for my Air Force call-up which finally came in October 1942.

My aircrew training took place in Australia and after graduating as a pilot, was sent to the UK for further training as a bomber pilot. Following refresher training on Airspeed Oxfords and operational training on Wellingtons and Lancasters, I was posted with my crew to No. 550 (RAF) Squadron at North Killinghome in England's north-east, returning to Australia in late 1945 for demobilization in January 1946.

Rejoining the RAAF in early 1951 as an Air Traffic Control Officer, I specialized in radar Ground Control Approach and in reviving Air Traffic Control aspects of Land/Air Warfare techniques. Spending 13 years at a variety of bases including two and a half years at Butterworth during the Malayan Emergency, I accumulated over 5000 radar final approaches, controlling both piston and jet engine aircraft. In January 1964 I was posted to the (then) Department of Air Canberra, spending 2 years rewriting the Manual of Air Traffic Control, was promoted to Squadron Leader in 1966 and was selected to undergo the 1967 RAAF Staff Course. My post-graduate posting was to RAAF Richmond as Senior Air Traffic Control Officer for 2 years after which I spent five and a half years at (then) Headquarters Operational Command in 2 postings, electing early retirement at age 51 in 1975 as a Wing Commander, from the post of Command Air Traffic Control Officer.

After 2 years of retirement, my wife and I conducted a consultancy business for 8 years before again retiring for 6 months. Administratively supported by my wife I became manager of Encyclopaedia Britannica's Education Services Division for Queensland and Northern Territory during the next 7 years, finally retiring in 1992. Subsequently, I spent 2 years as President of the ACA Gold Coast Branch, then withdrawing from the committee to write the Branch Archives at my own expense. That role became a labour of love and camaraderie.

Before becoming voluntary archivist I was (and still am) a short-story writer. In that capacity I submitted factual and fictional stories to annual competitions conducted under the auspices of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and more recently DVA/RSL (Queensland).

For additional general interest I have included several prize-winning stories in this section.

After 8 years of voluntary effort the time has arrived to find a home for this collection of remarkable anecdotal material which includes some incredible stories of survival and a deal of humour. Those writings will be freely available to society. All ACA contributors have agreed that public recognition of their service and of the stories they have told is adequate recompense for voluntarily having a section of their service and their memories recorded for posterity. I applaud their attitude as a true example of their collective spirit and sense of camaraderie. On their behalf, I ask that in future times the memories of individuals not be besmirched by any litigation attempt to capitalize monetarily on their gracious gift to society.

I hereby waive copyright of 'Love And A Call To Arms' but retain the right to be recognized as the author. E.C.

LOVE AND A CALL TO ARMS

They were far apart in the summer of an infant 1942, not even aware of each other's existence. So was it fate, coincidence, or part of a grand design that resulted in the coalescence of two youthful spirits?

World War 2 had a lot to do with it of course. With empty pockets how else could the young of that era cover the two thousand kilometres which separated their tender hearts?

Two years were to pass before those two hearts met, and a further three years before they were bonded in a matrimonial lifetime commitment. As Eric and Eileen remember the way it was, they invite your hearts to accompany them on their tours of duty to their country during World War 2.

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Eric had a problem. The War beckoned him now that he had turned eighteen.

The War, which everyone knew would be over by Christmas 1939, was now two years and four months old. Its core had festered and grown more diseased, developing into a cancer of hate, as innocent humanity was brutalized by the malignancy of armed conflict.

There was nothing profound in Eric's thinking. He was simply trying to decide which Service he would join. One older brother was in the Army, the other was in the Air Force. Eric gave the Navy a passing thought, but he had an innate fear of waters deep dark and sullen.

He reflected on the time four years earlier when he had been taken aloft in a tiny stick and wire Aeronca aeroplane. Feeling again the sensations of freedom and space tingling his spine, the Air Force won his mental battle.

The processing of Eric's application took three months. He travelled from his North Queensland home of Mackay to Brisbane for medical and pre-selection and was placed on the Aircrew Reserve. On arrival home, he discovered that he had been drafted into the Citizen Military Force (CMF) and put on his Army boots seven days later.

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Nearly seventeen degrees of latitude south of Mackay, in her hometown of Melbourne, Eileen was inducted into the Air Force in company with her girlfriend Marie.

During the last two years, Eileen's parents had both died and she had been living with her married sister. Her father had been an Army officer in World War 1 - The War To End All Wars - so her thoughts had initially turned to joining the Army. When she told her friend Marie of her intentions, Marie convinced her that the Air Force uniforms would suit them better, so the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) gained two new recruits.

A fortnight later, the two girls felt despondent as they sat in their dormitory, dressed in ill-fitting coveralls, having been made dentally fit, hair trimmed to a regulation 'one inch above the collar', no make-up and arms sore from vaccinations.

Close to tears they looked at each other, faces mirroring their mutual misery. With the marvellous resilience of youth, they grinned, then tittered, then the bonds of depression fell away as the room reverberated with peals of laughter. Mirth had become their own private cure-all for life's ills.

After Eileen and Marie completed their recruit course, They were posted as office orderlies to different units in Melbourne. That did not affect their social life, for after work, they spent their time at the Glaciarium Ice Rink (long since demolished in the name of progress) where they were very proficient ice skaters.

Eileen remustered to 'clerk' category and was posted to attend the first WAAAF Clerk's Course, following which she was posted to Air Force Headquarters in St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, where Marie was in the Headquarters Orderly Room. Eileen went to a new Secret post in what was to become the Directorate of Telecommunications and Radar (D. Tels. and R.). There they stayed for the duration of The War - Eileen in a 'screened' post and Marie steadfastly refusing to accept any posting which would take her away from Melbourne!

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The RAAF had an agreement with the Army that young men on the Aircrew Reserve could be released from Army service when the RAAF had training vacancies. Accordingly, after five months, Eric changed his uniform from khaki to blue.

He was processed through Initial Training at Kingaroy and was categorized for pilot training. His first flying training was on Tiger Moths at Narromine in New South Wales, then back to Queensland for Service Flying Training at Bundaberg.

Wartime films of pilot graduations show proud young men on parade in best uniform, proud parents with fear in their hearts looking lovingly at their sons being congratulated and having wings pinned to their chests by handsome and proud Commanding Officers, while a band played an appropriate accompaniment.

The reality for Eric's course was a gathering in a Nissan Hut, with the Chief Flying Instructor saying "The following people have been commissioned (about ten percent). The remainder are sergeants. As your name is called, file past my desk and collect your rank insignia and wings. You must sign your personal equipment card before leaving this room".

Some weeks later, a steam train took him to an Embarkation Depot at the Melbourne Cricket ground where his dormitory overlooked the oval. He lived in a spectator stand which he shared with some hundreds of other NCO aircrew.

The following week saw Eric at RAAF Point Cook, flying Airspeed Oxfords and learning the intricacies of Beam Approach Landing techniques. Then back to his open Cricket Ground stand for another period of waiting, and unbeknown to him, the fulfilment of a lover's destiny.

Mateship developed quickly in those transient times, so Eric rapidly made friends with Sergeant-Pilot Bob who occupied the next cot in the stand. They were soon planning their attack upon the hearts of love-starved young Melbourne womanhood.

On Friday night, Bob suggested a visit to the Glaciarium as a likely receptacle for girls - girls - girls! To Eric, the boy from the tropics that seemed a pretty good idea on a hot summer night. So they set forth on what was to become, for Eric, the first leg of a sortie which would culminate in his heart being pierced by Cupid's arrow.

The oldest trick in the book was played on the two young uniformed pilots as they hung over the rail at the ice rink, looking at the bevy of short-skirted girls gliding over the ice. One of the girls who introduced herself as Marie appeared beside the boys and asked Eric if he had a light for her cigarette. Much later in life, Eric found out that she had spotted her quarries while skating. Leaving the ice, she darted down to the locker room, grabbed a ciggy, put a helpless look on her face and made her play.

It appeared that Marie's girlfriend Eileen, for the first time in years, was not at the rink that night. Suddenly Marie had a bright idea! "Why don't the three of us surprise Eileen at her St. Kilda home on Sunday morning? If we bring our bathers we could spend the day at the beach"!

Eric and Bob, being mere males, thought all their birthdays had come at once.

That was how Marie and two young sergeant-pilots came to be at the front gate of a house in York Street St.Kilda at 10 a.m. on a fateful Sunday morning.

As Marie opened the gate, Eric's gaze fell upon the younger of two blonde girls, obviously sisters, lying on the small front lawn. Marie made the introductions, and as Eric and Eileen made eye contact, Cupid released his dart.

Marie lost her tenuous hold on the boy from North Queensland, so Bob became Marie's partner. From then on, the two young couples spent all their off-duty time together, with the Glaciarium as their base.

For twentyeight days, Eric and Eileen strengthened the bonds of their love. Then one day, he was gone!!

Life in Melbourne still went on for Eileen, but there was a void - an abyss which was gradually bridged by time. Even so, Eileen discovered what other women, both before and after discovered. Life is always more difficult for the one left behind.

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Eric sailed on the 32 000 ton liner 'Nieuw Amsterdam', the pride of the Dutch merchant fleet, which had made only her maiden voyage before being stripped internally for troop carrying. With 1200 Australian aircrew aboard, the ship sailed solo - that is, not in convoy, relying on speed (30 knots) and anti-submarine tactics to secure her safety. Sailing first to Durban, troop numbers were increased by a group of young Polish women who had made a remarkable two and a half years' trek through the Soviet Union, over the Caspian Sea, through Persia (Iran) to India. They were transported to East Africa then to South Africa after joining the British WAAF to help fight the monster of Nazism.

From Durban, the ship sailed to Cape Town to take on board a regiment of South African troops, then on to Sierra Leone's port of Freetown to repatriate an RAF contingent. By now, the troop complement on board was in excess of five thousand souls.

On departing North Africa, the ship ziz-zagged across the South Atlantic towards South America before turning north-east to run the North Atlantic gauntlet of 'U-boat Alley'. She sailed past the west coast of Ireland, continuing north to just below Iceland before turning south-east to enter the Firth of Clyde via the North Channel, seventyfive kilometres from Belfast.

By the time the ship docked at Gourock on the Clyde River, twentyfive kilometres west of Glasgow, over two months had elapsed since Eric's abrupt departure from Australia.

Eric progressed through the Bomber Command training system flying Airspeed Oxfords at Little Rissington, Wellingtons at Silverstone (now an international speedway), then to a Heavy Conversion Unit to convert to Lancasters. He was then posted to an RAF 'composite' squadron comprised of eighteen different nationalities, all living on a bleak and muddy wartime airfield to do their bit against a common foe.

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During Eric's absence of two years, Eileen became deeply involved with her work at D. Tels. and R. Her duties concerned locating, recording and making the priority allocation of all radio crystals used in air-to-air and air-to-ground radios throughout the RAAF, wherever the flying units were based. Young as she was, she had been given the responsibility of developing the system and making it work. It worked so effectively, that all her requests for posting to a flying base were refused.

To a certain extent those refusals were beneficial because she and Marie had developed a comedy skating routine which had attracted the attention of a J.C. Williamson's talent scout. He dangled the carrot of a lucrative future contract before her eyes - 'After The War'.

*

In the U.K. Eric, who had been commissioned whilst on his squadron, was one of thousands of Australian aircrew in limbo as, in fact, were members of all Commonwealth Air Forces during the months of relocation planning following VE-Day. The atomic bomb attacks on Japan put an end to all uncertainties as Japan capitulated.

It still took three months before Eric was on the 'Stirling Castle' bound for the Antipodes.

Eileen had written to him telling him of the offer of an ice-skating contract. By coincidence, at about the same time Eric, now almost 22, had dinner and some long conversations in London with a former Prima Donna, Constance Driever and her husband. Connie was encouraging Eric to take his discharge in the U.K. She wanted to train his singing voice and direct him towards an operatic career. In a letter to Eileen, he told her about the exciting offer. But, he said, he intended to return to Australia first.

At Freemantle, Eric sent Eileen a telegram asking her to meet him in Sydney, or rather, at the Personnel Depot at Bankstown.

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Busload after busload of Australian aircrew rolled into Bankstown to be reunited with their kitbags which were laid out in rows on the parade ground in alphabetical order of surnames.

As Eric searched for his kitbag, he saw a slim figure looking in his direction.

"Is it her"? he asked himself.

"Is it him"? she asked herself.

As they clasped each other in their arms, Eric said "Will you marry me"?

"Of course I will" replied Eileen.

"How about your JCW contract"?

“No. I’m getting married instead”.

Cautiously Eileen asked “What do you intend to do about Connie’s offer”?

Eric looked deeply into Eileen’s eyes. “That was yesterday’s excitement. I’m going to get married, too”.

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I, Eileen Cathcart, hereby waive copyright to the story 'A Pair Of Illegals' whilst retaining the right to be recognized as the author.

**A PAIR OF ILLEGALS
BY
EILEEN CATHCART**

The date was October 1945 and World War 2 was over.

My friend Marie and I shared, with the rest of Australia, a mixture of emotions. There was immense relief that the killing had stopped. There was sadness that so many would not return. Yet there was also joy - the euphoria of anticipating reunions with loved ones and, in the words of the song, seeing 'the lights go on again all over the world'.

We were two WAAAFs who had spent four years in Melbourne units, and were currently at Air Force Headquarters (Directorate of Telecommunications and Radar). We liked to tell people that 'We fought the Battle of St. Kilda Road'.

Right now, sitting at a table in the canteen, devouring our normal two-course meal of a glass of milk and a chocolate-coated Poly Waffle, we experienced another emotion - boredom. Just hanging about, working at mundane tasks while we waited for our discharge date, seemed so pointless. Both of us were due to go on leave next week, but as we had little money, we would be restricted to the local scene. Neither of us had parental homes, so a week of local leave was as attractive as our work - pointless and boring now that the stress had gone out of our daily tasks.

Marie looked glumly into her glass of milk, and spoke about her current heart-throb. In yearning tones, she said "I wish Peter was here - but he's in Townsville". As she said 'Townsville'. she looked up and met my gaze. We were both suddenly wide-eyed and silently questioning. I broke the silence by saying "We couldn't. Or could we"? Glancing around to make sure that no-one could hear us, we went into a conspiratorial huddle.

Peter, a Wireless Air Gunner, had been posted to Townsville, and had left Melbourne from RAAF Laverton on one of the many Dakotas which were being sent to Singapore and beyond to repatriate former prisoners-of-war.

Discussing ways and means, it soon became obvious that, through official channels, we would not stand a chance of doing what we had in mind. So we looked at the possibility of doing it 'unofficially'. That, of course, was a euphemism for 'illegally'.

Marie had access to official rubber stamps. Those stamps on Memorandum paper, with an indecipherable scrawl followed by S/Ldr comprised a 'chit'. Chits opened all sorts of doors.

The following Monday, each armed with an 'official' Interstate Leave Pass, plus an authority to wear khaki uniform whilst travelling, we went to the Transport Movement Office (TMO) at Laverton.

Going north was no problem because many aircraft were lightly laden with freight and personnel. The chits worked wonderfully well, and by Tuesday afternoon, we were enjoying the hot tropical sunshine of Townsville.

The duty transport driver took us into Townsville from RAAF Garbutt, and we two Melbourne girls were thrilled to see palm trees with their long feathered leaves waving gently in the late afternoon's balmy sea breeze. Brilliant splashes of colour from bouganvilleas added to the wonderful sight of a town spreading around the base of a sky-scraping Castle Hill. We were travelling light, and were deposited with our few possessions, outside the YWCA.

The room at the 'Y' was not expensive, but paying for bed and breakfast left us with money for a few phone calls, but precious little else. We were not really worried about money, because Peter would be good for a small loan until payday.

Upon opening the door of our room, we saw white nets suspended from wooden frames above our beds. We thought we had walked into a movie set. It was our first-ever sight of mosquito nets. Feeling - oh, so glamorous, both of us stretched out on our respective beds, letting the nets hang down over us as we each lit a cigarette.

Marie called from her bed "How would the kids in the barracks like to be in the shoes of their China Plates"? Rhyming slang was the in thing with we girls. 'Mates' were China Plates and we sometimes abbreviated that to 'China'.

"We mightn't have very much money" I replied, "but we sure know how to live".

Wednesday dawned bright, clear and hot, and Marie was full of excitement as she began her search for Peter. We did not know where to start, but both of us had great faith that someone would help us in the Big Brother environment that was the RAAF, and we were right.

Back at the TMO on the air base at Garbutt, Marie applied her 'damsel in distress' approach. She spent a long time with a sympathetic sergeant who seemed to own the telephone on his desk.

While he rang his contacts, I was sipping endless cups of tea supplied by an endless chain of airmen.

About mid-morning, Marie reappeared at my side.

Brightly, I said "Have you found him, Ma"?

With quivering lip, Marie nodded.

"Well, where is he? What's up China? What's the matter"?

Despondently, Marie said "He sailed yesterday on a Search and Rescue Crash Boat going to Port Moresby".

Our wonderful world came tumbling down. Here we were, two thousand miles from home, and only some loose change in our pockets. We could not call on official administrative channels to help us because our false papers would be detected, and we would be charged with a variety of misdemeanours.

One aspect of Marie's character was her ability to bounce back. After dabbing her eyes, she said "Let's have a conference, China".

Sitting on an outside bench under the awning of the building, we looked out over the tarmac where Dakotas were constantly coming and going.

We agreed that we had to jump on an aeroplane going south, so we sat and waited. As each crew came in, we asked their destination. Most were going north, some were slip crews overnighing in Townsville, but by mid-afternoon, not one was heading south.

Our prospects were decidedly dim. Another night at the 'Y' was out of the question - we couldn't afford it. Our empty stomachs told us that we had to come up with a survival idea quickly, so we went into another conspiratorial huddle.

The answer came to us.

Asking our friendly TMO airmen where the WAAAF officer-in-charge could be found, we were transported right to her door.

Confronting Madam WAAAF, an old lady of fully 32 years, we told her that we were in Townsville on leave. That was supported by our papers. Dejectedly, but not tearfully, we told her that we had been to a dance the night before, and that (fingers crossed) our money had been stolen. We were going back to Melbourne next day on a RAAF aircraft, but we had nowhere to sleep that night.

Madam WAAAF did not lecture us about how silly we were to leave our handbags on the seat while we were dancing. She was too compassionate for that. She called in a WAAAF from the Orderly Room, and told her to find us beds in the 'Waffery', to issue us with 'eating irons', and to introduce us to some of the girls.

Our gratitude was genuine, and she was so helpful, that we both had a twinge of conscience for the necessity of our deceit. In our adversity, Marie and I were getting so much help from all quarters that we were really touched by the spirit of friendship shown by people who were complete strangers to us. The TMO transport had waited for us, so we were taken back to TMO to collect our belongings.

Picking up our bags, we took a last late-afternoon look at the tarmac.

We sat on our bench, watching a group of ex-POWs being transported by bus from a Dakota. The crew of 3 Flying Officers came across the tarmac towards the TMO building. They glanced in our direction. Automatically, and a little self-consciously, I tugged my skirt down over my knees.

As they approached the door near our seat, I called out "Excuse me, you don't happen to be going south, do you"?

"How far south" asked the pilot

"We have to get to Melbourne" I replied.

The three young men glanced at each other.

"How badly do you need to get to Melbourne" the pilot queried.

"Really, really badly" Marie replied with deep emphasis.

He came over, sat beside us and introduced himself as Wilf Molloy.

"Tell me about it" he said.

Our whole saga tumbled out - the whole truth- as he listened attentively.

"I will take you as far as Amberley" he promised. "Meet me here at 0630 tomorrow morning".

With that, he joined the other members of his crew.

Marie and I looked at each other and started to laugh. At least we were on our way.

As I said my prayers that night, I made a promise to the Almighty that somehow, I would repay kindness with kindness.

Next morning at 6 o'clock, we rang the Duty Driver and asked if she could take us to TMO. She obliged.

At the TMO, Wilf arranged for us to be issued with an all-important piece of paper. It was a Southwest Pacific Area Air Travel Authority (Passenger), signed by ACW L. Darney. That wonderful piece of paper (carefully preserved) authorized us to 'travel at Class 4 priority on Service aircraft from Townsville to Melbourne' Naturally, we were delighted. Once at Amberley, we had the authority for further travel to Melbourne.

Wilf held up his hands in mock horror as Marie and I gabbled our profuse thanks.

With a grin, he said "Shut up both of you, and listen for a change. My crew and I had a talk last night. We have three days leave due to us at the end of this trip. My WAG has a wife in Sydney, and my second pilot's wife lives in Melbourne. So when we get to Amberley, we intend to tell the powers that be that we are prepared to forego our leave. That we will take passengers and freight to Melbourne first, then the same to Sydney, provided we can overnight in both places. Then we'll bring a load back to Amberley. No guarantees, mind, but that's the plan".

Open-mouthed, I stared at Wilf. "You're prepared to do that for us? You really are the tops".

Again, Wilf gave his infectious grin. "No, kiddo. I'm doing this for all of us. You kids need a break, but so do my crew. If this tactic works, everybody wins. Now come on out to our aircraft. We've got work to do".

With light hearts, Marie and I settled into our canvas seats and began talking to the ex-POWs, who had already boarded the Dakota. Some of the men were withdrawn, and did not wish to converse. Others seemed to have forgotten how to make light-hearted conversation with girls. Yet others were happy to chat with two effusive fellow-travellers.

During the climb to cruising altitude, the Wireless Operator appeared, to tell us that Wilf would like to see us in the cockpit. Wilf asked us if we would mind doing a job as acting unpaid air hostesses to his passengers.

So began the verbal interaction between two high-spirited girls and a plane-full of war-weary young men. Communication was conducted by shouting to each other in the high-noise, high-vibration environment of a non-insulated military aircraft interior.

Marie and I moved backwards and forwards, relaying Wilf's messages, and details of our position on our coastal track. If any of the boys lived in towns on or near our track, Wilf would spend a few minutes circling the town to give them a look.

Our role was to stimulate our passengers' minds away from introspection, and into a state of activity. Time has dimmed the memory of the methods we used, but the successes of our efforts are reflected in memorabilia which I still hold.

Addresses and signatures on scraps of paper remind me that some of our new-found friends were VX21733 Pte. F.C. Aitkin and VX20174 Edward C. Grigg (Thanks for the company) of 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, VX22304 Cpl. Keith Brown of 105th Transport Company, and PA1945 SBA Andy Mitchell ex HMAS 'PERTH'.

On one of my visits to the cockpit, Wilf said to the 2nd pilot "Have a break for a while, Smithy. Smithy vacated the right-hand seat and pulled down the folding 'jump seat' behind the pilots' positions.

Wilf motioned me to sit in the 2nd pilot's seat. "Take the wheel in your hands and put your feet on the rudder pedals".

I followed his instructions with some trepidation, for the control column and pedals seemed to have minds of their own. They jiggled and moved as if someone else was in control. I glanced at Wilf. His hands were not on his wheel and his legs were tucked back against his seat.

I panicked and said "What do I do"?

A serious-faced Wilf said "You're doing fine. Just keep her flying, although you're drifting a bit far out to sea".

In shrill tones, I squawked "How do I get it back"?

With a cheeky grin, Wilf said "Leave it to George".

"Who is George"? I almost yelled.

"The auto-pilot. Automatic pilot, you earthling".

Only then, when I heard burst of laughter from Smithy, did it dawn on me that I had been the butt of an aircrew joke.

I laughed along with them. "I don't know how I'll do it, but I'll get you both for this. You just wait".

"Can't wait. Time to distribute lunch boxes" Wilf said.

Handing out the lunch boxes did not take long. Marie had a weak airborne stomach, so she offered her food around and tucked her cardboard lunch box under her seat. She said "I don't want the tucker, but I may need the box later" - which she did.

During the flight, in conversation with the pilots, I remarked that I did not know which squadron they belonged to, nor where they had been operating since they left Australia. Producing his wallet, Wilf took out a ten cent note issued by the Board of Commissioners of Currency (Malaya) as 'Legal tender in the Straits Settlements and Malay States'. The back of the note was blank, so he headed it 'No. 34 Squadron', and listed their aircraft landing points as:

Singapore; Bangkok - SIAM (now THAILAND); Pakanboroe and Palembang - SUMATRA; Labuan - BORNEO; Zamboanga - PHILIPPINES; Morotai, Biak and Merauke - DUTCH EAST INDIES (now INDONESIA); thence Townsville, and terminating at Amberley.

The three young Flying Officers then signed their names on the front of the note. That defaced note with a former value of ten cents (Malay) is worth to me, a million dollars in memories, and will never be disposed of in my lifetime.

Approaching Amberley, as stage one of our homeward journey was closing, I reflected on the last two days, and thought about the camaraderie, goodwill and wonderful friendships which had flowed into the lives of my China Plate and myself. I felt humbled by the experience.

Neither Marie nor I had thought about our arrival at Amberley. The Red Cross was there with welcoming crowds of Service people, civilians and press photographers.

We stood by the doorway, and our fellow passengers all embraced us as they passed, down the steps and out of our lives.

Marie and I left the Dakota just ahead of the crew, and just a bit teary, but suddenly very much aware that, as illegals, we did not want our pictures splashed over newspapers.

Two Red Cross ladies at the foot of the steps held out compassionate hands towards us. Marie looked pale and ill from being airsick, and I realised "O God! They think we're ex-POW nurses".

They started to ask questions.

Thinking quickly, I said in pained tones "Thank you for your interest, but we would prefer not to talk about it. Could you do us a favour and screen our faces from photographers, please"?

Compassion once again came to the fore as the Red Cross ladies protected us like mother hens.

Wilf came over and said quietly "Wait for me at TMO. I'll be back in an hour with some answers".

We escaped to the anonymity of TMO.

Attitudes were so different to our Townsville TMO experience. Asked by a sergeant what our business was, we showed our Air Travel Authority. He wrote 'sweaters' (sweating on opportunity travel) on the top, handed it back, pointed to some seats and said off-handedly "You can wait there".

When Wilf returned, he said "It's on".

We danced delightedly around him. "Knock it off" he admonished. "You're back in the Land of Officialdom again. Meet me under the wing of our aircraft at 0630 tomorrow. See you then, kids. Oh, by the way, the Waffery has transit accomodation. Just show Madam WAAAF your Travel Authority. I've paved the way".

With that, he left.

Ever the romantic, Marie looked at his retreating figure and commented wistfully "What a wonderful man. I wonder if he's married".

Refreshed, breakfasted and excited, we met the crew at 0630. The WAG and 2nd pilot boarded the aircraft which was choked with freight, but only four passengers. Wilf told us to go aboard. As we reached the top of the steps, a snippy, self-important little corporal said "Names"? We told him. Checking his papers, he snapped "Not on the manifest. Off"!

We wilted.

A voice behind us said in unruffled tones "Supernumerary Crew, corp. Into the cockpit ACWs and learn your cockpit drill with Flying Officer Smith".

We scampered aboard, past the passengers comprising two RAF Wing Commanders, plus two 'sweaters', - 123209 LAC R. Archer of 39 Clifford Street Toowoomba and F4581 Stoker W. Burston RAN, Perth (To fellow hitch-hikers going dataway) - then up over the piled-up freight and into the cockpit.

We must have been a bit over-enthusiastic as we scrambled backwards and forwards during the trip because, as we were leaving the plane at Laverton, one of the English Wing Commanders asked "Are all Australian girls like you two"?

On reflection, I like to think that we were representative of the times.

A FOOTNOTE OF COINCIDENCE

BY
ERIC CATHCART

In 1953, I was based at RAAF Base Garbutt (Townsville's Military/Civil Joint-user Airport) as an Area Air Traffic Control Officer, and had finished duty for the night.

I met the captain and co-pilot of a Civil Airline aircraft which was overnighting, and I invited them to the Officers' Mess for a nightcap.

The captain introduced himself as Wilf Molloy. Recognizing the name, I asked him if he remembered giving two 'illegal' WAAAFs a lift from Townsville to Melbourne in late 1945.

Wilf said "Good God"! Did you marry one of those girls? They were great as unofficial hosties during that trip".

I identified Eileen as my wife of six years at that stage.

Wilf and I became good periodic friends who shared a noggin or two on his stopover nights if they coincided with my overnights at Garbutt.

We heard an unconfirmed report in later years that Wilf had died of a heart attack at a relatively early age.

THE FLAME CONTINUES

The time-worn phrase “a heart overflowing with love” has become a Mills and Boon type cliché, but according to my reasoning, the accuracy of the statement makes the phrase acceptable.

In the early part of our life together, I experienced a “turn-over” of my heart each time I looked at Eileen, the girl I loved and married.

I don't know what my expectations were. I suppose I thought that those floppy-heart feelings were aberrations experienced only by the young.

But I was wrong.

The 80-year window of life draws close as I write and I look at the framed photograph of “my girl” on the wall of my office. Taken 60 years ago at St. Kilda beach in Melbourne, it resided in the top pocket of my uniform for nearly 30 years. I experience now, the same heart-overflow feelings as I gaze, not only at the photograph, but at the dearly-loved smiling face just appearing at my office door.

Our lives together have really been one life shared. While retaining our individual personalities and opinions and experiencing the ebb and flow of a variety of emotions, we have been fortunate in having the strength of our love to act as a shock-absorber to even out the rough parts and the potholes in the road of life.

We have found that true love carries tolerance, compassion and mutual consideration in its wake, all of which can be used to great effect when any sign of selfishness surfaces.

Being part of the the Permanent Defence Force can be a nomadic type of existence. In the Royal Australian Air Force of my era, we were often subject to moves after two years, sometimes less, sometimes more, without the benefit of choosing to stay put. The moves may have been a few miles, or to the other side of this large island continent or overseas. One of my postings, for example, was from Townsville to East sale in Victoria in mid-winter. The next was to Butterworth, Malaya, during the Malayan Emergency.

Disruptions to family life called for love and understanding from both parties, and I knew that at all times, I could depend on just that from my life partner.

From 1951, as an Air Traffic Control Officer, I experienced 13 years of shift work and numerous absences from home on a variety of attachments. The irregular hours of work and separations from family during the children's formative years would place strains on any marriage and would test the strength of conjugal love.

The dart that Cupid released to strike Eileen and me all those years ago, must have contained a potent dose of true love. Not only did it help us through those 13 years, but it has remained the prime stimulant in our mutual affection ever since.

During the remainder of my RAAF service, the administrative nature of my appointments took me away from my home even more. Staff visits alone took 20 weeks out of each year during the last four years.

True love gives credence to the adage “absence makes the heart grow fonder”. That certainly was the case in our 2-year separation during World War 2. Extending that thought to the latter part of my Service life, I worked hard at cutting a day or two off each

of my staff visits to get back earlier to the one who was also working hard at maintaining our home as a welcoming haven.

My separation from the RAAF took place in May 1975 when I elected early retirement three and a half years before my mandatory retirement date at age 55.

After 28 years of roving during my time in the Air Force, and now that our children were finding their own ways in life, you would think that "Darby and Joan" would seek to remain static in the retired state we had reached.

The Roman Cupid must have handed over his love duties to the Greek Eros who gave us both an injection of "work ethic" which directed us into a love of self-employment for the next seventeen years.

Included in that activity was a change of our final home in Brisbane to a final-final home on the Gold Coast which incidentally, was our 30th domicile during our married life.

We survived two bouts of "posting fever" in our first four years here, but after 26 years in situ, we feel that our roots are now deeply embedded in Helensvale soil.

Eileen's ice skates have been hung up long since, in favour of hanging her paintings (more than 50) in other people's homes.

I do some scribbling for pleasure, and am honorary archivist for the Gold Coast Branch of the Aircrew Association, recording all kinds of military flying activity by members, covering the last 68 years of flying.

Wedding anniversaries are very special to us both. In these more mature years, we look forward with gratitude to the arrival of each anniversary. So we are pleased that our 54th is just around the corner.

Oh - by the way, we are as much in love now as we were when the ageless Cupid cast his dart nearly 60 years ago.

* * * * *

Archival note: I wrote this story for the Beutel Family from details provided by Mr. John Beutel, promising him that I would not have the story published without his express permission. He has authorized its inclusion in these archives for publication in the RAAF Museum website. Accordingly, I hereby waive copyright whilst retaining the right to recognition as its author. E.C.

BILLO GAVE HIS ALL

Recorded in the Centenary of Federation year of 2001, this is a true story about the strength of family love and about a problem which took an Australian family more than half a century to resolve through devotion and persistence.

The narrative relates to the short life of a young man who, during World War Two, died far away from his country and from his close-knit and loving family unit. It reveals how the pain of loss of life in war impinged upon a collective family memory. That pain could be allayed only by knowing in greater detail, the events leading up to the end of a life.

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Bill Beutel's life began in May 1924 when he was born to Wilhelm August and Mary (nee O'Reilly) Beutel a few years before his parents began farming at Brigalow, a small community on the western verge of Queensland's Darling Downs.

Christened William, the eldest of seven siblings (four girls and three boys), his name was lovingly abbreviated to 'Billo', and that name stayed with him within the family circle for the whole of his life and beyond.

During his childhood, Bill Beutel attended the small one-teacher school at Brigalow. When he was ready for secondary education, his parents sent him to a Toowoomba boarding college. That was, and still is, a more costly secondary education alternative for children being raised in the bush, but one which parents perceive as having both work-related and social advantages.

In the post-depression era in Australia, long-term security was a most important element in locating a job, and Bill considered himself fortunate in gaining a clerical position in a bank close to home.

Bank transfers were as common as school-teacher transfers in the employment market of the day. So it was not long before Bill, as an employee of the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac), was transferred to tropical Bowen, a coastal town in North Queensland.

World War Two had entered its fourth year when Bill was attested into the Royal Australian Air Force on 5th November 1942 as an eighteen-year-old aircrew trainee after serving some months on the Aircrew Reserve.

RAAF aircrew training was conducted under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), a remarkable flying training scheme set up within the British Commonwealth of Nations. Spread over the United Kingdom, Canada, Southern Rhodesia, Kenya, Iraq, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, young men were trained to fight the enemies of freedom in air-to-air and air-to-ground conflict.

Bill trained as an air gunner under EATS, initially at flying training schools in Queensland and New South Wales, before leaving Sydney on 11th August 1943 to travel to the United Kingdom (UK) via the United States of America.

After completing operational training, Bill was posted to No. 106 (RAF) Squadron at Metheringham on 17th May 1944. His final sortie was to a German V1 'Buzz-Bomb' launch site in France just over five weeks later on the night of 24/25 June 1944.

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One of the saddest tasks of the times was the gathering together of personal belongings of young airmen killed in action. At squadron level the officer appointed to carry out such a 'Personal Adjustment' took great care to ensure that every personal possession was recorded for packing and ultimate delivery to next-of-kin.

Occasionally some item or items were not received by families, perhaps because they could not be located by the Adjusting Officer, or were somehow mislaid in storage or transportation. That often occasioned family distress. The Beutel family experienced such a situation because Billo's flying log book was never received by them. Accordingly, they had no record of his flying activities and more importantly to them, no record of his flying in the UK nor in operations.

Billo's parents made some attempts to locate their son's log book and to learn of his squadron activities. Lack of understanding of the military system hampered their search and they were never able to gain knowledge of his final days.

The Beutel family was devastated at the loss of their dearly-loved Billo, but they got on with the task of making a living on their Brigalow property. However, the feeling of frustration at the lack of knowledge of Billo's last days continued to surface for his siblings, particularly John and his older brother Bernie, during the whole of their lives.

John and Bernie worked together in later years, and their business interests took them away from the Darling Downs, culminating in a successful enterprise on Queensland's Gold Coast. It was only in retirement that they found time in the mid-1990s to make further resolute efforts to locate the two RAF aircrew members who had survived the last flight of Lancaster LL975.

A search through official channels proved fruitless. The RAF had no record other than the wartime addresses of the two crew members, and they had long since moved on. That made the Beutel brothers even more determined to do everything in their power to get the information they sought. Years of following a variety of avenues provided no positive results, but their search went on despite experiencing many frustrating false leads and blind alleys.

In the first part of the year 2000 they placed an advertisement in an RAF ex-service magazine, enquiring about crew survivors of that fatal flight. At long last, in July 2000 they received a response. It was from a Scotsman named Bill Knaggs, the crew's former bomb-aimer, who was then the sole surviving crew member of Lancaster LL975. The other survivor had died in 1984.

It transpired that Bill Knaggs was not even a subscriber to the magazine which had carried the Beutels' enquiry. One of the former ground crew from No. 106 Squadron was browsing through his copy and read the request for information. Knowing the whereabouts of the survivor, he alerted Bill to the Aussie quest. Given the crew survival

circumstances and the passage of fifty-six years, the odds against a successful outcome to the magazine item were incalculable. Service camaraderie and family persistence had paid off!

Amid great excitement, letters were exchanged, followed by a number of phone calls. Those communications culminated in John and his brother heading off to Scotland to meet the ex-bomb-aimer.

Other former members of No. 106 Squadron who had experienced the raid on Pommereval on 24/25 June 1944 also responded to the advertisement, and the brothers planned to meet with some of them. Unfortunately, Lady Luck was out of sorts, for when they arrived in the UK there were demonstrations and road blockades associated with fuel problems in that country. So it was just not possible to go ahead with planned meetings because of time constraints.

Undaunted, and with great expectations, they went to Scotland to meet with Bill Knaggs. The purest way of describing Bill's reaction to the Beutel brothers is by using John's own words. "Bill Knaggs went out of his way to photocopy, at personal expense, all pages of his 'book of memories' about his Air Force life prior to and including operational action. He even had some crew photographs which he had taken at RAF Metherringham (a definite no-no at the time). After his life in Civvy Street, and in retirement, he obtained colour photographs of the grave site at St. Sever (France) which included graves of the five crew members who didn't return. He had colour copies done for us, which was indeed most gracious. I like to think of that as a necessary part of his own healing".

The brothers added all Bill Knaggs's detail to that contained in UK communications received after the initial response to their advertisement. Additional information was gleaned from a book titled 'In The Middle Of Nowhere - Metherringham' by Richard Bailey, published in the UK in 1999.

At last, they were able to put together all the pieces of the jigsaw associated with Billo's life from the time of his arrival in the U.K. until his untimely death.

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On 16th October 1943, Billo arrived in Brighton, a popular seaside resort on England's south coast in the county of Sussex. Brighton had become the UK reception location for all RAAF aircrew, the RAAF having established a Personnel Depot which embraced two hotels on the waterfront, the 'Metropole' and the 'Grand'. They contained both the administration organization and aircrew accommodation which was very basic for transient personnel. The Metropole housed NCOs, and officers were accommodated in the Grand.

As a Sergeant Air Gunner (later promoted to Flight Sergeant) Billo would have been living in the Metropole until his on-posting. He would also have made the acquaintance of two vastly dissimilar officers.

He and all the members of his arrival group would have known the Commanding Officer of the Personnel Depot, Wing Commander Andy Swan. To all Australian aircrew in the UK he was 'Swanny', a disciplinarian of the old school, being a former Disciplinary Warrant Officer.

Each batch of new arrivals, both officers and NCOs, met him on a parade in the street outside the Metropole Hotel. Dressed in full uniform, covered by a service raincoat which carried no rank insignia, his standard address was:

“Have a good look at this face. You will see me in a variety of situations. You will see me around Brighton riding a bicycle or on foot. You will see me in this raincoat or you will see me in full uniform”. At that point he would remove his raincoat.

“I am Wing Commander Swan, and I am your Commanding Officer. Any time our paths cross, no matter how I am dressed, you will salute me as a sign that you recognize my authority. Failure to do so will incur my wrath which would not be a pleasant thing for you to experience”.

Stern disciplinarian he may have been, but actually his bark was worse than his bite. Nevertheless, his bark was sufficient to encourage all the high-spirited young men under his command, to tread warily.

The other officer he would have met was was right at the other end of the disciplinary scale. RAAF Padre, Chaplain David Byer was a man beloved by all his Air Force flock, whoever or wherever they were. Although being as sharp as a tack, he was as soft as a lamb. His approach was illustrated by a sign in large print above his office door ‘ABANDON RANK ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE’.

Billo did not have long to wait before being posted to No. 17 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Turweston during November 1943. He became a member of a Wellington crew which flew with a variety of staff pilots before being ‘crewed up’ with their Australian pilot, Flight Sergeant Wright, in late December 1943.

In early January 1944, No. 17 OTU was moved to RAF Silverstone north-east of Oxford (now an international raceway), still using Wellingtons for training. Flight Sergeant Wright’s crew followed the pattern of all Bomber Command aircrew, becoming a very close-knit team which consisted of three Australians, three Scots and one Englishman. Considering the strains and stresses that bomber crews were placed under, even in training, an unusual feature of that particular crew was that not one member smoked, and the whole crew was teetotal.

From Silverstone, on 3rd April 1944 the crew was sent to No.1660 Conversion Unit (CU) at Swinderby to convert to Stirlings, then to No.5 Lancaster Flying School (LFS) at Syerston where they arrived on 9th May to convert to Lancasters and complete their training. As a point of interest, later in 1944, Stirling conversions were deleted from the training process. Lancaster Flying Schools became Heavy Conversion Units (HCUs) and crews converted direct from Wellingtons to Lancasters.

Billo’s crew position was rear gunner operating the tail turret. He and the rest of his crew arrived at No. 106 Squadron at Metheringham on 17th May 1944. Their first operational trip involved a 5 hour sortie on 27th May, taking off at 11 p.m. The target was Nantes Railway Junction 150 miles or so south of Cherbourg. After their first ‘blooding’ sortie, the crew was involved in squadron training flights on four separate days.

June 3rd saw them on their next operational trip with an 11.30 p.m. take-off for a raid on an anti-aircraft battery 5 miles north of Bologne, nearly 200 miles east of Paris, with an elapsed flight time of about three and a half hours. That raid was followed on 5th June by an attack on an anti-aircraft battery at St. Pierre Aumont, deeper into France, 70-odd miles from the Mediterranean Sea. That sortie involved a 2.45 a.m. take-off and they arrived back at their base at 8 a.m.

The crew carried out an attack on 15th June, targetting an ammunition dump at Chatellerault, nearly 100 miles south-west of Orleans. It was another long trip of 6 hours 15 minutes.

To sharpen operational techniques the crew was involved in squadron training in blind bombing techniques on June 18th. That involved practising radar methods of bombing through cloud and locating targets by radar in case they were required to bomb without the help of target markers which were usually laid by Path Finder Lancasters.

At 10.55 p.m. on 19th June, Billo's aircraft was one of 16 from No. 106 Squadron which took off for a briefed raid on a V1 Storage Plant at Watten, about 40 miles south-east of Calais. An hour out from Metheringham, the whole force was recalled and the raid was aborted. Reasons were not recorded. There could have been weather problems, or any of a dozen reasons for the recall.

A Synthetic Oil Refinery at Gelsenkirchen, deep into Germany's Ruhr Valley just a few miles north-east of Essen, was the Squadron's next target on 21st June. The Ruhr Valley was Germany's industrial heart and a prime target for Bomber Command. A natural result was that it was one of the most heavily defended areas of Germany. With a take-off time of 11.15 p.m. Billo's aircraft was one of twenty from No. 106 Squadron to take part in the raid. Two of those aircraft did not return. On that particular trip, the hydraulics on Billo's turret failed. His reduced capacity would have been galling as he sat in his isolated tail position sucking oxygen as the plane trundled along at its briefed height of 17 000 feet.

The crew's final raid was on the V1 launch site at Pommereval in France. In 1944, the V1 menace was causing a civilian morale problem in the UK because German targeting was 'random'. The low-flying bomb dropped wherever the fuel ran out. In typically British style, 'Punch' magazine portrayed the cartoon figures of people in the street with one oversized ear permanently pointed skywards, waiting for the putt-putt of the V1's engine to cut out.

On the night of 24/25 June 1944, a massive force of seven hundred and thirtynine Lancasters attacked seven V1 launch sites. Of that force, twentythree Lancasters failed to return to their bases. On the Pommereval target, four aircraft were lost, one from No. 106 Squadron, two from No.44 (Rhodesia) Squadron and one from No. 49 (RAF) Squadron.

Bill Knaggs was persuaded to talk to the Beutel brothers about that fateful trip. He told them that, as bomb-aimer, he had just dropped the bomb load when their Lancaster was hit and was massively damaged. Almost immediately, the Australian pilot ordered the crew to bail out. There was no acknowledgement from either the mid-upper gunner or the rear gunner.

After he dropped out of the forward hatch, the bomb-aimer could see his Lancaster ahead. Both inboard engines were on fire. He saw another parachute canopy open, then seconds later the Lancaster's port wing exploded and the crippled plane spiralled down to crash.

Following his safe descent, Bill Knaggs walked ahead in the plane's direction of flight in the hope of making contact with the only other parachutist. The other crew member was captured by a German patrol and eventually sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Poland, so it was lucky for Bill that they did not meet up.

In understated fashion, Bill Knaggs said he had some 'difficult' times on the run, evading capture for three months with the help of the French Resistance Movement. Eventually, he made his way back to the UK courtesy of U.S. General 'Blood and Guts' Patton's army.

John and Bernie expressed their deep gratitude to Bill for his help in satisfying the Beutel family's life-long aching need to fill the void which had resulted from their lack of

knowledge of Billo's last weeks of life. The detail they now possessed comforted the brothers, and with a sense of calmness upon them, they travelled to the St. Sever War Cemetery in Rouen, France to pay their family's last respects to their brother and finally put their memory of Billo to rest.

Archival note: After speaking to John Beutel, I sent Bill Knaggs a copy of this story. In reply, Bill sent me a copy of a book he had written titled 'The Easy Trip'. It contained details of the fateful flight and a record of his three months as an RAF evader. The book is dedicated to the memory of his crew and his evasion helpers who "...risked all to keep me free". We worked at trying to contact his Australian pilot's family to send them a copy of his book. Subsequently he located them through his own efforts - but that's another story. Bill and I correspond at Xmas. Such is the camaraderie of Service Aircrew, past and present. E.C.

Archival note: During World War Two, locations of media reports were classified material so the generic terms 'Dateline and *'Somewhere in* were used to mask dates and locations. Those terms have been used in the following true story to be indicative of the times. This story was written in memory of my brother. With its inclusion in these archives, I waive copyright to 'Date Lines' whilst retaining recognition as its author. E.C.

DATE LINES

Dateline: Winter 1942. Somewhere in England.

RAAF Flying Officer Doug Cathcart was on the final trip of his first operational tour as a fighter pilot. He was flying a protective cap several thousand feet above a bomber stream which was returning to UK bases from a mission to Germany. As he scanned the vista below he spotted an intruder flying at low level. It was late afternoon and Doug was about to leave his cap position and return to base because light was fading and his fuel was low.

Looking at his fuel gauge, he said to himself "He's mine. There's enough for one pass so make it count young feller. This is your last chance to notch up a kill". Putting his Hurricane into a dive from 20,000 feet (6100m), he speared toward the intruder, recognizing his quarry as a JU87 dive bomber, a Stuka (the word is a contraction of the unpronounceable Sturzkamphflugzeug).

At that stage of the war JU87s were being used by the Luftwaffe for 'tip and run' raids. Their method of attack in that role was to run to the target at low level below radar cover, just before dusk. They would pull up to gain height about ten miles before reaching the target, dive bomb then head for home, again at low level under cover of gathering darkness and below radar cover.

Doug was closing rapidly with the Stuka as he made a quick appreciation of his attack alternatives. There was a blanket of high cirrus cloud above 30,000 feet (9150m) so if he attacked his target from above and behind, the gunner in the rear seat of the Stuka would see him quite clearly against a white sky. Doug did not fancy being on the receiving end of the Stuka gunner's two 7.9 millimetre machine guns so he considered other methods. The best technique was to attack from below and behind but that was not possible because the Stuka was flying at almost tree-top level.

"Trees! That's it! If I make an oblique attack from the starboard rear quarter at the same altitude as the Stuka, that will make it difficult for the gunner to see me against a background of trees. Here we go!"

Running in with a speed advantage of 130 miles per hour (208 kph) plus some extra speed picked up in the dive, Doug held his fire until he closed to 200 yards (180m). Pressing his firing button he raked the Stuka with the eight .303 calibre machine guns in the wings of his aircraft. The Stuka's gunner returned fire and Doug saw a smatter of close tracer as he went into a left climbing turn over the dive bomber. Continuing his turn to check the results of his attack he could see smoke streaming from the intruder which was making a slow right turn onto a reciprocal heading for home. Now at 2000 feet (610m) Doug said "Blast! I can't claim a kill and I'm too short of fuel to give chase, but that's one sick aeroplane. Anyhow, I'll be home in time for tea".

He turned the Hurricane towards his base and decided to climb to 5,000 feet (1500m) as a

comfortable height to map-read his way home. Suddenly the engine sputtered then picked up. There was another sputter, then another, then suddenly the engine stopped! "That bloody Kraut hit me"! Doug said aloud.

Checking his altimeter he saw that he was now at 1500 feet with no power, Doug knew he had to get out - quickly! Unstrapping himself he pulled his helmet off and slid his canopy back. A glance at his altimeter told him that he was now at 900 feet as he clambered out of his cockpit. "Go now"! he muttered "or it will be too late"!

Going over the side of the aircraft his seat-pack parachute caught on the inside of the cockpit as his body dangled outside! Frantically he tried to kick himself free as his Hurricane headed earthward. Unable to free himself he did the only thing left to him - he pulled the parachute ripcord. The parachute streamed out of the seat-pack and Doug started to fall. Then, as the 'chute opened, his body paused momentarily in midair. The Hurricane's tail plane hit his back and everything went black!

*

Doug opened his eyes and saw nothing. He was cold - very cold - and disoriented. Lying on his stomach, he was aware of something flapping on top of him. Life's realities came flooding back and he realized that his parachute canopy was covering him like a shroud.

"Hey - I'm alive"! he exulted. "I must get rid of this 'chute".

Trying to roll on his side to press the harness release, he yelled as excruciating pain knifed the middle of his back. In the cocoon which was his present world all was silent, cold and dark. Digging down with his gloved fingers he felt a softness beneath him. With his thought processes slowed by trauma, it gradually penetrated his mind that he was lying on snow. Probing around under his stomach he located the round metal harness release. "Turn clockwise and press". Nothing happened. Excavating further with his right hand he dug quite a hole to give himself room to punch the harness release. He punched hard and yelled as searing pain jabbed his back once more. However, the punch had released his harness which he tediously shed and pushed his 'chute away.

Not having thought what it would be like outside his silk igloo, Doug was not prepared for the bite of the outside air or the chill breeze. He was confused also about the time of day. His reasoning capacity was slowly returning but he was unsure whether the middling dark was from a fading twilight or the weak light of a cloud-filtered moon. Having no idea how long it was since he had baled out, he had not thought to look at his perfectly serviceable pilot's watch. When he looked at its luminous dial he realized why he was so cold. He had been lying in a snowdrift for two hours!

What to do?

If he stayed where he was he could freeze to death by the time he was found. There had been no time for a distress call so nobody would know where to start looking for him or how close he was to his crashed aeroplane, wherever that may be.

Gingerly he tested his physical capabilities. He could not stand so perhaps he could crawl. Moving his legs, he did not yell with sudden pain this time because he was ready for it to hurt. But it became obvious that he could not crawl on hands and knees. Still lying on his stomach he gently moved all parts of his body. From the results he recognized that he was stuck with being in the prone position and that he would not be

able to use his legs and feet to propel himself. However, he could still use his hands, arms and shoulders without restriction. "So" he reasoned "If I am able to use my body as a snow sled without too much discomfort, I can use my hands and arms as my motive force. First up I'll try to move out of this snowdrift".

Grasping some bushes he pulled himself along a few feet. The forward-pulling movement hurt his back but the pain was not as bad as the twisting motion had been earlier. Edging out past the shrubbery which had blocked his view he seemed to be in a country area on a slight rise in an otherwise flat terrain. The ground was completely covered by a blanket of snow.

"It's all very well to be mobile" he thought "but where the hell do I go"?

Within his field of vision there was nothing to be seen but a hazy grey-whiteness of snow so he began a laboriously slow swivelling right turn to change his direction of visual search. Wincing occasionally as his back reminded him not to twist, something caught his eye as he looked over his right shoulder.

"A light! I can see a light!" he yelled to the night air, the shrubs, the snow and everything which could absorb the vibrations of his voice but no human ears heard him. He was still very much on his own except for God in whom he placed his trust. Slewing himself further around he got a better look at the light which was stationary and muted. Probably a farmhouse he suggested to himself. Trying to assess its distance from him he thought it would be between 600 and 800 yards.

The light became the complete focus of his mind. In his thoughts he could visualize the farmer and his wife sitting before a cheery fireplace blaze. He could almost feel the warmth of the room extending to him across the intervening snow. Then, as another thought came to him in his current reasoning capacity, he became alarmed and anxious to reach the light to tell his new friends to draw their blackout curtains. That light could be seen for miles by an intruder like the Stuka he had attacked. The fright of that thought brought an adrenalin rush which stirred him into action. Grasping at bushes within his reach he pulled himself along until he ran out of bushes. Then he had to use his hands, elbows, arms and upper back muscles to propel himself. That hurt more than the pulling method although it was not too bad going down the slight slope.

"God, I could do with a smoke" he thought. But God was not listening because He knew that cigarettes, matches and lighters were taboo on fighter operations. Regulations did not concern Doug too much but he observed that one religiously.

As he moved himself slowly along he had a fixation with the light. In his eyes it put his unknown friends in danger, yet if they turned it off he would lose direction. He had developed a technique of progress, dragging himself using arms and elbows over clear areas to where he could see some bushes then he would pull himself from bush to bush. During that zig-zag progress the light was his beacon, his target which guided him back on track. Without it he may as well be in some Arctic wasteland.

With all the exertion he was perspiring as he sledged his body toward his target but when he rested, the perspiration increased the chill factor. His flying gloves were icily sodden as were his flying boots, their wool interiors wet with melted snow. He could not feel his toes but he studiously kept his mind away from thoughts of frostbite.

For a long while the aiming light seemed as far away as ever. He was now giving himself an increasing number of rest periods because he was beginning to tire badly. Even though he chilled rapidly when not active, he had to be careful not to drift off to sleep when

resting, for in his present predicament sleeping was a precursor to death. So he pushed his suffering body onward.

After three hours of punishment and during one of his rest periods, his aching shoulders and pain-ridden back cried 'enough' as he started to nod off. Pulling himself back from the brink of sleep he told himself that he must go on. Raising his head to look for his beacon he could not find it.

The light had gone!

His heart pounded. Where was his target? He felt desperately lonely and deserted as if a long-time friend had left him without warning. Straining his eyes he could just make out the dim outlines of the house and an enormous sense of relief flooded through him. His unknown friends inside the house were no longer possible targets and now that he could see the house he did not need a light to guide him. That seemed an appropriate moment to thank God for having given him the fortitude to make so much progress. He went on with renewed vigour.

After another thirty minutes the house was clearly visible to him, being only a hundred yards away. He thought he would try a shout so he filled his laboured lungs with air and gave a cooee. Instead of being a reverberating noise it came out of his throat like a mew from a week-old kitten. He tried again with the same result.

Resigning himself to more body-sledding he pushed and pulled his tortured body forward for a further half hour. He stopped, stymied, at a front gate and a stone fence. "No doubt about the Brits" he thought tiredly. "Not only is an English farmer's home his castle but he hides it behind a stone fence".

Lying outside the front gate he dug down through the snow to try to find a stone to throw at what he hoped was a bedroom window. That was a real needle and haystack routine. His thought processes were slow and tiring further. Then a bright light turned on in his brain "Make yourself a snowball" said his subconscious.

Rolling a snowball the size of a cricket ball, he threw it. It went about ten feet. "Little ones" said a tired forebrain. Rolling about six golf balls of snow into ice balls he pelted them as hard as he could, grunting with pain each time he threw, when his back reminded him of its problem. He was rewarded with the sound of tinkling glass, then further rewarded with a light coming on inside the house.

A shotgun-toting figure appeared, dimly outlined in the doorway. Doug thought that he'd never heard a sweeter sound than a gruff voice yelling "Who the hell's out there"?

His own voice was as loud as he could muster as he croaked "Hurricane pilot".

The farmer advanced to the fence. Gun cocked, he pointed it at Doug. "Get up" he said.

A masterpiece of understatement emanated from Doug as he replied "Sorry, I've got a sore back". Then he fainted.

He had spent four hours crawling on his stomach suffering a broken spine.

Dateline: Autumn 1944. Somewhere in Holland.

RAAF Flight Lieutenant Doug Cathcart sat on his German motorbike outside the Commanding Officer's tent, fingers beating a tattoo on the hand throttle. It was not exactly his motorbike but in his wallet he had one of those pieces of paper so beloved of the military bureaucracy, a 'chit' stating that Doug was permitted to use the motorcycle (to be regarded as acquired salvage) whilst a member of the Second Tactical Air Force (2nd TAF) in Europe.

More than a year and a half had passed since he was admitted to hospital with a fractured spine. It had been a clean break which had miraculously knitted in precise position, possibly resulting from the type of exertion of dragging his body over the snow. His spine was as good as or even stronger than it had been previously.

After discharge from hospital and some leave (during which he did some effective courting in Leicester), he had been earmarked for training as a flying instructor. That did not suit his purpose nor his personality, so on his first day back on duty he applied to return to operational flying. Those applications continued regularly until the upper echelons of the RAF and RAAF hierarchy decided that having a good operational pilot was better than having a half-hearted instructor. Accordingly, he was posted to a Typhoon fighter-bomber training unit then to a Canadian operational squadron not long before D-Day.

Typhoons were fearsome weapons systems which were to play an important ground attack role in 2nd TAF operations after the Normandy Invasion. When equipped with rockets and forward firing guns, each aircraft had an equivalent fire power to a broadside from a World War Two Naval light cruiser. The first time Doug fired a rocket in anger was against a German tank travelling on a main road. After the attack he made a climbing turn to check results. There was no sign of his target on the road, The tank, now a twisted wreck, had been flung over a hedge into an adjacent field! He was awed by the power he now knew to be at his fingertips.

In the early stages of his squadron's operations out of an airfield near Nijmegen in eastern Holland, the pilots operated individual search and destroy missions. Later in 1944, a highly efficient and very effective 'cab rank' tactic was developed by the RAF. Under ground radio control, the rocket-firing Typhoons were directed to reported movements of armoured columns.

In attack mode a number of Typhoons followed each other in line astern from behind the column, each pilot picking off the hindmost target with one rocket. Then still in line astern, they went around in a cab rank pattern for another attack. That continued until there were no more rockets or no more targets! Typhoons were so effective in that role that there was great demand for them. As a result pilots flew up to three sorties a day every day, leading to the problem which was worrying Doug.

Now approaching the latter stages of his second operational tour and an 'old man' of twenty-nine years, he was concerned at the effect the concentrated flying effort was having on his younger contemporaries. They were twitchy, argumentative and in his opinion, being affected psychologically by the daily havoc they were wreaking. He did not realize that his own responses were mirroring the reactions of his fellow pilots.

Sitting on his motorbike he was thinking about the discussion he had just held with his C.O. He had put forward the thought that the number of individual daily sorties should be reduced and that the pilots should be granted at least one rest day a week. Doug was

reminded that there was a war on and was told that he, the C.O., was not about to go to 2nd TAF Headquarters, kick open the Air Marshal's door and make demands of that nature.

Doug started his motorbike, glared at the C.O.'s tent and said out loud "Well, if you can't do it, I can".

So he did.

Not long after that incident, in conversation with his Warrant Officer, Doug commented "You know, there are times when the Air Force can move quickly. Two days ago I was flying Typhoons over Holland and Germany. Now, here I am in Kean Street London, managing the RAAF Canteen Services Cigarette Section".

Three weeks later he received a letter from one of his squadron oppos. Couched in non-specific terms for the benefit of the censor, it read:

"Dear Doug,

I hope you are having fun dodging the buzz bombs. We now go on our deliveries once or twice a day and we are not employed full-time each week.

All your friends can now go sun baking or resting their tired brains three days each fortnight.

Grateful thanks!!"

Archival note: This fictional story has been included in acknowledgement by aircrew of the stirring work carried out by all RAAF women in all categories both in the air and on the ground. As with the other short stories, I hereby waive copyright of 'Letters Of Grace' but retain the right to be recognized as its author. E.C.

Dedicated to all former and present RAAF women for their great contribution to the nation.

LETTERS OF GRACE

Sue Bonithon rang the doorbell of her grandmother's house in Southport on Queensland's Gold Coast.

Gran, widowed for a number of years, was someone quite special to Sue and they enjoyed a closer than usual family bond. It was a purposeful visit and Sue was keen to get a response to both her news and her needs.

Upon opening the door, Gran greeted her with a smile. "Come in Sue, what brings you to me today?"

"I don't need a particular reason to visit my favourite Gran" Sue responded.

"You don't fool me a bit my girl. You are fairly bursting to tell me some earth-shattering news."

With her guard down, Sue enthused "I've been accepted for aircrew training in the RAAF."

"Oh Sue, that's wonderful. Your grandfather would have been as proud of you as I am. What category? Do you know?"

"I want to follow in granddad's footsteps and train as a pilot.

But it's your past service that I want to talk about."

"Me? I was nothing special, I was only a WAAAF corporal."

Sue bridled at her grandmother's self-deprecatory tone. "You are very special to me, so don't go selling yourself short. What I am looking for is a feeling. The type of emotion or sensitivity if you like, of being one of a distinctly important group as the World War Two WAAAFs were."

"Come and sit down while we have a cuppa" Gran invited.

They sat sipping tea at a table in the big old-fashioned country style kitchen when suddenly Gran said "I've just had a bright idea. I'll be back in a minute."

She hurried to a built-in storage cupboard in the passageway and returned carrying an ancient Arnotts biscuit tin. Placing it on the table she said "This tin contains letters of four WAAAFs, including myself, who formed a close bond all those years ago. We were on the same rookies course in Toorak, Melbourne. Our training took place at St. Catherine's School which had been taken over by the RAAF as a WAAAF Recruit Training Depot. Upper class suburb, Toorak, but our rookies course was no sinecure let me tell you."

Opening the tin, Sue saw neat bundles of yellowing letters but she did not touch them.

"Gran, these are private letters surely, with personal and private details."

"They are my dear. What better way for you to understand what camaraderie or good old military service mateship is all about? We corresponded irregularly but we kept in touch

all through the war years and in later life. You will also find carbon copies of my typewritten replies to the girls, so you will be able to gauge for yourself what the war years did for a section of young Australian womanhood. These are yours to keep now. No, don't object, hear me out. I have read these letters time and time again over the years. I have used them to refresh myself many times and I just about know them all by heart. They were always going to be yours anyway. Take them, savour them and learn from them. They are a part of me which you can absorb and retain."

Sue reached out and touched her Gran's careworn hands affectionately. "Thanks Gran for your understanding."

In the privacy of her room, Sue read and reread that treasure trove of letters which depicted the lives of the four WAAAF girls during that war which ripped the world apart and changed it forever. She knew that she would not be able to tote the large tin around during her future nomadic life yet she wanted to keep those memories alive in her mind.

She recalled her grandmother's statement about the letters being a part of her and when reading again the typewritten replies to each of the wartime WAAAFs, the answer came to her. She would select four of Gran's letters which gave an insight into wartime life in the WAAAF including one '40 years on' letter which had impressed her and which brought the kaleidoscopic pattern of World War Two WAAAF into focus.

*

Dear Joan,

How our group has scattered since our rookies days. Thanks for your letter. You sound so happy to be working on aircraft. Even the title of your RAAF Station, 'Operational Training Unit', has a ring of importance about it and underlines the value of the job you are doing. Who would have thought that a girl from a remote cattle property would be working as an electrician clambering into and around aeroplanes checking wiring, batteries, lights, generators and the like using things called ammeters and voltmeters? You are not only doing those things but by the sound of your letter, loving it. Half your luck.

As you know, after our rookies course at Toorak I was posted as an office orderly to RAAF Headquarters in Melbourne's St. Kilda Road to shuffle papers. Big move!

There are two other girls off our course here in Victoria Barracks. I am now in the Directorate of Signals, soon to change its name to 'Telecommunications and Radar'. That's the Air Force, always changing something to make it sound more accurately important, which it is I suppose.

The other girls here are Beatrice and Iris. You must remember them. When we were in Pool at Recruit Training Depot awaiting posting, we went to that Salvo's Xmas party. If you recall, a female Salvation Army Captain chaperoned us that evening as we went on foot in double line, semi-military style to the venue. The route was under an overhead road bridge, followed by a sharp turn left.

Beatrice and Iris had placed themselves on the rear of the line and as we passed under the bridge they dropped off and hid in the shadows. The mother of one of their acquaintances who lived in Toorak was hostessing a Xmas party for her daughter's friends and that sounded more attractive to them than our 'must attend' function. They tacked themselves onto the back of the line at the same spot two hours later as we were returning, so the head-count was right as we passed the guard post.

When I remustered to clerk, I went on No.1 Clerk's Course at Adelaide and who should be on the same course but Beatrice. We were both posted here to 'Sigs 2'. I am in Registry, still shuffling paper but I am now a typiste also and have a higher security clearance. Beatrice is in a classified (secret) job. We don't quite know what she does and she doesn't tell us. Iris is in our Orderly Room.

When you have time, please write again. I would love to keep in touch with all our group.

Good luck and best wishes.

Grace.

*

Dear Val,

Wonderful to hear from you. I really envy you being on a flying station but that was a natural posting after completing your mechanic's course.

I consider it quite extraordinary when I think of the jobs you and so many of the girls from our rookies course are doing. It is quite incredible that you, as a former waitress, have completed an aircraft mechanic's course. You hardly knew a spanner from a screw driver but now you have completed the same intensive mechanic's course as the men.

To have become a qualified aircraft mechanic and be operating without supervision shows the trust the RAAF puts in you girls. That faith has also broken a work barrier for women. The remuster list for WAAAFs in Daily Routine Orders goes on and on - riggers, armourers, wireless assistants, parachute packers, instrument repairers, all selected for specialist training after the basic 'technical training' course.

When you think about it, all RAAF training now takes place under pressure. It has to be that way because of the terrific expansion of our highly technical service. The fact that so many girls are responding to that pressure and achieving the same high standards as the men shows a wonderful depth of dedication. Everybody seems to be imbued with that "we will win" spirit. What I see is a two-way happening. Girls are realizing for the first time that, far from having frilly minds, we are seeing ourselves as beings with a capacity to achieve anything we set our minds to do. When we do achieve though, we still have our love of frilly things.

The other happening is also a substantial breakthrough in our lives. RAAF men are beginning to not only accept us as equals in the work place but are recognizing that we also bring with us that intangible something called a woman's angle and they seem to respect us for the mixture.

My goodness, I have got carried away haven't I? That would never do for an Aircraftwoman. An ACW is not supposed to have such a depth of thought but we do, even though we tinge it sometimes with feminism.

I heard from Joan some weeks ago and I've asked her to write again when she has time. The bond we four established on our rookies course should continue as we make our way through the rest of the war. Please keep in touch, I promise you a reply without the philosophy next time.

Keep the boys airborne you lucky bunny.

Grace.

*

Dear Girls,

Some time has passed since I was last in touch, but I was nudged into writing by an inner compulsion.

Today has been a strange day with a mix of emotions and I feel the need to release them to you all, knowing that the four of us have a kindred feeling of understanding of each other's joys and sorrows.

Early this morning my boss Flight Lieutenant Brooks called me into his office and said "Do you enjoy the work you are doing?" His approach sounded aggressive to me and I wondered if I had done something wrong.

I said "Yes Sir, I do. But as I have said many times before, I would love to be out on one of the RAAF stations."

"Well there is no chance of that. You are too valuable to us here Corporal."

"ACW Sir, if you'll pardon the correction."

"ACW has been superceded. From today, you are a Corporal. Congratulations on a well-deserved promotion. Take this chit to the Stores Section. It authorizes the tailoress to sew on your stripes." Elated and a little embarrassed I followed his instructions.

Later in the morning I was at my desk when I heard Flight Lieutenant Brooks' voice. "Corporal, there's a task I'd like you to do for me."

I stood up as he was saying "Come with me. ACW Cook is in my office and I've had to break the news to her that her brother, an Army sergeant, has been killed on Bouganville. She is naturally distressed and I would like you to take her to the park over the road and comfort her as best you can."

Feeling as if a cold hand had gripped my heart I walked with him to his office. He stopped before opening the door and said "Tell her to take the rest of the day off. Tomorrow as well if you feel she needs it. Come and see me when you get back."

After lunch I went in to see him.

"How is she?" he asked.

I told him that Beatrice had talked and talked about her brother and their past life. They were alone in the world and his loss hit her greatly but after our chat and a bite to eat she was much calmer.

"Has she gone back to barracks?"

"No, she's back at work."

He looked at me blankly. "Didn't you tell her to take the rest of the day off?"

"Yes I did Sir but she said she would be better off at work. Otherwise she would have nothing to do but mope."

Flight Lieutenant Brooks has the most piercing pale blue eyes and he looked at me as if he were searching the recesses of my mind. In level tones he said "On many occasions you girls amaze me."

You all have so much depth of character that you scare me.

Thanks for your help Corporal.”

Now that I've unloaded myself I feel much better. But I pray to God that all this unnecessary killing will soon stop.

Hope to hear from you again soon.

With best wishes to all.

Grace.

*

Dear Gladys,

The girls were devastated to learn that you were not well enough to join us on this fortieth anniversary of the formation of the WAAAF. We three send you our prayers for a speedy recovery. During the past few days the years just fell away and stories from the early to mid forties were wide and various. Some carried embellishments but most were remembered accurately (I think).

At our Remembrance Dinner we were addressed by a World War Two ex-Group Captain with a chest lined with gongs. He was a delight to listen to because he told us how wonderful we all were during our Service days. He did not tell us one war story of his own and he elevated our egos as he described the WAAAF contribution to the war effort. His facts and figures were astounding.

You know, we all did our bit in our own way but we had no idea that the cumulative effort of our individual contributions were so effective in support of the flyboys and the RAAF as a whole. We did not realise that the tasks we collectively took on were so deeply appreciated by the boys at the sharp end. I will quote you part of his speech.

“You ladies, as WAAAFs, were the first group of women to adopt an active support role in the RAAF and were an integral part of the backbone of our Service. Without our ground staff on flying stations as they were then called, without our administrative and communications support, our supply organization and the individual trades in which you served side-by-side with your male counterparts, the RAAF would not have been the effective fighting force it became.

“In a letter to the Director of WAAAF in February 1944 the then Duchess of Gloucester, the ‘Queen Bee’ of the British WAAF, wrote ‘The Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force has today more than seventeen thousand women employed in well over fifty Air Force trades and they have earned high tributes from many senior officers. Their loyalty and whole-hearted enthusiasm will always be remembered with admiration and gratitude.’”

I’ll close on that high note and earnestly hope that you are soon well again.

Your friend always.

Grace.

*

After Sue made her selection of letters she wrote her own letter to Gran. In part, she stated “After reading all those wonderful excerpts of life during an historic period, I realised that this was a place where the movement began in Australia for the equality of women in the workplace. The tasks you WAAAF girls undertook in widely diverse fields and

technically difficult areas revealed the latent power of women to equate and shine in what until then was men's domain. That revelation blew away the Victorian attitudes which had been carried over from the nineteenth century. In fact, you all helped create an atmosphere which allowed my selection for a role in the RAAF which would have been inconceivable before World War Two.

"I am deeply grateful to you and all World War Two WAAAF. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Love forever.
Sue."

EULOGY PREPARED AND DELIVERED BY ERIC CATHCART

Camaraderie engendered by military service is strong - particularly among aircrew, past and present. So strong that it continues beyond the grave in the minds of those remaining on this mortal coil. Accordingly, I was gratified to be asked to prepare and deliver this eulogy at the funeral of one I called 'friend'. A fitting finale to this archival record.

*

Group Captain (Ret.) Raymond Victor Banks - Distinguished Flying Medal - RAAF Staff College Graduate - was born on 30th August 1913, in Toowoomba, Queensland.

Role in life: A Quiet Achiever.

Educated at Toowoomba Grammar School, Vic Banks was junior sportsman of the year on one occasion and he continued his sporting activities to represent Toowoomba in first grade Rugby League. After a period in the office of Toowoomba Foundry, Vic and his brother Wally joined forces to become fencing contractors on properties in the west of the State during the Great Depression Years of the early 1930s. At one stage, Vic applied himself to acquire a steam engine ticket so that he could qualify for the job as mechanic of the steam plant at the shearing sheds of Boatman Station.

Even though money was tight, this man of many parts applied himself to still further to gain a civil pilot's license.

Joining the RAAF in 1940, Vic trained in Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme en route to the UK where he served as a member of Nos. 120, 159, 511 and 160 (RAF) Squadrons. He earned himself a Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) as a member of No. 160 Squadron after it moved to the Middle East. That was no mean feat for an NCO Wireless Air Gunner, indicating the level of expertise he achieved as a crew member. He also earned himself the nickname of "Dogger", granted to him by his RAF oppos, the name stemming from the North Sea fishing grounds of "The Dogger Banks". Not many people in the Air Force knew "Vic" Banks but all and sundry knew "Dogger" Banks.

Vic was fond of telling how he learned to play poker to fill in the time while he waited for aircraft to become serviceable, while based in North Africa's Western Desert. He also learned that he could make a tidy amount of extra money at the game he learned to love. He passed on his secret - when you play poker, stay sober. If the other players drink, you can't fail to win!

At the end of World War Two. Vic was posted to Japan to serve with the RAAF component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, remaining there for six and a half years.

Now commissioned, Vic returned to Australia and in 1952 he joined No. 78 Fighter wing as Senior Air Traffic Control Officer for their deployment to Malta. At that point the Fates had decreed that Vic's bachelor days were to come to an end because it was during his stay in Malta that he met a Royal Navy WREN named Monica.

The late Air Vice Marshal "Bay" Adams, who was Vic's Commanding Officer during his Malta days, never tired of telling the story of how Vic appeared on his doorstep at 2

o'clock one morning to ask his permission to get married. He said "Dogger, can't this wait until later this morning"? Vic said "No Sir, It can't". In typically direct fashion, he wanted his answer then and there.

I first met Vic Banks when I was posted to the (then) Department of Air, Canberra in 1964. Vic was the head of the RAAF Air Traffic Control Branch and I was to be his assistant. We shared the same office for three years, so we got to know each other fairly well during that time. I learned a lot about Vic Banks the man, and I learned a lot from Vic Banks the administrator and policy maker. In both roles. Vic was earthy and practical. He was also tenacious but not stubborn. He was, by nature, a mixture of gentleness and firmness. He was always friendly with his standard greeting of "How's your health"? However, when the occasion demanded, Vic would dig in his toes and fight for what was right. We became firm friends.

During Air Force days, I did not know one person who did not like and trust Vic. Terms like "Good old Dogger", "The old boilermaker", "The old fencing contractor" were recognized as terms of endearment but if you were to tell him that, he would have said "Do you mean that they want to put their arms around me? I'm not into that sort of business". Direct, earthy and loveable.

On Vic's retirement in September 1968, Wally encouraged him to join AMP as an Insurance agent and he did a typical Vic Banks thing. He made a study of various insurance policies available, selected those which would be of greatest benefit to military personnel and presented his findings in matter-of-fact manner to his prospects.

Vic did very well in the insurance business because of one stand-out feature of his personality - his innate honesty. People trusted him and he never, at any stage, betrayed that trust. All who knew him remember Vic Banks as his own man - The Quiet Achiever.