

Bill Black—A14430—Armament Fitter

The twin Browning .5-inch machine guns hammering away either side of me turned the ocean into a fury of froth and foam. The deeper thump of the twin 20-mm cannons from the mid-upper turret added their own savagery to the hail of deadly fire. The linked belts of ammunition roared through the feed chutes and eventually consumed themselves so the hammering guns lapsed into silence. We were now at the mercy of any marauding enemy fighter planes that chanced upon us. Luckily, this was peace time Australia and this post-D test flight did not run into any that day so we had an uneventful return trip to Amberley and my short career as a Lincoln tail gunner was over. This was a fitting end to my post apprentice time at 3AD as soon after I was posted to 82 Wing and the super-modern Canberra jets. Within twelve months I was with 2 Squadron and we were packing up and heading for Malaya.

“The Aussies are back – the Aussies are back.” The happy shout from the Tengah Village shopkeeper turned to dismay when he found that we were only a staging crew there for a couple of days to stage our Canberras of 2 Squadron through to Butterworth which was to be our personal home for the next two and half years and of course the squadron was there for many years until it was sent to Vietnam. A few weeks after our arrival, although the Malayan Emergency was nearing its end, our bombs were dropped in anger for the first time on a strike against a Communist terrorist base. A few more strikes followed then the Emergency was declared over and peace reigned over the land.

My own free running reign as a bachelor did not last much longer than the Emergency, as I met the woman of my life and she has shared my trials and tribulations ever since. Our return to Australia was on the *Johan Van Olden Barn Velt* (a 20,000-ton Dutch liner) and as we waved farewell to it in Brisbane, little were we aware that it was later to meet a fiery end and finished up in Davy Jones’s locker by sinking off the African coast.

We adapted to amah-less Australian living (what a blow for the wife) and spent the next few years fairly uneventfully at Amberley with the odd mobility exercise to Darwin, Darwin and Darwin. However, it was not all bad – remember the days when native girls traditionally went topless – well on one of our trips to Melville Island guess who had the good luck to get invited to inspect the girls’ high school.

Good-bye Amberley. We were on the move again with a posting to – you guessed it Darwin. However, who’s complaining? Four years of barramundi fishing, scouring the Territory looking for wayward wartime bombs, mandatory SLR weapon testing (checking knock down capacity was an important part of this – naturally we could not test them on people) but the hordes of troublesome feral pigs were considered a suitable testing substitute. At this time, however, I became pro-life, decided even pigs had a right to their day and my hunting and killing days were over - a bullet did not cause pain to a paper target – so that was the way for me from then on.

Luckily we were not at Darwin during cyclone Tracy however her smaller brothers and sisters used to visit us several times a year. We were not sorry to have missed the big one; on a trip back to Darwin after Tracy, I was horrified to see our high-set house was missing from the floor boards up. Darwin gave me my first commercial business experience when I bought a milk run to work on the side. On the side – am I kidding? Air force from eight am to five pm, milk run from eleven pm to seven am. Boy, did I enjoy Sundays. And I never did have the time to get back to Melville Island.

As the Boeing 727 lifted off on our way to Williamstown, we (we being a family of five by now with children Geoff, Ralph and Lyn) were all eagerly looking out of the windows to check out our favorite spots, recollect our near misses and savour the delights of our four years stay.

The near misses included: a broken outboard crank shaft in the middle of Darwin harbour

Mango Stories

Bill Black—A14430—Armament Fitter

with a twenty-foot tide running out; the run back to Darwin jetty from our favourite island in Middle Harbour with a sudden tropical storm bearing down on us creating the wildest waves; a severe thunder storm that nearly put our yacht on the rocks at Quail Island; being bar member of the Sergeants Mess allowing the mess one day to run out of beer and sending off a VIP aircraft with an improperly secured fuel filler cap. When the fuel started venting the aircraft had to return and was quickly and successfully turned around and safely completed its journey and not one word was ever spoken about the incident. Someone was on my side that day.

The delights included many happy days water skiing in the crystal clear waters of Fanny Bay; drinking plenty of Swan (until their brew went sour—then luckily VB came good); several trips to the beautiful Katherine gorge, Adelaide river and Berry springs; a most memorable sight of a million or two of migrating magpie geese covering the sky as far as could be seen in all directions—all flying in precise formation that would have turned our jet jocks green with envy.

Two years of Mirage familiarisation, then back to Malaysia with the pointy nose ones for another two and a half years of the tropical lifestyle. The joys of being the flight line chief with twenty short-range aircraft on line (four coming, four going and twelve being turned around) gives one excellent training in stress related multi-tasking complex coordination tasks. Then, when you think that it cannot get any worse, one flies into a mountain and does not come home. And the head hunters are out in force scouring the service log looking for a head or heads to lop. It is interesting seeing your own signature on the paperwork that is being minutely studied. Nothing at RSTT prepared us for this!

Maybe the stress took its toll (or it could have been that poisonous Tiger and Anchor) but the return to Australia in 1978 bought on the Devil. A frustrating and infuriating state of intermittent ill health that seemed to defy explanation, understanding and treatment. After grappling with this for two years, civvy life was looking better and better so I swapped the joys of the Force for the joys of business ownership in the field of food.

Despite the Devil (which still haunted me from time to time,) the business was successful and satisfying and we retained it for four years. Upon the sale of this business and now fairly experienced in business ownership, I embarked on a career in real estate and property investment. An extension of this into business consulting and sales and a further extension into business advertising resulted in my entering the publishing business in which I produced a bimonthly professional Businesses For Sale Magazine for a period of some eight years (with a print run of 10,000 copies per issue, this was a total of some 500,000 magazines I produced in this period). This was sold Australia-wide and was also distributed through state and federal government offices overseas and some private business migration offices. With the head office in Brisbane and representatives in other areas around Australia, the business flourished and prospered.

Then came the ghastly and unnecessary GST and our clients – businesses – suffered badly. As a result, so did we. Flexibility and compromise, running lean, cost cutting, staff reduction – all effective but not enough. It was still hurtful and business turnovers were down twenty to thirty percent, and the government laughed on. And I fretted because I helped vote the @#\$%&* in.

The last federal election – many genuine independent groups, mainly against the GST, but more importantly for a better economic policy for Australia – campaigned heavily for selected independent candidates. After deciding that I did not like any of the parties, I was going to vote informally, then decided that this would achieve nothing so I submitted my candidacy for the federal seat of Petrie. I worked hard and so did my family and friends but unfortunately the establishment takes some beating. If my group were now government we would no longer have the GST, but a much better economic system and we would not have

Mango Stories

Bill Black—A14430—Armament Fitter

that election left me convinced that neither major political party in Australia is interested in the welfare of Australians. The interest in their own welfare is paramount and any measures will be used for their own ends. In this, the fourth year of the new millennium, Australia must be regarded as a criminal nation governed by dishonest governments. May God help us all to create peace on earth and give our leaders the wisdom, integrity and courage required to seek solutions other than by bullets and bombs.

From two hundred kilometres an hour to dead stop in thirty seconds. The magnificent Euro Star high speed train between London and Paris (via the Chunnel) hit the anchors with severe braking, indicating something was not very right and the Chunnel was right ahead. However, luckily our jaunt to the joys and sights of Paris and our delightful visit did not come to a crunching and mangled end. But, after sitting going nowhere for six hours because of power problems caused by violent gales, we were off-loaded at Lille and got to our motel beds by three am. However, Viva La French for their organisation; several thousand people were accommodated for what remained of the night, woken for a hearty breakfast, bussed to Calais then ferried across the Channel back to England. Naturally unlike the outbound trip through the Chunnel, this time we traveled on top of the water and the sight of the magnificent White Cliffs of Dover beckoned us back to England. I had to sing the song and share the moment with someone not there, and our daughter Lyn—back home in Aussie was the lucky person. She rose to the occasion and enjoyed the moment with me; despite the late Australian time zone. Back in England because of the unexpected delay, we needed a high speed train dash from Dover to Heathrow Airport and we just caught the last flight of the night out of London heading for home. Our mission had been accomplished; number two son Ralph (long term resident of London was now safely married); we did the Tower, London Bridge, many castles, walked with Jimmy Cook where he first started his maritime career (that is Captain James Cook to those not on first name basis with him), and cherished the past histories of Great Britain and France.

The future is not clear: many thoughts, many ideas, go for leisure and retirement. Don't retire (keep involved), make a movie, write a book, enjoy the grandchildren, make a million (dollars that is) Anyone have any good ideas? Tour Australia, change the government, get more sales, have another baby (Kersmash! Pow! – that was Dot). Maybe by the time the next fifty years come around I will have it all worked out and all the mysteries will be revealed.

To finish - bless the Mangoes - our mates – those who are still with us and a thought for those who have gone. One can only wonder at this lottery that is life that selects our arrival and departure times, some early while others the full innings—will it all ever be revealed??

Hopefully, if we have all not made this world a better place to be and live, then when we leave it, we will have left it none the worse for our being here.

Bill Black
27 Killarney Crescent
Capalaba, Qld. 4157
Tel. 07 3245 1918

PS: Don't forget to read my poem on page 55 —I wrote it forty-nine years ago, I must have known something.

Mango Stories

Bill Black—A14430—Armament Fitter



A young Bill Black



L to R : Tonkin, Fiddes, me and Hobbs in Wagga 1954



My wife Dorothy-married January 1960



Would you vote for this man?



1974 Butterworth with long service gongs.
L to R : Me, Brooks, Morrow and Hodge.