

Allen Gibbon—A216379—Electrical Fitter

Post Wagga

After a twelve-month stint in 2AD, I was posted to No 86 Wing where I remained for almost three years. This was my last employment as an electrical fitter for about forty years.

In 1960 I applied for and was accepted for training as an aircrew signaller. I remained as an active signaller/air electronics officer for the next seventeen years except for two and a half years on a ground posting at Butterworth, Malaysia.

I married my wife, May in Sydney in 1963 and we celebrated our ruby wedding anniversary in September last year. The late 1960s were a very busy time for us with four children born in five and a half years! I have two boys, John and Robert and two girls, Anne and Catherine. During this time I had postings in Richmond, NSW, Adelaide, SA, Malaysia and back to Adelaide again. It was a challenge to move interstate or overseas with a young family especially when I was often away on exercise. I was very fortunate that my wife was a capable mother and household organiser. Luckily, we had a long posting in Adelaide whilst my children were in primary school.

From 1978 to 1985 I was posted to Canberra where I served in four different posts until I retired from the RAAF. After leaving the RAAF I joined the public service and have remained with a government agency ever since. In 1996 I retired from full-time employment and for the past three years have been engaged in casual work as an electrical fitter with the same agency.

May and I were initially apprehensive about the posting to Canberra with one son in high school, another son about to go to high school and our daughters still in primary school. We had also just bought a new home in Adelaide after a long search. It was a great house with plenty of room for our growing family and we were not keen to leave it. Canberra, however, turned out to be a good posting. We sold our house in Adelaide and found one even better in Canberra (although it did not have the in-ground pool my children had been so enamoured with in the Adelaide house).

Canberra also turned out to be a great place to raise a family and was a stable environment that allowed my children to complete their secondary and tertiary education. All my children now live and work in Canberra and May and I will probably remain in Canberra close to our family. I now have a daughter-in-law, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren between the ages of one and eight years (Alannah, Andrew, Caitlin, Lauren and Matthew).

I have enjoyed all my postings with the RAAF. The training I received at Wagga plus a post-trade electronics course and a C130 course conducted by Lockheed prepared me well for aircrew training and operational duties.

In 1979 I was awarded the Air Force Cross for innovations I introduced to improve the operational capability of the P3B Orion aircraft mainly in the field of electronic warfare and maritime surveillance.

During my posting at Air Force Office in 1979 I initiated a project to replace the operationally challenged electronic intercept equipment on Orion aircraft. This project finally became reality some twenty years later. Thank God they did not have to go to war in the meantime.

I owe Ray Stevenson an apology which dates back to about 1976 when he was the senior engineering officer at No 11 Squadron. During a major exercise at Darwin we decided it would be a good idea to launch radar reflecting chaff (packaged small aluminium strips) from the free fall sonobuoy chute of an Orion aircraft. This we did with great success against the “enemy” RAN force when an F111 strike was in progress. On arrival back at base the ground crew found copious quantities of these aluminium strips under the floor of the aircraft. Some of the packages had opened before entering the slip stream and air turbulence blew the foil all around the cavity beneath the floor. Ray and his

Mango Stories

Allen Gibbon—A216379—Electrical Fitter

blew the foil all around the cavity beneath the floor. Ray and his troops were not amused with the big cleanup job that resulted.

My first administrative posting was my last when I was posted to the Defence Conditions of Service at Russell Offices (1984). Having spent all my life in either technical or operational postings it was a big cultural shock. My duties included defence housing and removals policy and answering ministerial correspondence from disgruntled service wives. At that time the Army in particular was starved for funds which meant that a lot of soldiers had time on their hands and consequently about eighty percent of the correspondence was from Army personnel. After twelve months in this post I decided it was time to quit the services.

Other big events in our lives have been when our children married. We had three weddings in three years - my eldest son and two daughters - it nearly broke us! These were great celebrations and a good excuse for an extended family get together.

The recent Canberra bushfires had our home under threat. Our house is situated about twenty rows east and six rows north of the fire front. The photo shows the house behind us and the yards to the east of us destroyed. We were lucky. Unfortunately my son who lived a kilometre west of our house lost everything including his car. It was an awful day. We were evacuated by the police and only had time to pack the photo albums and some other memorabilia. I tried to go up to my son's house to help him but the fire had advanced so quickly I could not drive up the road. My son had the good sense to leave on foot when he knew it was hopeless. He walked down to my house and helped us pack up what we could in the pitch black darkness. I was not happy about evacuating but when I heard how bad it had been up the road I felt we had no choice. I was fairly certain that we had lost the house and we did not know for six long hours until we were able to get back into the suburb and see it still standing unscathed. The house held a lot of memories for me and my family and it would have been devastating to lose it. I am grateful to the young blokes who live across the road who remained behind and put out spot fires. If they had not done so we would have lost our home. My son is now living with us until his house can be rebuilt. His house was in a row of eleven houses that were destroyed and the fire was so intense that there was no way it could have been saved.

May and I spend a lot of time with our grandchildren and children. We also like to travel when we can. We have travelled overseas to Britain, Canada, Hawaii, Singapore and New Zealand. We often do short driving tours around the NSW south coast and sometimes up to the north coast to visit family. I also enjoy being a handyman for my children and friends. There is always a constant stream of jobs that need to be done from installing new power points to fixing broken appliances, painting rooms and maintaining cars. I have had a go at most trades, the most recent being a bit of carpentry where I designed and built a gazebo in the backyard. I am trying with limited success to pass some of these skills onto my children.

I have also taken an interest in learning a bit about my family history, My father left a notebook of his movements as a member of the Australian Imperial Force in the First World War along with a number of photos, maps and other memorabilia. I wanted to transcribe the notebook before it deteriorated to a point where it could no longer be read. This project took on a life of its own with my daughter and son becoming involved. We transcribed the notes, checked place names, researched different battles my father had been involved in, and interpreted jargon used in the notebook. This was an interesting project and we used the resources of the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives in Canberra. We were able to obtain service records for both my father and his older brother. In the end we put together a booklet containing the transcribed notes, service records, maps and photos which I distributed to my family.

In April 2003, I attended the apprentice reunion at Wagga and took part in the Anzac Day parade. There were two other Mangoes at the reunion: Rod McKenzie and John Cox.

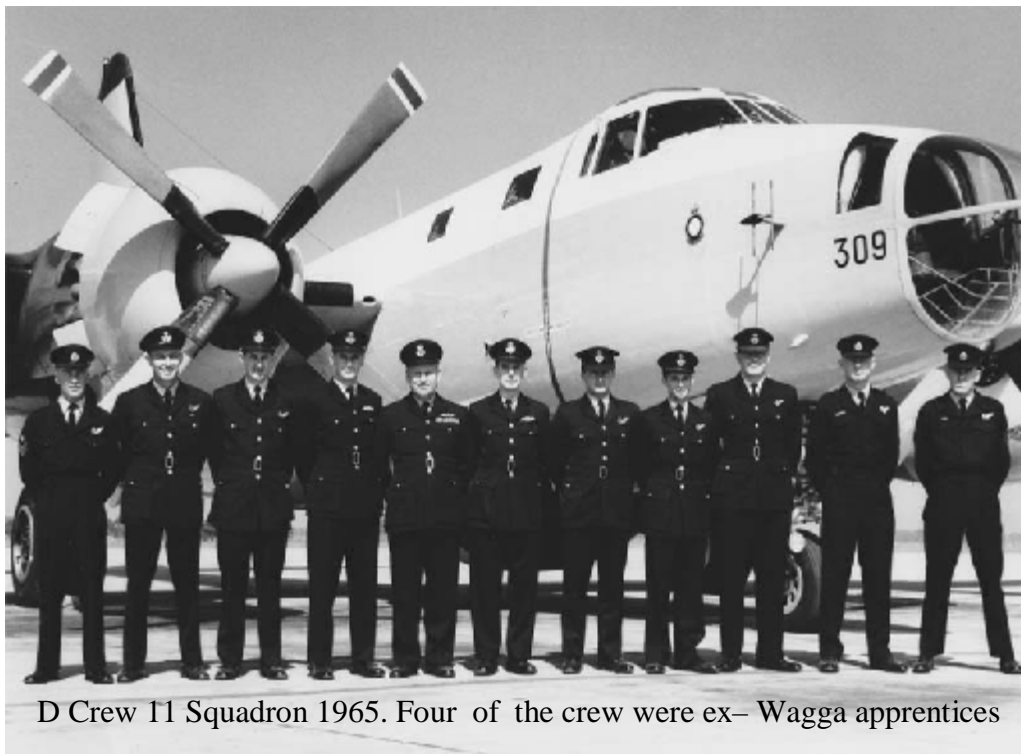
Mango Stories

Allen Gibbon—A216379—Electrical Fitter

My family came down for Anzac Day and watched me march in the parade.

It is hard to believe that it has been fifty years since I started out as an apprentice in the Air Force. I have fond memories of my training as a Mango at Wagga. I do not think that I could have even imagined then as a young fifteen-year-old that I would be attending a reunion fifty years later with that same group of boys. It will be interesting to see how we have changed over the years and what things have remained the same. I think I have had a fortunate life to date and I hope that this continues well into the future.

Allen Gibbon
14 Burrinjuck Crescent
Duffy, ACT, 2611
Tel. (02) 6288 5156



D Crew 11 Squadron 1965. Four of the crew were ex- Wagga apprentices



ANZAC Day Wagga 2003
me, Cox and Mackenzie

Mango Stories

Allen Gibbon—A216379—Electrical Fitter



6000 flying hours.
At Barbers Point, Hawaii 1977.



Fire damage photo from roof of
my Duffy house, January 2003



Presentation of Air Force Cross
at Government House, Canberra 1979 by Governor-general, Sir Zelman Cowan.