

Dave Menzies—A14411—Instrument Mechanic

Life and times post 1957

Away from Wagga and a black band on the cap; the blue triangle now a thing of the past. Onto RAAF base Amberley and the real Air Force; 3AD, 482 Squadron and 6 Squadron, but some things never change. Guard duty, band duty, duty crew, guards of honour and bush fire fighting fitted themselves around aircraft servicing and made life in the RAAF less humdrum than a civilian job.

In 1961 a posting to the new Army light aircraft Squadron was to change my life. Apart from servicing the aircraft, the RAAF members of the Squadron had to undergo army field craft and weapons training. This posting finished in 1962 and I was on my way to Butterworth in Malaya to join No 2 Squadron. The Air Force was very kind and sent me there by ship, a prize posting and a tropical cruise to Singapore thrown in as a bonus!

Life in Penang was a dream until September 1963 when a disagreement came about between Malaysia and Indonesia. All members of No 2 Canberra Squadron and the fighter squadrons were rostered for guard duty on the flight lines to protect aircraft from possible Indonesian infiltrators. Although nothing ever happened, we knew the threat was real because the powers that be issued live rounds for our weapons. These night time adventures on the flight lines continued and were still in practice when I was posted back to Amberley in 1964.

Once again with Army Aviation and enjoying life in Queensland, along came a conflict in Vietnam. Before the announcement of our participation was made by our Prime Minister, I was sent into Brisbane with a stack of instrument test equipment and an Army long-base Land Rover. My job was to design and build a mobile instrument section for use in Vietnam, so I knew in advance of the Army Aviation's impending commitment but could not talk to my fellow workmates about the purpose of the vehicles. Many times I had to fend off questions from the civilian workshop fitters.

More Army exercises, a promotion to corporal, more training with the Army, a promotion to acting sergeant and a trip to Vietnam followed. In May 1967 I found myself in the international lounge at Sydney airport awaiting a BOAC flight to Singapore via Perth. "Bodgie" Moore, No 7 apprentice intake, was also waiting for the same flight. We traveled to Singapore where we stayed overnight before continuing on to Saigon with Pan American Airways. Bodgie stayed with No 9 Squadron and I flew north to the Army base at Nui Dat to 161 Recce flight.

Besides the aircraft servicing, members of the squadron flew as observers and audio operators on the "psych" warfare chopper. Civil aid work was also carried out at selected local villages which included helping the medics run health clinics for the Vietnamese.

Flying as an observer was rather hair-raising as we normally flew at fifty feet or tree top level looking for tunnel entrances or for Viet Cong movement in the jungle. During the year I was there, the squadron lost three Sioux helicopters with two observers and one pilot being either wounded or injured. The job of the observer was to ensure the people on the ground kept their heads down while the pilot got the aircraft away as quickly as possible. Artillery was the brought into the act and the area became a hot target. An SLR .762 was the most used armament to keep "Charlie" occupied.

The psychology warfare aircraft was equipped with loud speakers, tape recorders and an amplifier with a crew consisting of a pilot and the equipment operator, normally a radio or instrument fitter. Flying at about three thousand feet, tapes with calls to surrender were played to an un-appreciating audience in the jungle below.

The year was passing, Christmas 1967 came and went. Our new year was celebrated and we approached the Vietnamese new year or "Tet". The Tet offensive of 1968 was rather hectic. An Army of seven thousand strong Viet Cong assembled to the north of Nui Dat and

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began to move south. Our choppers and fixed wing Cessna 180s kept tabs on their progress, and every night was spent in the slit trenches waiting for the attack. However, the enemy bypassed Nui Dat and attacked a town to the south of our base called Baria. After a couple of weeks Baria was recaptured and our supply line was reopened.

During this time in Vietnam I passed the nights by studying and upgrading my educational qualifications using the Army education system. In May 1968 I qualified to apply for a commission. I was made a substantive sergeant in the May list 1968 and returned home soon after to work once again with Army Aviation.

A trip to the Northern Territory followed my return to the Army, to service aircraft which were in support of a survey corps platoon from the English army- all Welshmen. They entertained us around the beer tent with beautiful harmonizing. The tunes were old but the words were quite different! They also taught a corella to speak, but as we were staying at a Church of England Mission Station, we kept the missionaries and the bird well separated.

The area we were working in mapping became the Kakadu National Park. After six weeks in this paradise we were relieved and went back to Amberley. Another six weeks passed and I was in hospital with hepatitis A contracted during my stay at the mission station.

13 January 1969 saw me being commissioned into the special duties branch and entering into a new lifestyle as a member of the RAAF. For the first time since leaving Wagga I received a posting south of the Queensland border. After completing Officer Training School, a course at RAAF Base Sale, and the admin officers new course, I found myself at RAAF Fairbairn for two years: firstly at No 5 Squadron then at Base Squadron as the Officers Mess manager.

The next posting was to RAAF Peace and further changes to this bachelor's lifestyle were about to happen. During the next two and a half years, I met my future wife, got married and brought her and three stepsons over to Sydney to begin a completely new career as husband and stepfather. I worked in Sydney at the Sydney University as regional safe hand officer for the next three years.

Then a posting to Canberra to Air Force Office where I spent the next thirteen years shuffling around the various divisions. I was privy to the various purchases and building programs the RAAF were making during that time, such as the F18 purchase and the building of Tindal. Time marched on and I arranged through various friends a final posting to Pearce where I served for a year before retiring in February 1992, having served thirty-eight years and twenty-six days in the RAAF – but who was counting!

Since retiring I served for a short period working for the WA Ministry of Justice as a community service supervisor. I now fill my days playing veteran hockey, boating on the Swan River and trying to keep fit at the gym. The children have all left home; two are married with children and live in the eastern states. My wife Angela and I live in a cottage close to all facilities and our sporting clubs. God has blessed us with a satisfying lifestyle.

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Apprentice 1954



At Butterworth 1963



Graduation OTS May 1969



Army Aviation 161 Recce Flight Nui Dat, Vietnam 1967-68. Berets to RAAF personnel.
L to R : me, John Green and Peter Nolan.



Perimeter patrol Nui Dat



Jacka, me and Dodds 1956



No. 25 Squadron 1991.