

Anecdotes and Tales

OPEN THE HANGAR DOORS: From Pete Taylor, Sumpy, 77 Sqn from 19 May 69 to 17 Nov 70.

There are many memories of my short time with 77 Sqn, all of them good. In all, between 3Sqn (2 tours), 481(m)Sqn, 77Sqn and ARDU I spent some 9 years on this wonderful aircraft that even today, still evokes an emotion that I find rather strangely pleasant. I recently (5 Jul 15) had the good fortune to visit Fighter world and wander around and under A3-3 and A3-102 and squatting under the Stb wheel well and looking up at the hatch where the re-oiling was done, that wave of emotion hit me. Ah! The good old days, they don't make them like that anymore. Sometime in 1970, I was on the flight line to do an engine run for the Eleco's after an alternator change. Just up from my position a formation four were getting ready to start as well. I had a hang start and as you all may remember there was always quite a heavy vibrating noise that could be heard all over the tarmac. A movement on the line caught my eye as a very ruddy faced Sumpy SGT, Jerry O'Sullivan ran toward my aircraft slashing his hand across his throat indicating to me to shut down. Apparently my start coincided perfectly with one of the formation four and that pilot thought he was the one with the hang start and aborted his start which in turn put all four on a late departure. This incident resulted in no more engine runs on the line without the permission of the Flight Line SNCO. Engine changes can go smoothly or they can hiccup with many a Sumpy at some time or another having problems getting the throttle pin to line up and put in place. The taller blokes could quite easily stand under the Port hatch when the aircraft was on jacks and with their longer arms could reach the throttle pin without standing on anything. Being just that little bit shorter I had to resort to standing on a wheel chock (Shock horror, try doing that today – OH&S would have a field day) and strain the left armpit just to reach the bits. It was worse in winter with cold numb fingers. Anyway the upshot of this story is that John Mantell and I were on late shift and we had to do an engine change to get one of the birds ready for ground runs the following morning. The Framies had the aircraft jacked and levelled and the day shift had the removal stand pumped up and attached. The replacement engine was on a holding stand with a spare holding stand beside that. Hand over to late shift was at 4.30 and we had the aircraft down off jacks with the T4 probes and box set up by 5.15. 45 minutes to remove, swap over components and install the new engine. From memory the Sumpy Cpl was Blue Haines and the Independent Inspector was Framie FSGT Grumpy Grimmond (X trained for inspections on engine changes). My fingers worked well that day and the throttle pin was in first go. The ATAR and I have been no strangers in recent years with Rosco McGlashan installing one in his Land Speed Record vehicle Aussie Invader II and subsequently in Aussie Invader III, which has the fastest terminal speed in Australia of 1026kph. In 1987 Rosco obtained three core engines from the Department of Admin Services auction in St Mary's. Through the efforts of then Wing Cdr Neil Smith of 481(M)Sqn, a core engine was fitted up complete with all other components and sent to Perth. Over the next six years Aussie Invader II was readied for that assault on the then World Land Speed Record of 1019kph. Ex Mirage Sumpy

Tony "Wolfy" Wolfe now based at 2FTS and I spent many a long hour helping Rosco achieve his dream. For more information go to aussieinvader.com I would love to read about other blokes' memories of our time at 77, particularly those early few years. Perhaps there's a Framie out there with a few stories of that great Framie personality "Shady"!! AND WE GROUNDIES THOUGHT ONLY PILOTS HAD FINGER TROUBLE!!! 77 Squadron ground run at the run up area sometime in 1970. Instructor--John Mantell. Student--Peter Ssamasue Instructor—OK Sam are we good to go? Student—Yep all looks good. Instructor—All clear, fire guard and man with the blower? Student—Yep Instructor— Ok Sam close the canopy using the down button located near the canopy lock handle. Student---Ok. (ah down it comes) Instructor—Now lock the canopy by pushing the canopy lock handle forward. Instructor—Sam, have you locked the canopy? Pause, pause, pause Instructor—Have you locked the canopy Sam? Pause, pause, pause Instructor—Sam talk to me? Pause, pause, pause Instructor—Sam talk to me? Pause, pause, pause Instructor—Sam can you hear me? Ah alas slowly but surely rising towards the top of the canopy a finger appears minus the tip plus a little extra. Did you know that if you leave your finger on the down button and lock the canopy at the same time a little "guillotine" shoots across and covers both the up and down canopy buttons thus amputating a small part of that finger? When the canopy was eventually opened and the victim transported by high speed clarktor to the base hospital, a medical direction was received to retrieve the missing fingertip. Now: With the ejection seat full up, head down, bum up commence searching for the fingertip. This took some time and the lesson learnt here was that once a fingertip is cut off it does not look like a fingertip. It becomes a sickly grey coloured rubbery thing which does not look like a finger and does not stand out so well under an ejection seat. Eventually the illusive fingertip was found, carefully wrapped in the engine run sheet (which was of no use now) and transported to the hospital. All of this is a bit vague now and for the love of me I cannot recall whether Sam got his finger tip back or not. My gut feel is that to this day that finger is a little shorter than it was prior to engine run training. Needless to say the actual engine run did not go ahead. (A3-27 Ready For Ground Run. Note T4 test box on wing and cables to T4 probes. Personnel are Paul Finlay, Terry Culhane and Blue Haines, all Engine Fitters with 77 Sqn.) A HARD NIGHTS DAY – Exercise Castor Oil Anecdotes from then LAC John Mantell Engfitt2 January 1970 exercise Castor Oil at Tindal. 12 hours on, 14 off, rotating over two weeks. Try sleeping in a 2 man tent at midday in the middle of summer in the NT! We roll up for work on the ORP at some ugly hour of the morning in the back of an LGS. One troop had to be poured from the tailgate of the truck and before he could be hidden away to recover from the session a few hours earlier a voice was heard to say "Oh Arch what have you done, this will have to be reported". Unfortunately for the then Flt Sergeant Peter Coleman, Arch was not the culprit but one of Peter's "better troops". The outcome I cannot remember but the better troop was ??????????????????? Snippets that I recall: During Exercise Castor Oil, an RAF Vulcan came across the Tindal base at tree top level. We later heard that tree foliage was found lodged in places under the aircraft on its return to Darwin. Ice was transported to Tindal ex Darwin and obviously made from sea water as the lower two inches or so were that salty that we had to cut the bottom off if we wanted ice in our drinks. I had noted in my photo album that the exercise was called "Stubborn Mule" and believed that for many a year. The book Swift to Destroy dispels that as the exercise was in fact "Castor Oil" I would be grateful if someone can tell me what Stubborn Mule was? I remember this trip to Tindal very clearly. My wife had given birth to twin girls on the

8th January and due to her parents residing with us in a caravan at the time, my request to not to go on the exercise was refused. Away for two weeks with no communication it was only as we sat in the shade of the Herc waiting to come home that some mail had arrived on said Herc and there was a letter for me. Anticipation soon turned to worry as the letter unfolded. The twin that was still in hospital had taken a turn (she remained there another 2 weeks), the washing machine blocked off and overflowed all down the hallway ruining the brand new carpet runner that we managed to afford, (we furnished the whole house with the two hundred dollar housing loan we got from the Padre), and numerous other snippets of not good news as well as nothing about missing me but rather hurry up and get home and fix all this stuff! Yes, I remember it well. Peter Taylor notes that in Swift to Destroy a pilot and aircraft from 77Sqn arrived in Edinburgh on 12th July 1977 to confer a plaque of Honorary Membership to a bub that was born in Adelaide at 0707hrs on 7/7/77. I was a Cpl Sumpie in ARDU at that time and saw in the aircraft for reoiling and refueling. It was an act that has stuck firmly in my mind as I remember my old Sqn with many happy memories.

16 Ship Fly Past: from Gary Cooper

Does anyone recall the 16 ship fly past we did for GG Hasluck over Canberra on 28 April 1969? As I recall, there were 12 Mirages and 4 Skyhawks led by Jim Treadwell with Dick Waterfield as deputy lead.



RP was Lake George where we met the Skyhawks. Run in was too early with our controller on the ground being in a state of panic as we were going to arrive over Canberra more than 60 seconds early. All had trouble maintaining formation due to the slow speed, less than 250 KTS, and minimum power. Hasluck was still arriving when our shadow quietly crossed the parade ground on the airport.

9 Jan 24. John Clarkson – The Aussie Character

I received your E-Mail today. Sadly I don't have any early movies or old photos. But I can give you a couple of early history stories. Two of them I shall extract from my book, (which I wrote in 2005/06,) and there is another story I thought of which occurred at Amberley in April 1964, when I was posted to my very first operational squadron – No 1 Squadron.

You could title this as “The Way Things Were.”

As I said, it was in April 1964, I had been an LAC Armament Fitter for a whole three months, and this was my first squadron experience. I was still three months away from my 20th birthday. On arrival in the hangar, (yes one of the old igloo hangars of 82 Wing) and had a look around at my fellow Armourers. The section comprised of 1 FSGT, 2 Corporals, and 6 LACs. I, of course was the most junior, and the most senior LAC had been an LAC for about 7 years. The others varied between 2 years and 6 years, so yes, I had a long time to serve. Both of the Corporals had seen WWII service, one in the Army and the other in the RAAF. The second of the two had been on a Lancaster squadron right through until the end of the war, then was discharged in 1946. He signed on again in 1950, as an Armourer, and by the very late 1950s or very early 1960s, he became a Corporal. The other fellow served in the Army in Borneo, and left the Army in 1946, and enlisted in the RAAF, as an Armourer in 1951. He too became a Corporal around the very early 1960s. Well it seemed that my ambitions for a career were going to be rather slow, considering those who served before me.

Then I spoke to my FSGT who quickly outlined his service. He had joined the RAAF in Australia House from the RAF in the mid 1950s. However, prior to that, to give me a bit of empathy, he told me of his very first experience as an Armourer on an RAF squadron. His first squadron (I can't remember the No) was in the SE of England re-arming spitfires in the Battle of Britain in 1940!! So, you could imagine how I felt after being introduced to my fellow Armourers.

After about three weeks, I was to be introduced to the Warrant Officer Engineer (WOE). Yes, it was a formal introduction. My FSGT took me to his office and introduced me. He looked at me and said, “I normally don't like having boys in my squadron, but now that you are here, we shall see how you go”. So, I thought that was a good start. Between he and my FSGT, they outlined his service experience. (Be aware that the WOE, at the age of 52 years, was 32 years senior to me in age). He had served in a number of fighter squadrons in the Far East during WWII, then staying in the RAAF, he had seen operational service in Japan, Korea, Malta, then Malaya, etc. Later that day, I was talking with a few of the SNCOs in the hangar commenting on what outstanding careers some of the SNCOs had experienced. The WOE heard me as he was walking past and said to me, “You don't join the RAAF to pursue a career son, you join the RAAF to serve!”

Here is a story from 1966 in 77SQN. One could give a title – “The AOC inspects 77SQN”.

Whilst in 77 Squadron, there was an “Air Officer Commanding” (AOC) inspection. I had hoped that here supposedly in a front line operational squadron, they would not go through the rigmarole of painting everything prior to the inspection. Well, my hopes were well founded. On the day, we were asked to simply parade in our working dress, in a straight line in front of our aircraft. There we were, in our stubby shorts and work boots, looking like bronze Anzacs, standing ready to greet the AOC. The squadron CO, with the squadron WOE, escorted the AOC along the line to inspect the airmen. In those days, the Malaysian bases were under the control of the Far East Air Force, and the AOC appointment was granted to either an RAF, or an RAAF, or an RNZAF Air Vice Marshall on a rotation basis. Well, AVM Sir Foxley Norris, a very British RAF gentleman from Battle of Britain fame, inspected us. One of our armourers, Darkie Macleod, although a white Caucasian male, tanned extremely well in the tropics. When the AVM came to Darkie he commented to the CO, “Isn't it

wonderful that you've got your indigenous labourers on parade with you” Well, Darkie exploded, and responded immediately, “Corporal Macleod, Armament Fitter, Royal Australian Air Force, Sir!”. Not to be outdone, the AVM responded, “Young man, you'll have a lot of trouble getting back into Australia won't you, with the White Australia Policy”. Darkie began to respond, but we all hissed, “Shut up Darkie”.

Here is another story which I believe may not have been widely spread. It involves one Sabre pilot in 79 SQN Ubon who received quite a scare!

A suitable Title might be: “Aircraft Towing – by the USAF”.

Another incident involved a 79SQN Sabre which was being flown by a newly arrived pilot and he was doing some local flying and gaining familiarity with the area. During this flight, his aircraft suffered an inflight engine failure. Several attempts to re-light the engine were carried out, but in vain. Fortunately, as he was close to the airfield perimeter, he notified Air Traffic of his emergency informing them he was conducting a “Straight In” approach without an engine and using emergency hydraulics. He also informed Air Traffic that he would require assistance to be towed from the end of the runway to the squadron lines. A successful landing was carried out and the USAF Crash Crew met the aircraft at the end of the runway. (This crash crew were the same operators who would meet a loaded F4 Phantom in distress, or a loaded C130 Hercules in distress). They connected a Sabre towbar to the aircraft, hooked it up to their Crash Crew towing vehicle and began to drive back to the Australian lines. The driver probably didn't even feel the weight of the Sabre on the back. After a short trip to the squadron lines at about 25 miles per hour, our Pilot thought this was the scariest part of the whole incident.

Dave Bowden reflects:

My only claim is that I was very fortunate to have been CO of 75 SQN, OC 41WG, OC 81WG, COM TFG as well as the last fighter exchange on the F-102 after such luminaries as Bernie Reynolds, Murray Turnbull and Bruce Grayson. No ejections fortunately.

The only unusual event was in 1970 when taking a T-33 to Forth Worth for my C exam (the F-111 project team were to be the supervisor), a bird strike as I broke out of cloud destroyed the small under slung fibreglass travel pod along with my study notes and uniform. The SAR chopper did recover my uniform from a field 5 nm from the departure airfield (Perrin) but those study notes just floated away.

We think the bird strike was some geese flying just near the edge of the low cloud base and hence were not seen. The other cause may have been a failure of the travel pod as they were fairly light construction and only the attachments fittings remained on the aircraft.