

Evan S Devenish

I SURVIVED A MID-AIR COLLISION

At the age of 18 I joined the RAAF at Clontarf and trained to become a Pilot. I did my EFTS at Cunderdin on 32 Course and followed up with SFTS at Geraldton. I graduated in June '43 as a Sergeant Pilot and was anxious to get an overseas posting. Imagine my disappointment when I was posed to Mt. Gambier as a Staff Pilot. On enquiry about this I was told that as I was under 19 years of age it was considered I should get more experience, as Staff Pilots were in great demand I would have to accept this posting.

I went to Mount Gambier and flew Anson's for trainee navigators. Boring!! For one who wanted to fight, being a "Taxi Driver" certainly was mundane. So to brighten it up a bit, I convinced another young enthusiast that we could have a bit of fun, if we were able to do one of the exercises together flying formation.

This was strictly taboo, but at least we would have company and not get as bored, as was the straight and level flying we were doing. By looking at our flight schedules, we saw that on August 19, I was to take off some 6 minutes after my friend and that exercise was a 2½ hour sea search. This was just what we wanted. If Bob, the other Pilot would throttle back after take off, I could go full bore and catch up with him. We could then finish the exercise flying formation, out of sight of any prying eyes.

The Anson I flew was AW 797, an early RAF model without flaps. This turned out to be a disadvantage as I had no way of slowing down when approaching my friend's aircraft. Therefore, rather than formatting on his plane I flew past and he had to catch up. This he did and he flew on my starboard side. All went well until we were about 32 miles off shore and were flying at about 4,000 ft. when we noticed below, a coastal freighter. We had no radio communication between us, so all our signals were visual. Bob indicated he wanted us to go down and "Buzz" the ship but I wanted no part of that and let him know. However he believed that if he took the lead he could take us down.

So he disappeared below me and the next thing I knew, we were thrown on to our back, when he came up too early and took off 5ft. 2 inches of my port wing. It was not too easy to control the aircraft, but after a struggle I managed to turn and head for home.

A friend of mine was Duty Pilot in the tower for the day and when he saw me limping home, he advised the CO, that he had "half an Anson in the circuit area." Red Very-lights were fired, warning other aircraft of an emergency and I landed to a welcoming committee and was immediately placed under arrest.

They wanted to know what I had hit and all I could tell them was that I thought it was my mate Bob, but as I didn't see him, I wasn't sure. They asked me why I didn't stay around and look for him. My reply was that I was more concerned about getting back to base as I had trainee navigators on board.

About half an hour later he came in, with part of the fuselage, around the gun turret, crumpled. He stated he was unaware he had hit anything, until one of his trainees told him it was cold and noisy in the back. He was given the same welcome as I and in due course we were court-martialled, for damaging His Majesty's Aircraft.

Both aircraft were written off and we were fined 28 days pay with a loss of rank for 6 months. I continued flying as a LAC Pilot.

A couple of months later I was given Embarkation Leave and came home to WA to say farewell to my folks. After leave I was sent to 1 ED Melbourne and then on to 2 ED Sydney and during Roll Call, on the Docks shipside, my name was called and I was removed from the contingent and posted to Evans Head in NSW. There I flew as a Staff Pilot for Air Gunners and after one month I was again given Embarkation Leave and sent home. This time I only got as far as 5 ED Perth before I was again withdrawn from the overseas posting and sent back to Mount Gambier.

I continued flying Ansons at Mount Gambier, Oxfords at Point Cook, more Ansons at Ballarat and Deniliquin, before being posted to No. 1 OUT at East Sale to fly Beauforts.

I completed that course and then went to No.5 OUT Williamtown NSW and converted to Beaufighters. I also completed that course but because the "bomb" had been dropped on Japan all further movements to 30 Squadron ceased. I remained at Williamtown until November 1945 flying Beaufighters to their graveyard at Wagga Wagga.

Therefore as a result of my "mishap" I never left Australia and while that upset me at the time, I look back now and realise that event possibly saved my life.