

## **H. P. Traylen**

### Chapter 2

My Adventures in the RAAF, by H. P. Traylen. 1944-1947  
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I was born in Guildford on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1926. I started school in 1932 at the Guildford Primary School and finished education at Midland Central School in 1941. My occupations were Hardware Assistant and Junior Clerk.

I joined the RAAF because I had always been interested in aircraft.

I did my basic training at Busselton at 4RD (Recruit Depot). We were there for about a month and in that time we had one weekend pass so the train was caught from the then Busselton railway station to Perth. I remember Hughie Blake in the carriage for he sang a song of the time, Red River Valley. I'm not sure but I think Alan Hunter and Clarky were also in the carriage. The train was called the Midnight Horror because it arrived after midnight in Perth. I spent my first leave at home. We left Perth to go back to camp at approximately 11pm and got back to Busselton at about 4.30am in time to start drill again. We had our first needles there and vaccinations for smallpox and also went to dental parades. Everything was called a 'parade'. Most of the time we spent on the 'bullring' (parade ground) marching and doing rifle drill. The gas chamber was another thing we had to go through with the gas masks on and laughing gas to give us confidence in the masks. Also theory on the various gases with small pots made up to smell like the gases. Route marches were on and we did quite a lot of them down the bush roads of Busselton. We spent some time at the rifle range firing rifles and the Thomson sub-machine gun.

One chap would not go to the showers after a day on the bullring and he smelled awful so we asked the DI what we could do about it. He said if it was him he would throw him under the shower and scrub him with a scrubbing brush so we got a brush from somewhere and several of us carried him to the showers and scrubbed him. He always went to the showers after that.

We spent a week at bivouac in tents towards the end of our stay at the camp where we did unarmed combat and did grenade throwing etc. We also did some firing of dummy ammunition there. One chap didn't do what the drill sergeant wished and he chased him around the clearing with the bayonet on his rifle. Afterwards he was shot with dummies in a dispersal hangar it made a terrible noise. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if a live round had got into one of the magazines. After a week at bivouac we were told to find our way through the bush to the Ship Hotel it was part of our training. We were all set off in pairs to find the ship and when we arrived we were met by our drill Ivor Warne and the sergeant in charge of airfield defence and they bought us all a beer. We passed out with a 'Passout Parade' all except for Clarky who was assigned to kitchen duty as he could not keep in step. The sergeant would say "AC Clarke as you were the rest of the squad change

step” and somehow Clarky would still be out of step. Clarky was also a very heavy sleeper and one night a couple of the chaps lifted him and palliassed with the three boards we slept on out to the parade ground. Clarky awoke in the morning to the drill sergeant balling him out and he wanted to know how he got there. I don’t know what Clarky’s answer was but it was towards the end of our training and I suppose the sergeant just wanted to get us out of his hair so he didn’t report him. Several days later we were all posted to await our basic courses in engineering. I was posted along with others to 4SD (Stores Depot) to a pool there. When we were ever posted there I don’t know for we did nothing there. I met Max Smallacombe who was a sergeant in stores and the father of my then girlfriend Olwyn. We were eventually posted to 6ED at the bottom of William Street Perth to attend the school that had been set up in the Perth Technical School over the road. It had been an Embarkation Depot.

There we did the basic requirements for engineering using hand tools, theory and practical. One of the teachers I can remember was “Cherry Red” Morris. He took us for theory and his main chant seemed to be “bring it to cherry red”. Filing a block of metal to be perfectly flat was another exercise that we did. One of the chaps Mick Millet was recruited as a drummer I don’t think he had ever played the drum before and used to keep us in step as we marched to the school. However we all seemed to get through and I was posted to Ascot Vale in Victoria, which was the main showground for that state and had been turned into an engineering school for the RAAF. I had been picked out to do a Flight Riggers course. Alan Hunter was also chosen for the same course. One thing I remember about 6ED was an unfortunate accident I had while on leave. I was at the Court’s property in Bushmead and chopping some wood for Mrs Court when the axe slipped and I sliced into my foot. Mrs Court bound it up for me and Mr Court took me into the local doctor, Dr Bladen. He said I had cut an artery and tied it up. I came home after that and called Alan Hunter who reported to camp that I had had an accident. Well the doctor at the hospital camp was most unaccommodating and said I should have reported straight to them to which I answered that I could have bled to death in that time. However I was stitched up and when it came time to have the stitches removed the nurse must have been a trainee or something for she pulled the knot through the first one and I howled that I didn’t think much of that and she proceeded to remove the rest properly. I was sent to the stores branch at the camp straight away and spent a week there while my cut improved.

Another thing that sticks in my mind was John Oliver who always seemed to win the competition for the shiniest boots when we were selected for guard duty and he would sell the duty for a pound because he would get off. He would do the duty himself. Also there was a Warrant Officer there called Gash and he revelled in the fact that he was too tall to be called a C----. One day someone filled his sump with sand and he never drove the Baby Austin again. The rumour was that he was never sent overseas because at the first opportunity he would have been thrown overboard.

We all were sent by train to Melbourne after a short leave and left Perth Station with my brother Ern to see me off. At Kalgoorlie we were changed at Parkeston to cattle trucks, which were covered in straw on the floor and with a hole in one corner for necessary toilets. At least they had covered the roof with corrugated iron to keep the rain out. I think I sat in the doorway all the way to Port Pirie in South Australia where we were detrained into old carriages of the South Australian railways. The trip across the Nullabor Plain was a classic. The train had a cookhouse in it and we would be pulled off the main line sometimes an hour or so before mealtimes to allow the passenger train to go through. The Yanks of course had sleepers on the troop train and sheets and pillows etc. at the end of the train and special food. We would all line up with our 'dixies' for the meal and the tucker was not too good, most of it went in the slop bins that were provided. At one stop near an aboriginal mission the abo's scooped up the meals from the slop bins and ate it. They sold carvings of kangaroos and emus to the troops made from jam wood and made quite a sizeable sum from it. Being rookies we took all this but it is better forgotten. At Tarcoola there was a pub and of course the army blokes who had been in for years headed for it. When they got there it had just closed so they sent a deputation to the colonel in charge of the train and he ordered the publican to open up as these chaps had been in the Middle East and were on their way home on leave. So everyone had a few beers and the pub was crowded.

At the station in Port Pirie where we detrained there was a ramp, which we had to go down and we all baaed like sheep as we went to show that we *were* like sheep. The rest of the journey was spent on the South Australian and Victorian railways in the old carriages. I can remember one stop at Ararat and it was bitterly cold. The ladies of the town had prepared breakfast for us and we were treated to snaggers and mash and that warmed us up.

We arrived at Ascot Vale about 11am on a Sunday and found the Orderly Room. There we were told to go to the hay shed and fill our palliasses and proceed to No. 1 Cattle where we were to be quartered. This was an enormous structure, which had been divided into rooms of about 16 men by a wall 12 inches off the ground and about 6 feet tall. Needless to say as it was very cold in Melbourne this wall did nothing to keep the wind out. On Monday morning a corporal who was to be our mentor turned up and began to sort us out. He had a room at the end of the pavilion, which was all closed in. We would keep warm for most of the night by going to the showers which were mercifully hot and turn the hot water up so that we were like lobsters when finished and run back to our quarters and pile on as many clothes as we could, get under two blankets and sleep till about 4am when the cold seemed to seep through.

There we completed such subjects as Theory of Flight, Rigging (on a Tiger Moth, an Airspeed Oxford), Fabric and Dope, Metalwork (which included a patch of metal riveted to a Spitfire). I was paired with a WAAAF for this job and as she couldn't climb inside the tail section I did and got stuck. It took some time to get out. I got on well with some of the WAAAFS and I can remember one who used to mend my clothes and see to the starching of my

collars for me, her name was Terri and all she wanted for this was to go to the station pictures or concert parties and another Joan Sadlier from Western Australia. I used to meet her after lights out under a huge veranda near their quarters. I'm sure it was the bravado of cheating the officers because all I did was talk. Then there was Blanche Wright from Victoria who was probably my first real love. We were inseparable going everywhere together. I went to her home in Moorabbin and felt I was accepted there. Her father belonged to a 50's club, which only had 50 members and met every Sunday morning. He took me to this once when I was on leave. I also visited my eldest brother who after his crash in England and his subsequent hospitalisation was in East Melbourne in the experimental section and as he was one he was employed, as a psychologist. He and his wife Mae lived at Hawthorn where they had just adopted a son Ross and I visited them there.

Ascot Vale was also home for their training of a lot of Indonesians. They were at that time under Holland and were doing the same courses as us. We were not allowed to fraternise with them and they probably wouldn't be able to understand us anyway.

We did our practical work such as learning how to inertia start aircraft, on a Fairey Battle and after this went into pool. I was allotted the boilers, which meant all night work as the days were done by the permanent staff. We took over after five and had some five or six boilers to keep stoked up. Some were our own showers and some were other courses. Our favourite boiler was the WAAAF where we would usually get a mug of tea and a piece of cake. They would also have their washing pegged out to dry in the boiler room. After a stint at this I was put onto the fire tender again after the staff knocked off. This was a pie job as apart from training runs we could sleep all night.

I'm not sure whether this was only our course or whether it was a song of Ascot Vale but we sang it I know. It went like this to the tune of Lilli Marlene:

When we joined the air force  
We thought we walked on air  
But when we got to Ascot Vale  
We know that we were there  
It was there that we finally realised  
The tales we'd heard were only lies  
We'd signed away our freedom  
We'd signed away our lives

I don't know if there were any more verses but this I remember.

After some months of this we were asked to fill in forms of where we would like to be posted. I think all of us wanted to be sent up north and only one chap wanted to go home to WA as his mother was ill. He was the only one sent north and the rest of us were sent to our home states. We had had exams at each section and a final exam in all the different facts of rigging. We all passed and I along with others was posted to 4SD (Stores Depot) to sit around and do nothing. Maurie Carr the journalist was also sent there with

us. This was in the Sunshine Harvester factory in Maylands which had been taken over by the RAAF as a stores depot.

With Alan Hunter and Bruce Louth I was posted from there to 4CRD (Central Recovery Depot) which was over the road in Maylands where Ross's are today. It was there that I did the first work that I had been trained for. The idea was to recover all crashed and unserviceable aircraft, take all the instruments etc out and break them up for melting down to make parts for other aircraft. Because I had been a junior clerk it was not long before I was sent to AIU (articles in use) section to maintain the tool lists that all the tradesmen had. It was up to me to register all tradesmen coming in with tools and also recover from those posted. There was a sergeant there but all he was interested in was the sale and repair of watches and jewellery. It was also up to me to destroy all tools if they were broken etc. I had accumulated a large toolbox of tools by the time I had finished. Years later when I went to Wooroloo to visit my father I asked my brother what happened to all the tools. He said they must have been left at 43 Market Street in Guildford so someone got all the tools for nothing. The words junior clerk got me into a lot of trouble because I was transferred to the technical library to do amendments.

After a period of time there I was promoted to an LAC (leading aircraftsman) along with Alan and Bruce. This allowed us to wear the propeller on our sleeves. We would have a parade every morning and then all go to our sections. It was there that we heard that they were calling for aircrew so I paraded before the adjutant to remuster but was told that the air force had spent thousands of pounds on my engineering training and I would not be allowed to apply. That was that.

As a unit we were disbanded and sent to Pearce Airbase for it to be carried out. We had weekend leave from there but had to live on the base through the week in two storey brick barracks, which are still there. We cleared our section then played patience in the offices above the hangar. After the work was all finished I was posted to Richmond in NSW to TT&SD Flight as a rigger.

We were all posted individually in the RAAF unlike the army, when you were put into a unit or battalion, you stayed there and went where the battalion went. Alan Hunter was posted to the same flight. TT&SD (target towing and special duties) flight had Beaufighters, a twin engined fighter. They were known to the Japs as "Whispering Death" because of their speed it was not known they were approaching especially at low level. The flight's aircraft were stripped of all weight in the way of ammunition cases and guns etc to make them faster as they were mainly used for naval gunnery exercises. If live ammunition was used by the navy they would tow a drogue and if not, which was mostly the case, a camera was used by the gun crews in the navy. They could attain a speed of something over 300 mph and mostly they were used in a dive to increase their speed.

We were housed in brick two storey barracks and had a room each as at Pearce Airbase. On weekly inspection everything had to be put away, the bed

made and the floors polished. We would take it in turns to polish the passages and clean the toilets. The inspection would take place after we had gone to work, by an officer, WOD, and a sergeant. Otherwise it was a pretty easy life. To fill in time one of the LAC's, Jim Farmer, ran a card game of pontoon and we would gather in his room around a blanket spread on the floor at night and the weekends. On a Sunday the RAAF team used to play rugby union against various other clubs and we used to go and watch them.

Most of us had to do mess duties at the officers mess like peeling spuds and cleaning up the pots and pans. This was done with bad grace as we didn't see why we had to. The WAAAF waitresses would hand out jugs of beer to us through a window when the officers had a bash. We would gather on the lawns outside the mess and drink the health of all the officers. Two of the WAAAF waitresses were redheads, one older than the other and the young one said over something I did that she had had me, to which the other one replied that she wished she had. I took the young one to the pictures in Richmond one night and on the way back to base she walked a distance of two paces from me and nothing I did made any difference. So I gave her away.

I made some firm friends there and was to stay in touch with them for many years after I was discharged. Clem Jordan was one who I ran into in Mt Barker in later life when I was there as a technician in the PMG. He was a cable jointer in the lines section. Alan Hunter stayed at Richmond and I lost touch for some time. Bruce Louth had gone to another posting. Jim Farmer was another I ran into at Kendenup in the 1950's, he was a school teacher there and was married and they had just had a baby. He was the one that ran the pontoon school. Harry Lloyd another of the pontoon mob, went on to become a technician with a hearing aid company.

I suppose I stayed with the flight for about 12 months and then I was posted to 486 Maintenance Squadron at Schofields in NSW. It was a previous naval fleet air arm base and we were housed in corrugate iron huts of approximately 24 men. The airman's mess was also built of corrugated iron as were all the buildings on the base. It was there that my previous stint as a junior clerk again got me into trouble again. I was one day called to the Orderly Room and was told that as they wanted a leave clerk I was it. After having worked as a rigger for a long time it was a bit of a blow to me. I suppose I should have made more use of the position than I did because many people without any leave credits would approach me and wanted to buy leave. It was a simple job to have the adjutant sign the leave passes as he would just sign a batch as they were put in front of him. But I was too honest. It was here for the first time since I had been in the air force that we were given sheets and pillow cases. We still had cyclone wire beds but the sheets did make a difference.

After a period I was seconded to 36 Squadron as a rigger. It was one of three flying squadrons for which the maintenance squadron was formed to do all the maintenance work other than pre flight inspections. At that time I was selected to do a small conversion course in mechanics and instruments to become a crew chief. This didn't mean much but it did give me some time

away as a member of an aircrew and we were acting corporals while away. We flew to Port Moresby, Lae, Mt Haagen and Garoka in the mountains. On my first flight away I was to go with another crew chief in Etbin Pilko. He was a Pole and I think his name was abbreviated somewhat. Anyway I learnt my duties, which were mainly to refuel and check to see that the generators operated satisfactorily in flight. The aircraft were Dakota's or Douglas DC3's a good kite which flew many miles during the war. I can remember going through the cut between Port Moresby and Lae for the first time. One moment we were flying along thousands of feet up and the next there were mountains on either side. It was an eerie feeling. Of course at that time it was not possible to fly high enough to get over them. From time to time we had to transport natives from point to point and once they were in the air the sad faces were something to see. All of them seemed to think that they would be airsick and then everything would be OK. So they were all issued with a paper bag and once airborne would be sick and then a transformation came over them and they would all look out the windows and marvel at the height etc.

During my posting to Schofields Air Base we had representatives from TAA (the previous name for Qantas), Ansett, BOAC (British Airways), and several overseas airlines to study the RAAF's method of maintenance. We were quite proud of our record during WWII in the Transport Wing, of not losing a plane due to maintenance, only by enemy action. I believe they carried out a modified form of this for years after.

At one time a Mosquito fighter bomber from the RAF landed at the base and I was one of the team that was attached to service it. I must admit that I didn't know much about Mosquito's but all we had to do was a daily inspection on it.

On the base an operator who sold hot dogs to all and sundry had permission to come onto the base. They sold for nine pence each and he must have sold millions as the mess food particularly at weekends was not much chop.

It was there that I met a nurse from the army hospital who had come to a dance there. She was called Mickey and her friend was called Merle. She was very small and I broached the subject one night that she must be the smallest girl in the army. She said she was but for one who was smaller than her. Merle was full of fun and had been to Morotai, she said she was "Merle the girl who lost her virginity on the beach at Morotai". I never did any good anyway so I don't know. Mickey was Indian by birth and had beautiful bronze skin.

I met my future wife at a dance at Schofields Air Base in NSW where I was stationed. It was the practice to ask the nurses from the hospital near Strathfield in NSW to come, as there were not enough WAAFs on the base as partners. The nurses came in a bus from the hospital. I had previously knocked around with a nurse name Mickey who was Indian by birth and she was pretty small. I said to her she must be the smallest girl in the Australian Army and she said there was one smaller. I met her at the dance and she was to become my future wife. She said she was 4'11 1/2". I asked her name

and she said Betty Schofield and I thought she was having me on so the next day I rang the hospital and asked was there a Betty Schofield there and the answer was yes. I spoke to her and made a date to see her the next weekend that I had a pass. Anyway I did ask her to go for a walk at the base and we walked down where the aircraft were. I said is she would like she could get in one to sit in the pilots chair but she refused, I suppose because she thought I might make a pass.

In 1947 my mother died and I was notified by telegram from my eldest brother Neil. He said it was no use me coming home as she would be buried by the time transport could be arranged. The adjutant was very good about it and wanted to know if I wanted to have some time off. To this I said no but I would like the rest of the day off as it was about 2pm. He agreed to this and the following weekend I was to go on leave and I showed the telegram to Betty. We had a quiet weekend.

By this time it was 1947 and I decided to stay in the Interim Air Force which was between the wartime force and the permanent force. I was still flying with 36 squadron and I can remember that each time we went away we had to go to the Medical Section for needles and while we were away take tablets for malaria. They were a white tablet, not atebirin. I think they were experimenting with us. We would fly from Sydney to Brisbane then on to Townsville refuelling at both places. Then on to a strip in the Cape York Peninsula which I can't remember the name of but I can remember that we would drop off fresh vegetables there for the airmen and bring back tropical fruit from New Guinea. It was a refuelling stop. Port Moresby was the next stop and the first time I landed there we were housed in caneite huts and we would lie there at night and wait for the breeze to come in which was invariably hot. Concert Parties were still coming to entertain the forces then and I attended some good ones. We would then fly to Garoka and Mt Haagen both in the mountains and usually stay over at one of them where we would be feted and slept in a grass hut with a grass woven floor. I well remember the breakfasts of cereal and tropical fruits that were turned on. Back to Port Moresby and then home to Sydney calling at the various places we had stopped at on the way up. We would be away about two weeks.

After a period of time I was transferred back to 486 Maintenance Squadron and I had asked Bet to marry me. On leaves we would go to the pictures, the dirt track racing with a friend of Bet's and her boyfriend who rode sidecars. Two Americans were racing at the time, Perry Grimm and Cal Niday and they of course had American cars and mostly cleaned up the local opposition. One day we went to look over HMAS Australia with a sailor from the ship who at the time was going with a cousin of Bet's.

It was a cruiser and was very interesting to see. Other times we would go to Manly in the ferry and once we went to Lunar Park and to the Olympic Pool for a swim. Of course weekend passes were not very conducive to much activity and I had to travel some 50 miles by train each pass.

Betty had been down to go to Japan with BCOF but decided to stay at home since she met me. She had been discharged from the army and was now in



the Repatriation Department and was doing the same job of nursing. She would never forgive the Japs for that they did to our boys till her death and would tell me some horrific stories of the returned servicemen that had been prisoners of the Japanese. Even in much later life when people said the war had been over a long time she would not forgive or forget.

We were to be married in the Methodist Church at Mascot NSW, by Rev. Arthur Morris-Yates on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1947. Of course we had to go to an interview with the minister earlier in his office and he gave us forms that had by law to be filled in. He was quite a man and had been on missionary work in the Pacific and told us if we didn't want others to know and we wanted to say "I love you" we could say "Ofa Artu" it was one of the islanders languages.

I asked Des Leahy if he would be my best man and he agreed and Bluey Taylor was to be groomsman. I told the L Group bods that I was to be married and they gave me an issue of new clothing and new shoes and Bet sewed all my insignia on. She had bought a new dress and a fur coat for the occasion. Her mother-in-law was to be her matron of honour, so all was set to go and the car had been hired. It was to be a home wedding and Rod Miller of Millers Brewery had sent a case of bottled beer for us as he and Pop were friends. I can remember that Kevin, Bet's younger brother, was offered a cigar and Pop said it was Ok. He took a couple of draws on the thing and turned green and was sick. Des, I think, went back to the air force at Richmond and settled over there, I saw a couple of years ago his death notice in the West Australian. He had originally come from Dalwallinu. Bluey Taylor still lived in Vic Park up until a number of years ago where he had settled with his wife.

After all the speeches and the eating was over we went to Central Station to catch a train to Katoomba where we would stay for a week on our honeymoon as I had a weeks leave. Some bright spark had written in chalk on the side of the carriage we were in "See honeymoon couple in seats 34 and 35". We were mystified by all the people staring in to our compartment, but it all became clear when we got out and saw the chalk writing. We were to stay at Leura in Merriwa House, which was a holiday boarding house. It overlooked the Jameson Valley and we could just make out the Jameson Valley farm which in the distance looked like a pocket handkerchief. It was mostly walking that was done to the Bridal Vale falls etc although we did go on a trip in a coach to see the Jenolan Caves and other places on the way. Also went to the pictures one night to see "The Sea of Grass" with Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn in. With only a week the time passed quickly and I arrived back with only ten pounds (twenty dollars) in my pocket. I had to go back to camp the next day and that was that. I was welcomed as a married man and had to make out the necessary forms etc. to make an allowance to my new wife. I took a fair amount of ribbing also.

I stayed on in the RAAF for a period of time and the weekend passes became too much having just been married. Bet of course was now married so she was not allowed to stay on at Repatriation (those days when a female was married she had to give up her job). So I made the decision to go for discharge. The adjutant tried to talk me out of it and so did some of the chaps

but I was adamant so the process started and at last I was able to go from section to section and be signed out. We arrived in Perth in mid-September 1947 as we had decided it would be best to go where there was some family. At the time I had two brothers and a sister and my father still living. We were met at Midland Junction by my father, sister, brother-in-law and brother Ern. After the introductions were over we all went home to my sisters place where we were to stay. My father had sold the old home in Market Street, Guildford and was living at the Shack at Wooroloo with my brother. I had to go to Pearce Air Base to complete my discharge after my leave cut out and the only things I kept were my uniform and greatcoat. I was later to regret this. After that I had to find a job. I did not want to go back to being a junior clerk at the Trade Protection Association, as they were bound to take all ex-servicemen who had worked there beforehand. So I started to look around.

I joined Clarksons WA Ltd soon after my discharge and then served 35 years in the then PMG Department and Telecom.