



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION of RETIRED AIRLINE PILOTS and AVIATION PROFESSIONALS

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EDITORIAL

We could possibly title this issue "The Hijack Issue". We lost Captain John Pyman in February and as most of you know, John was the FO on the June 1979 TAA DC9 hijack. As we decided to include that event, we thought, 'Why not the other Australian hijacks?'. So, later in the newsletter we have chronicled the 1960 TAA Electra hijack, the Ansett F27 event (featuring our own Walter Gowans) and the 2003 QF (QantasLink) 717.

New Joiner Dinger Bell's career history makes for interesting reading. Other than being possibly the only AARAP member with the B17 and C46 on his licence, he spent time flying in, shall we say, not the nicest of places? One company he flew for is WIGMO and after researching it we thought you might like to see its "job description" and so it's included with his profile.

Relatively new to the association, Eric Young died in January. Eric was an ATCO in Australia and Hong Kong but unfortunately, we've been unable to get any details of his career. If anyone does have something on Eric, please pass it on so we can include it in a future issue.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to Autumn along with some relief from the heat.

As can be seen from the photos on your website everyone at the combined Sunny Coast lunch had a fun catch up; around 30 pax made for an enjoyable afternoon.

Not a good time for sub-load travel with fuel shortages causing cancellations along with disturbances in the Middle East, home seems comfortable for now.

Your AGM is booked for 25 June, so see the website under "Our Events" for details. Mail Chimp notifications will also be sent.

Watch out for E bikes!

Phil James

NEW JOINERS

Captain Eric Cooper: ex Bush Pilots/AirQld (QN) 1978-1986; TN 1986-1989; QantasLink (QF) 1991-2010

Captain Alan Gawthorpe: ex GA; TN; Compass Mk2; TG; SQ. (Alan retired in 2002 and currently lives in Strathmore, Victoria.)

Captain Ronald (Dinger) Bell: LAME apprenticeship with QF at Mascot; 5 Years as LAME, London Heathrow; Libya; Congo. 1966 gained FAA commercial licence. Co-pilot B17 Waterbomber, Cody Wyoming; Co-pilot DC3 LAVCO, Tripoli, Libya; Co-pilot then command C46, DC3, Learjet **WIGMO (Editor's Note: Refer Below)**, Congo; Libya, Occidental Oil, Linair (Libyan National Airways) F27; YS11 & DC3 Pyramid Airlines Cairo; DHL Brussels CV580; B727.

*Anstalt **WIGMO** (Western International Ground Maintenance Organization) was a 1960s CIA front company in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Incorporated in Liechtenstein in 1964, it provided maintenance, air support, and pilots (mostly Cuban exiles) to the Congolese Air Force against rebels.*

*Key facts about **WIGMO** in the Congo:*

- **Purpose:** Supported the Congolese Air Force (FAC) and mercenary forces against Simba rebels, providing air cover and airlifting supplies during the 1964-1967 period.
- **Operations:** Maintained T-28 Trojans and B-26 bombers, which were used to attack rebel positions and stop supply lines on Lake Tanganyika.
- **WIGMO Air/C-46 Crash:** The organization operated aircraft, including the Curtiss C-46 Commando. A WIGMO C-46 crashed into the Congo River on a flight from Kinshasa, killing all 45 people on board.
- **Personnel:** WIGMO was known to use Cuban exile pilots recruited through the MRR (Movement for the Restoration of Roads) and operated under the guise of a private maintenance contractor.
- **Defunct:** The company was active in Africa, primarily DR Congo, roughly between 1969 and 1989 (though active earlier, as noted by 1964 sources).

RIP

Mr Eric Young: 15 Aug 1947 – Jan 2026. ex ATC AUS; HKG

VALE

Captain Trevor Thom 13 Sep 1941 – 4 Dec 2025

(Editor's Note: Comments taken from various contributors to PPrune)



Trevor and I were compatriots at Ansett - he was a very nice gentleman indeed. A quietly spoken, kind man, he always had time for everyone. Despite his obvious intelligence, he never ever resorted to that "I'm the cleverest man in the room" persona. He passed away at 85. Thirty years ago, he fell off a double story roof, landed head first on concrete tiles below, and for good measure, put a couple of ribs through his lungs. In a coma for three weeks, doctors recommended pulling his life-support system, but his son (now a VA Captain), who stayed with him the whole time, would not allow this. Eventually awakened to find the only language he could speak was German which he had learnt when in Germany in the early 1960's. His English slowly returned...

After the events of 1989, when with Condor/Lufthansa he was called to a meeting at the airline's office in Frankfurt with some US Embassy officials, German Security types and Lufthansa Flight Dept. personnel. It was a couple of years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the new German Government had access to Stasi files, including one on Trevor Thom who had been in Germany, both West and East Berlin during that early 1960's sojourn. The Stasi believed Trevor was a CIA agent! The Americans said they could not find any evidence of this, and were relieved when Trevor put them straight. They gave him a copy of that file which he treasured, and also one that the KGB had on him. A truly impressive man. Blue skies and tailwinds old friend.

RIP Sir, your books are truly excellent. Well written, well-illustrated, and I used them all to start my airline pilot journey. I have kept the whole set and even now dip into them every now and then.

I used his FAA/US version, the 2 volumes, Airplane and Flight Operations, for my PPL ground school in the early 90s. So well written and organized, I still use them as reference once in a while, as a refresher for things like aerodynamics, prior to teaching new students. RIP, good sir.

Trevor Thom made a great contribution to aviation. His highly readable and clear style was a big step above previous training manuals that I had used for my PPL (and might have saved both money and time had they been available in my training days). Bear in mind the knowledge he imparted probably has quite a lot of people, both front and back sitters, walking around alive and well today.

I got to know Trevor back in early 70's. when he was an MIT Maths Teacher and also had a job with the Hawthorn College of Aviation Theory. That's when I met him as I was a student during a series of courses he ran at the school. I was doing the courses full time whilst on leave from Ansett as it was my final shot at passing my ATPL subjects before Ansett terminated those who did not pass them. His wonderful teaching did the trick and I was one of very few who passed the exams that year. Not long after that I introduced him to the Captain of Ansett's Intake and training system, Capt. Ron Stanton whom I knew quite well. Trevor was highly qualified and got a position as an F/O with Ansett and the rest is history. I was so blessed to have met and be helped by Trevor and in return did him a favour by way of the introduction, his qualifications did the rest. In the following years I spent quite a bit of time visiting Trevor and Elke whilst he was based in Melbourne. I will never forget such a wonderful person.

Captain Maurice Notley: 30 Jan 1952 – 12 Jan 2026



Maurice was born in Lae, Papua New Guinea, where his father worked as a LAME with Mandated Airlines.

The family returned to Australia in 1956 and his early life and school years were spent in Camden, NSW. He would spend a lot of his spare time at Camden Airport where his father owned Notley Aviation. Here he helped assemble a Tiger Moth which his father registered with Maurice's initials "VH-MWN". However, he wasn't interested in the mechanics of aircraft, all he ever wanted to do was to fly.

Maurice obtained his Australian CPL in 1976. He then flew for Flick Pest Control, later Talair and briefly Air Niugini in Port Moresby. He then joined East-West Airlines in Sydney, initially on the Air Ambulance contract, which he very much enjoyed and later on the F27 and F28.



He flew with EW for approximately 9 years until the Dispute put an end to his flying time in Australia and he and his family moved to Mauritius in January 1990 to take up a pilot position with Air Mauritius as a Twin Otter captain. He quickly progressed to command on the ATR42, co-pilot B747SP, captain B767 (check & training) and



ended his career on the A330/340 after 29 years with MK.

He retired to Parrearra on the Sunshine Coast.

Captain John Pyman: 7 Apr 1937 - 7 Feb 2026. Ex RAAF; TN

John was born in Perth on the 7th April 1936 to Max and Jean Pyman. When he was 4 his father Max went to War. He went to live with his grandparents in Hawker SA until the end of the war.

He attended Church of England Grammar School in Brisbane and joined their Airforce Cadets and later the RAAF based at Amberley with 23 Squadron. He was later transferred to Williamtown with 75 Squadron flying Vampires.



In mid-1961, approval was given for the formation of an RAAF Sabre aerobatic team.



There was obviously a large number of high-quality young pilots looking to be appointed to the team. Flying Officer John Pyman was selected in the No. 2 position.

In early 1962 John and his family of four moved to Butterworth, Malaysia. John's call sign was "Jay" and two of his grandsons were named Jay after him.

His last flight in a Sabre was November 1964.

In early 1965 he joined TAA on the F27 later transferring onto the DC9. John was the First Officer of the DC9 which was hijacked at Coolangatta airport June 1979.

(Editor's Note: The majority of you will be familiar with the event however we have included a Courier Mail article (below) which describes the hijack and the actions of the crew during and after the hijack.)

John retired to the Gold Coast in 1982.

THE HIJACK: TAA 552 MEL-OOL-BNE 8 June 1979

TN552 is nearing Eagle Farm after the evening flight from Melbourne to Brisbane with a stop at Coolangatta. That's where Phillip Sillery, 36, dishevelled and agitated, had boarded with his gun hidden inside a bulky jumper. Air hostesses on the ill-fated TAA flight Marlena Chadwick, Esme Qazim, who received a Star of Courage, Irene St John and Colleen Johnston.

Not long after takeoff, about 8.45pm, the scruffy seaman from South Tweed Heads marched up the aisle, opened the cockpit door and threatened to kill Captain Grahame Mackelmann and First Officer John Pyman.

He is on a suicide mission and Flight 552 is only minutes away from crashing into Brisbane's CBD. Even though his heart is racing, Captain Mackelmann keeps a cool head and calmly announces: "This is the captain speaking. Would all passengers please remain seated."



He tells Sillery the jet is running dangerously low on fuel and has to land. "I don't care," Sillery replies. "We will put it in Moreton Bay."

He orders the four hostesses, all from Brisbane, to the front of the aircraft and tells them to make coffee. Sillery forces Mackelmann to take the jet higher then orders him to take his hands off the controls. The jet begins to descend but Mackelmann will not tolerate this any longer.

He decides that even if Sillery kills him, Pyman will still be able to land. He circles Eagle Farm twice and then with the gun still at his head brings the plane down safely. Seventy seconds more and Flight 552 would have run out of fuel.

Mackelmann somehow convinces Sillery to let the 40 other passengers leave. Police sharpshooters surround the aircraft. For 93 more minutes the gunman keeps the crew hostage. He is given a can of beer and, bizarrely, offers to pay for it.

Then as Sillery still holds the shotgun on Mackelmann, hostess Esme Qazim, carrying coffee into the cabin, knocks Sillery off balance. First officer Pyman jumps on the hijacker. Mackelmann kicks the gun away and the other hostesses, Marlene Chadwick, Irene St John and Colleen Johnston all leap on to Sillery to hold him down.



Mackelmann and Qazim are awarded the Star of Courage. Sillery was sentenced to life in jail but a High Court challenge reduced the sentence to 10 years after he claimed his actions were merely a cry for help.

He was freed on parole in 1987 and said that he was so sorry he would never catch a plane again for as long as he lived. Five months later, while working for a Brisbane engineering firm, he was stopped trying to board an Ansett flight from Brisbane to Darwin. Sillery said Ansett was guilty of blatant discrimination. Ansett replied it was company policy not to allow convicted hijackers on to their aircraft.

Grahame Mackelmann retired from aviation in 1989 after a distinguished career. He died in April 2012. Sadly, his son Craig was killed flying an RAAF Mirage in 1986. Captain John Pyman died February 2026.

(Editor's Note: John Ridd was at Eagle Farm that night signing on for a freighter flight and tells the story below.)

“Back in June 1979 I was to sign on in Brisbane for an evening flight to Sydney and Melbourne on Ansett's Electra freighter. As I was walking from the car park to the domestic terminal to sign on there was a strange eeriness about the place. There didn't seem to be as much noise, or activity as there usually was.

When I got to sign on, the crewing guys advised me that there was a hijacking taking place, and that the airport was closed at the moment. The TAA DC-9 involved had been able to land okay, but there was a standoff, in the aircraft, with the hijacker, crew and passengers, at the eastern end of the tarmac.

Our plan was to go out to our aircraft, go through our pre-flight rituals and wait to see what would eventuate. While we were whiling away the time Captain Vercoe brought up the subject of the court case that Debora Wardley had taken against Ansett, for discrimination against hiring female pilots. He wanted to know what the opinions of us younger flight crew (Flight Engineer Steve Finger was of a similar age to me, 28) was about this business?

We both suggested that we had no problems with women being hired, and I mentioned that I had known a few female pilots in General Aviation, and that Christine Davies was a Captain on DC-3's with Connellan's, at Alice Springs, and that they all had good reputations!

With that Captain Vercoe became highly animated! He'd heard that us younger guys weren't giving Reg the support that he needed, and that airline aircraft were jobs for men! “Could you imagine a woman flying this aeroplane asymmetric, or with manual reversion (hydraulics failure)? he asked. Things went quiet for a little while, then he brought up the hijack situation as an example. “What if there was a female pilot flying that aircraft; she would go to pieces, and wouldn't be worth a cracker!” he suggested.

Well, barely a minute or two went by, when the tower air traffic controller called us up and said “It's all over guys, you can start up when you're ready”. I asked him if he had any idea how it was finally resolved, and while the memory is a little faded, I think he replied “Apparently the female cabin crew overpowered him and kicked the shit out of him!”

On the flight to Sydney and Melbourne the amount of non-operational conversation was practically zero!”

Australia's First Hijack: TN 408 SYD-BNE 19 July 1960

This Trans-Australian Airlines hijacking was Australia's first aircraft hijacking. It occurred on 19 July 1960 over Brisbane in a TAA Lockheed Electra. 43 passengers and six crew were on board Flight 408, the last Sydney to Brisbane flight for the day.

The crew consisted of hostesses Fay Strugnell and Janeene Christie, Captain John Benton, First Officer T. R. (Tom) Bennett and Flight Engineer Fred McDonald. Another TAA pilot, Captain D. R. (Dennis) Lawrence, was traveling in the cockpit as a passenger.

The hijacker, Alex Hildebrandt, wielded a sawn-off .22 calibre rifle, as well as a bomb: two sticks of gelignite, connected to a detonator that would apparently have fired, had Hildebrandt touched a bare wire to a torch battery.

After demanding that the plane be redirected to Singapore, Hildebrandt fired a shot, which went through the aircraft ceiling. First Officer Bennett, who had been narrowly missed by the bullet, punched Hildebrandt and pulled the wires from his hand, disabling the bomb. Captain Lawrence assisted Bennett in subduing and disarming the hijacker. Bennett was awarded the George Medal for his actions and Lawrence was formally commended.

Hildebrandt, who had been born in the Soviet Union in 1938, faced serious charges of attempted murder, having an explosive detonating device with the intention of destroying the aircraft and having explosives capable of causing injuries to persons on board. Hildebrandt was sentenced to three years in jail for attempted murder, 10 years for attempting to destroy the aircraft and two years for the explosives charge.

He successfully appealed the sentence in the Queensland Criminal Court as he argued that the aircraft which was 35 minutes into the flight, was over New South Wales when he armed the explosives in the aircraft toilet. He served a three-year sentence in Brisbane, for attempted murder and on discharge was arrested by detectives from NSW. He faced court again and was convicted on the charge of attempted destruction of an aircraft and sentenced to seven years imprisonment in NSW.

The Second: AN 232 ADL-ASP 15 November 1972

Ansett Australia Flight 232, on Wednesday, 15 November 1972, was an F27 flight from Adelaide, South Australia bound for Alice Springs, Northern Territory. It was Australia's second aircraft hijacking (after the first in 1960), and resulted in the perpetrator's death by suicide.

A male passenger, subsequently identified as Miloslav Hrabinec, a Czech migrant, had boarded the flight in Adelaide with a concealed sawn-off .22 ArmaLite rifle and a sheath knife strapped to his leg. About a half-hour before the scheduled landing time, as the flight was making its descent into Alice Springs Airport, he emerged from the lavatory, produced the gun, and said to a flight attendant named Gai Rennie, "This is a hijack".

Gai walked through the cabin followed by the hijacker. She then explained to flight attendant Kaye Goreham that the man behind her had a gun. All three then moved to the front of the aircraft. Gai then advised Captain Young and First Officer Walter Gowans that a man wanted to talk and he had a gun and said it was a hijack. However, Young said he was in landing mode and would talk to him on the ground. Young asked Rennie, "What does he want?" Rennie replied that she did not know.

The crew informed Hrabinec that he needed to be seated for landing and he complied.

After the plane landed, police commenced negotiations with the hijacker.

According to Goreham's account, Hrabinec stated his motive was not financial (he asked for no money) but that he wanted to commit suicide in a spectacular way by parachuting into a remote location and surviving for as long as he could before killing himself. To this end, he demanded a light aircraft, a parachute, and a jumpsuit.

A civilian pilot and flying instructor, the local Aero Club manager Ossie Watts, volunteered himself and his Cessna aircraft. An undercover police constable Paul Sandeman, posing as Watts' navigator, was also on board the Cessna.

According to Kaye Goreham, Hrabinec became suspicious upon seeing Sandeman and requested Goreham search Sandeman for weapons. Goreham did so but did not inform the hijacker when she felt a small firearm Sandeman had hidden.

Goreham states that the policeman "went for his gun" and the hijacker shot Sandeman in the hand and stomach. Sandeman was also shot in the right shoulder and left arm.

The hijacker ran off and Watts, who had been shown how to use a gun minutes earlier, began shooting. Police marksmen also opened fire and Hrabinec was wounded. Hrabinec then retreated to a ditch where he fatally shot himself.

The Fourth: QF 1737 MEL-LST 29 May 2003

QantasLink Flight 1737 was an afternoon Australian domestic flight from Melbourne Airport to Launceston Airport, which was subject to an attempted hijacking on 29 May 2003. It was the first attempted hijacking since the September 11 attacks.

Flight 1737 left Melbourne Airport at 2.50 pm on 29 May. Around ten minutes after take-off, as the crew prepared for the onboard meal service, David Mark Robinson, a passenger seated in Row 7 became agitated, stood up and began to make his way down the aisle. Producing two sharpened wooden stakes from his pocket, Robinson stabbed flight attendant Denise Hickson and flight purser Greg Khan in the head on his way to the cabin galley. Khan tackled Robinson to unbalance him, eventually succeeding despite repeated blows to the back of the head from Robinson's stakes, which caused him severe injuries. Several passengers (including a Canadian paramedic, Derek Finlay, a former Canadian soldier in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry helped restrain Robinson, holding him down and tying him up with materials found on board.

The plane immediately turned back to Melbourne, where Robinson was placed under arrest by Australian Federal Police. He was also found to be carrying aerosol cans and cigarette lighters, which he told police he intended to use as a flamethrower.

Khan and Hickson were later taken to Royal Melbourne Hospital for treatment, and two passengers who received minor injuries were treated at the airport by paramedics.

Despite numerous security improvements following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Flight 1737 lacked certain security arrangements. The door to the flight deck had not been adapted to completely block access from the outside, and there was no sky marshal on board.

Qantas undertook a full security review following the incident and promised to secure the flightdeck doors on all of their aircraft by 1 November 2003. The airline dismissed the suggestion of armed sky marshals on each flight as too expensive, and a full body search of passengers to detect wooden objects as unfeasible.

In an interview with the Australian Federal Police, Robinson admitted attempting to hijack the plane, which he intended to crash into the Walls of Jerusalem National Park in Tasmania – an action intended to release the Devil from his lair and bring about Armageddon. Robinson also admitted that he had intended to hijack aircraft on two previous occasions.

In July 2004, a Supreme Court of Victoria jury found Robinson not guilty of the three charges against him (attempted hijack of an aircraft, attempted murder and grievous bodily harm) due to reasons of mental impairment. Three psychiatrists testified that at the time of the incident, Robinson was suffering from severe paranoid schizophrenia. Justice Murray Kellam ordered Robinson to undergo psychiatric treatment at Thomas Embling Psychiatric Hospital in Fairfield.

Flight attendants Greg Khan and Denise Hickson returned to work after the incident. Khan and four of the passengers who helped restrain his attacker (Domenic Bordin, Keith Charlton, Gregory Martin and Garry Stewart) were awarded the Commendation for Brave Conduct from the Governor of Victoria, John Landy, in November 2004. Qantas also made a training video regarding the incident; the crew involved were interviewed and this is shown during security training.

Khan also speaks of how a passenger complained that the aircraft was returning to Melbourne, even though two crew members had suffered serious injuries and an attempt to hijack the aircraft had just occurred. Khan and other crew also report the amount of blood stains throughout the aircraft as a result of the injuries.

Upon further investigations by the airline, it was found one of the cabin crew used the international code for hijacking over the interphone to the flight deck. The crew member states she got a reply; however, the flight deck crew never heard the message, and found out much later that an attempted hijacking had occurred and crew were injured. The flight deck crew also stated they both heard yelling and screaming coming from the passenger cabin, and that they attempted to call the cabin crew but they received no answer and decided at this point to declare a pan-pan call to air traffic control.

(Editor's Note: There have been two further hijackings involving Australian pilots, both of which occurred in Papua New Guinea.)

November 2007: Two Australian pilots from Tropicair were hijacked by two armed security guards who were escorting a cash shipment worth approximately \$2 million. The guards forced the pilots to land on a disused World War II airstrip on Fisherman's Island near Port Moresby.

The pilots managed to activate a distress signal shortly after takeoff, leading to a police response. The hijackers abandoned the pilots, who were found handcuffed to a tree in a mangrove swamp.

Police launched a manhunt, during which one hijacker was shot dead, two were captured, and most of the money was recovered.

November 2019: Eight armed men hijacked a Tropicair Cessna 208 aircraft during a refuelling stop in Gasmata, on the island of New Britain. The men forced the pilot to fly to a disused airstrip, where they stole cargo and baggage before fleeing. The pilot was unharmed, and the aircraft was not damaged. The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary investigated the incident.

“TURNING LEFT SKIDDING RIGHT - CARDS FOLLOWING IN THE CORRECT SENSE”

Flying the DC3 with Ansett (Dave James)

If you had flown the DC3 for Ansett-ANA in the 60s the title would ring bells for you. This particular incantation was recited by the captain, taxing out before T/O. In those days we spoke to the aeroplane a lot. Later when assigned to the Viscount the recitations got longer and more complex. On engine start it was something like 'STARTING ONE, BUTTON IN, LIGHT OFF, LIGHT ON, LIGHT OUT, BUTTON OUT. Then repeated three more times of course. Mind you it became difficult to hear these calls with four RR Dart engines screaming at you.



I digress, back to the good old DC3!

When I joined Ansett-ANA in July 1965 DC3s were still very common. The company had more DC3s than any other type. The airline had a bewildering variety. DC4, Carvair, DC6B, Viscount 700 and 800, Fokker F27, Lockheed Electra, Boeing 727/100.

There were two types of DC3s in OZ, those powered by the Pratt & Whitney 14-cylinder twin row engine and the Wright Cyclone 9-cylinder single row engine.

Ansett ANA had only Wright Cyclone engines. TAA had all Pratt. The story goes that ANA got a hangar full of engines from the USAF when they left Essendon after the war ended. FOR ONLY ONE POUND EACH therefore all their Pratt and Whitney equipped DC3s were converted to Wright.

The Wright Cyclone weight and power was very close to that of the Pratt and Whitney. Some of the differences were that the Wright revved higher on T/O to the extent that the propeller tips moved at above the speed of sound. This created a terrific din until the power was setting reduced to climb power. The Pratt had movable cowl flaps where the Wright were fixed (simpler to operate). The Pratt equipped aircraft, which I never flew were apparently not as loud and vibrated less.

The Wrights were very reliable and had a life of 2000 hours between overhauls. I'm not sure that they were overhauled or simply replaced at one pound a pop.

As for operating the 3 the F/O (me) would wobble the wobble pump to pressurise the fuel line for engine start. Make the radio calls, take engine readings on climb and cruise, make entries in the flight log, keep a running weight and balance sheet on multi sector flights, tune the NDB if there was one. There was a large centrally mounted fixed card ADF and a basic autopilot which could only be used in cruise to maintain altitude and heading. If the F/O was flying the sector he had to look over to the flight instruments on the captain's panel as there were only systems gauges on the F/O's panel.

Flying the aircraft was not difficult. It was of course a tail dragger and required attention on T/O but was helped by having a tail wheel lock. In Ansett ANA we did tail down wheel landings, I believe TAA did three pointers. It was a breeze to fly an NDB letdown. In those days letdowns charts were scaled at 120 kt speed and 500 fpm descent. Happily, the Wright engine DC3 would fly level at 120 kt if you set 2000 RPM and manifold pressure 20 inches. We called the setting 20 20. If you threw the gear down and maintained 120 kt it would descend at 500 fpm. So, we would approach the NDB with 20 20 set, 120 kt at the descent point out bound, lower the gear, hold 120 kt descending at 500 fpm. The procedure turn was depicted level at a given altitude where we would retract the gear, fly level and put the gear down at the descent point inbound.

The complete letdown was flown at 20 20 pulling the gear up and down. The landing gear was very simple. When up was selected hydraulic power retracted both main wheels which held retracted. When down was selected the hydraulic power was removed and the gear extended by gravity.

The wind screen wipers were also hydraulically powered. The more you turned the control knob the faster they thrashed about. They needed lots of attention from engineering to ensure the blades actually touched the windscreen. One Captain, after several unsuccessful maintenance log entries made the following entry "please move this DC3 closer to the windscreen wipers"

The Ansett ANA DC3 operation was called the Victorian Air Coach Service. In other parts of the country Ansett subsidiaries operated similar services.

We operated with two Pilots and one Hostess (flight attendant) The service flew to many regional towns in Victoria, the Riverina in Southern NSW, King Island and Flinders Island in Bass Strait. We also flew Night Freighters to Adelaide, Sydney and Hobart. My first overnight with Ansett ANA was at Bairnsdale in Eastern Victoria.

The Captains I flew with were an interesting bunch to say the least. They included initial commands who had been with the Company for as little as four years and a strange mix of, as we called them then "New Australians" from France, Norway, Latvia, New Zealand and USA.

Included in the line-up were a number of former WW11 Pilots who were seriously heavy drinkers. Without naming names these were chaps who had scant regard for Bottle to Throttle rules. They were dangerous on overnights as we usually stayed in the town pub.

The overnight usually went like this. Arrive at the pub late afternoon, repair to the bar for a few beers before dinner. Have a few more beers and bugger - we missed dinner! Oh well let's take a few more beers back to the room.

One ex RAAF captain knew my father who was also in the RAAF during WW11. He said he was disappointed in my endurance at the bar and would report me to my father.

Another strange feature of the captain group was that many of them evidently came from large families. They seemed to have Aunties in most of the towns where we overnighted.

After less than a year the DC3 fun came to an end. I was assigned to the Vickers Viscount. There was no bidding system at that time.

The Viscount story I shall save for another day.

THE BAD ANGEL

In Hangar #4 of the Pima Air and Space Museum is a beautifully restored P-51 Mustang. It's name? "Bad Angel"

Proudly displayed on the fuselage of "Bad Angel" were the markings of the pilot's kills: seven Nazis; one Italian; one Japanese AND ONE AMERICAN.

"Bad Angel" shot down an American airplane?

Was it a terrible mistake? Couldn't be.

If it had been an unfortunate misjudgement, certainly the pilot would not have displayed the American flag.

Lt Louis Curdes graduated flight training school and was shipped off to the Mediterranean to fight Nazis in the air over Southern Europe.

He arrived at his 82nd Fighter Group, 95th Fighter Squadron in April 1943 and was assigned a P-38 Lightning. Ten days later he shot down three German Messerschmitt Bf-109 fighters. A few weeks later, he downed two more German Bf -109's. In less than a month of combat, Louis was an Ace. During the next three months, Louis shot down an Italian Mc.202 fighter and two more Messerschmitt's before his luck ran out.

A German fighter shot down his plane on August 27, 1943 over Salerno, Italy. Captured by the Italians, he was sent to a POW camp near Rome. No doubt this is where he thought he would spend the remaining years of the war. It wasn't to be. A few days later, the Italians surrendered. Louis and a few other pilots escaped before the Nazis could take control of the camp.

One might think that such harrowing experiences would have taken the fight out of Louis, yet he volunteered for another combat tour.

He was sent to the Philippines where he flew P-51 Mustangs. Soon after arriving in the Pacific Theatre, Louis downed a Mitsubishi reconnaissance plane near Formosa.

Now he was one of only three Americans to have kills against all three Axis Powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Up until this point, young Lt. Curdes combat career had been stellar.



His story was about to take a twist so bizarre that it seems like the fictional creation of a Hollywood screenwriter. While attacking the Japanese-held island of Bataan, one of Louis' wing men was shot down. The pilot ditched in the ocean. Circling overhead, Louis could see that his wing man had survived, so he stayed in the area to guide a rescue plane and protect the downed pilot. It wasn't long before he noticed another, larger airplane, wheels down, preparing to land at the Japanese-held airfield on Bataan. He moved in to investigate. Much to his surprise the approaching plane was a Douglas C-47 transport with American markings.

He tried to make radio contact, but without success. He manoeuvred his Mustang in front of the C-47 several times trying to wave it off. Apparently, the C-47 crew didn't realize they were about to land on a Japanese held island, and soon would be captives.

Lt Curdes read the daily newspaper accounts of the war, including the viciousness of the Japanese soldiers toward their captives. He knew that whoever was in that American C-47 would be, upon landing, either dead or wish they were. But what could he do?

Audaciously, he lined up his P-51 directly behind the transport, carefully sighted his 50 calibre machine guns and knocked out one of its engines.

Still the C-47 continued on toward the Bataan airfield.

Curdes shifted his aim slightly and knocked out the remaining engine, leaving the baffled pilot no choice but to ditch in the ocean.

The big plane came down in one piece about 50 yards from his bobbing wingman. At this point, nightfall and low fuel forced Louis to return to base.

The next morning, Louis flew cover for a rescuing PBY that picked up the downed Mustang pilot and 12 passengers and crew, including two female nurses, from the C-47.

All survived. Later, Lt. Curdes would end up marrying one of these nurses

For shooting down an unarmed American transport plane, Lt. Louis Curdes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Thereafter, on the fuselage of his P-51 "Bad Angel", he proudly displayed the symbols of his kills: seven German, one Italian, one Japanese and one American.

Louis Edward "Lou" Curdes (November 2, 1919 – February 5, 1995) was an American flying ace of the United States Army Air Forces during World War II who held the unusual distinctions of scoring an official and intentional air-to-air kill against another American aircraft as well as shooting down at least one aircraft from each of the major Axis powers.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice (one for action in the Mediterranean theatre and one for action in the Pacific theatre), a Purple Heart, 14 Air Medals and the Prisoner of War Medal.

He flew a Lockheed P-38 Lightning in both theatres and a North American P-51 Mustang only in the Pacific. Curdes named his first P-38 "Good Devil" and his P-51 "Bad Angel."



A Neat Row of Thunderstorms



What's E.T. short for?

Because he's only got little legs.

It's been twenty days since I joined the gym but there has been zero progress.

Tomorrow I'll go there personally to see what the problem is.

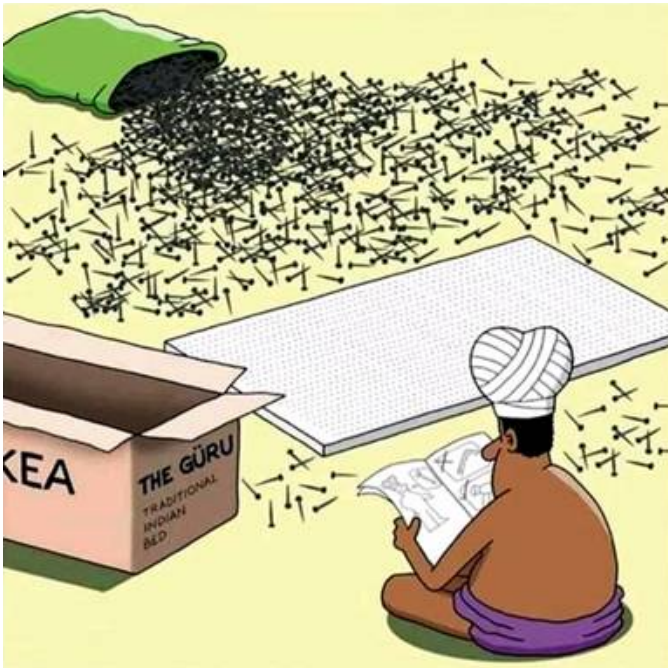
I found the world's best bratwurst.

My sister didn't believe me. So I sent her a link.

A man was walking through a graveyard when he saw a lady sitting on a bench. "Morning," he said. "No," she replied. "Just resting."

Fun fact: Koi fish always travel in groups of 4.

If attacked, the A B and C koi will scatter, leaving behind the D koi.



For contributions, comments and/or suggestions, please address your feedback to the Editors:

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