

## OPEN THE HANGAR DOORS

### Anecdotes from the troops

*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.

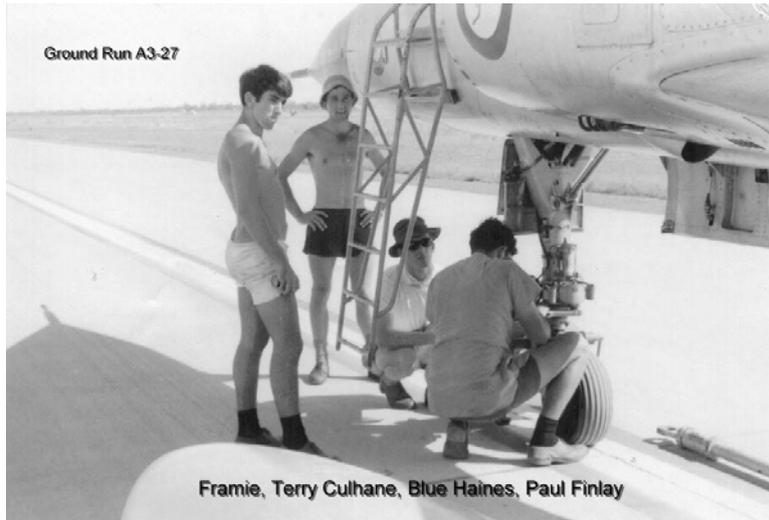
Sometime in 1970, I was on the flight line to do an engine run for the Eleco's after an alternator change. Just up from my position a formation four were getting ready to start as well. I had a hang start and as you all may remember there was always quite a heavy vibrating noise that could be heard all 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](http://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



*(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.)*

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.

## **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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.