

WHO IS / WAS BD?



At 5SQN RAAF FAIRBAIRN 1970

I was born 1937 and am now 87. My earliest childhood memories when 4 or 5 years old are of Brunswick Victoria with paddocks not far away. Brunswick is virtually now within the Greater Melbourne CBD.

I recall an air raid shelter being dug in our backyard at the real start of WW2, after Japan had entered the war.

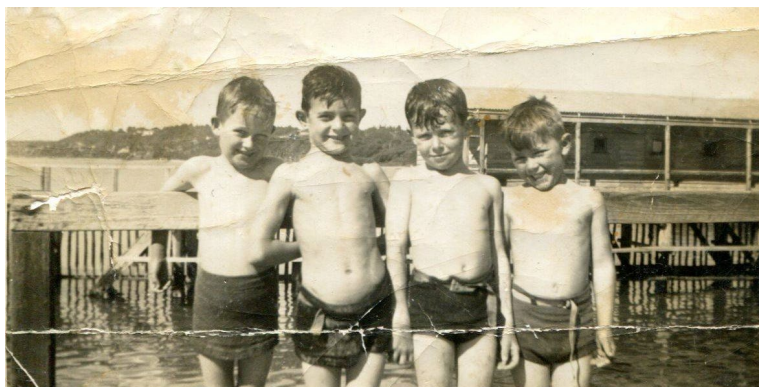
At some stage, my father came home in Air Force uniform but he was later decreed in an essential occupation as a PMG telephone technician and barred from military service.

He played cricket with Doug Ring of 'The Invincibles' and was a very good spin bowler, also a quite talented pianist.

We moved down to seaside Mornington sometime in 1942.

Life in those days was very basic. No sewerage or refrigeration and chip heaters for infrequent bath water heating. Food and clothing purchases were restricted via ration coupons.

Living seaside, we spent much time at beaches overdosing with sunburn causing skin problems in later years. Also, enjoyment via fishing and rabbiting to help feed the family.



Brian and Kevin Dirou at right

A Saturday afternoon matinee featuring ongoing war newsreels and western movies was a primary entertainment for kids; threepence for admission and threepence to spend was a very big deal.

My next younger brother Kevin and I both got involved with the cub and scout movements with occasional camping in the bush learning some basic skills and perhaps developing a creative flair.



Brian and Kevin Dirou

When a bit older, I played Australian rules football, cricket and did gymnastics up until leaving school in 1952.



Alas, our home life suffered from typical Australian adult addictions to drinking, smoking and gambling which affected my schooling performance causing me to fail Victorian Intermediate Certificate that I achieved via night school a bit later.

Reflecting on my life overall, I could have benefited much at that stage and later throughout the journey by seeking out mentors.

My boyhood aspiration probably originated when I somehow managed to read and/or hear on radio a series titled: '*The Air Adventures of Biggles*' inspiring me toward joining the Air Force.

After leaving school in 1952, I was accepted for RAAF Radio Apprentice training at Frognall in Melbourne and had a rail warrant for enlistment, but my father urged me to follow in his footsteps as a PMG telephone technician.

I left home at 15 and boarded at several locations in Melbourne, but it was seen that I was not happy in technician training and transferred to a postal clerk/telegraphist role that I performed for a couple of years before again applying for Air Force enlistment.

I applied unsuccessfully for pilot training in 1956 but accepted aircrew signaller training at Ballarat Victoria where I did flying training privately on Tiger Moths during 1957/58.

After sergeant signaller graduation in 1958, I served on crashboats at Point Cook and Darwin, Lincoln and Dakota aircraft at School of Air Navigation Sale before applying for RAN Fleet Air Arm pilot training.



When interviewed in Melbourne by an RAN group covered in gold braid, I was informed I would probably make a Navy pilot but would never make a Naval Officer. On return to RAAF Base Sale same day, I learned I had been commissioned as a Pilot Officer!

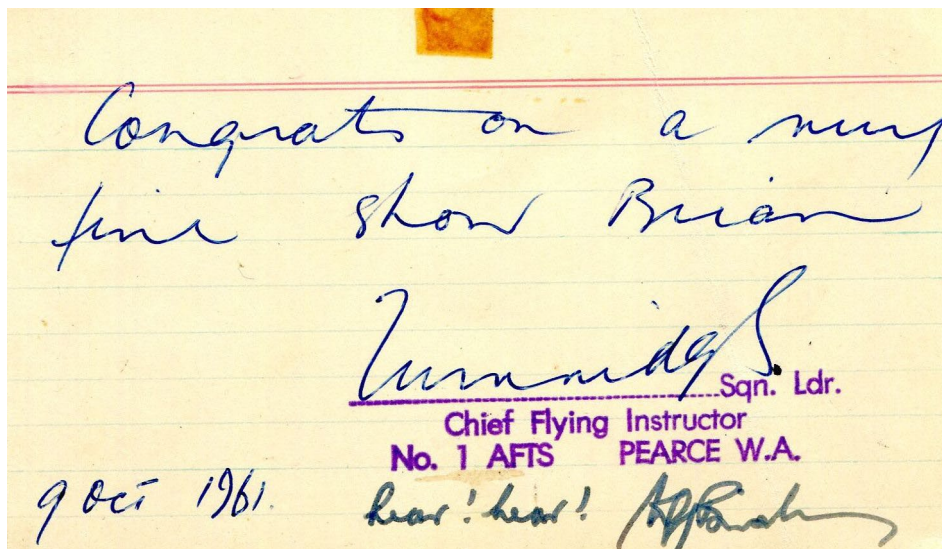
Having twice been through aircrew recruitment processes, I was more tuned to requirements and progressively improved my aptitude testing skills. When next applying for Air Force pilot training, I gained a Stanine Rating of 9 and was successful for No. 40 Pilot Course.



*Bob Henry, Darryl Sullivan, Graeme Nicholson, Terry Hunt, John Jacobsen, Brian Hammond, Gary Kimberley
John Ellis, Merv Lewis, Bob Thompson, Brian Dirou, Bruce Vest, Alan Pappin, Paul Smith
Commencing Vampire training at Pearce WA May 1961. 12 of 14 graduated as pilots.*

I wed prematurely at 23 early in 1960 and was perhaps the first married member to undergo pilot training.



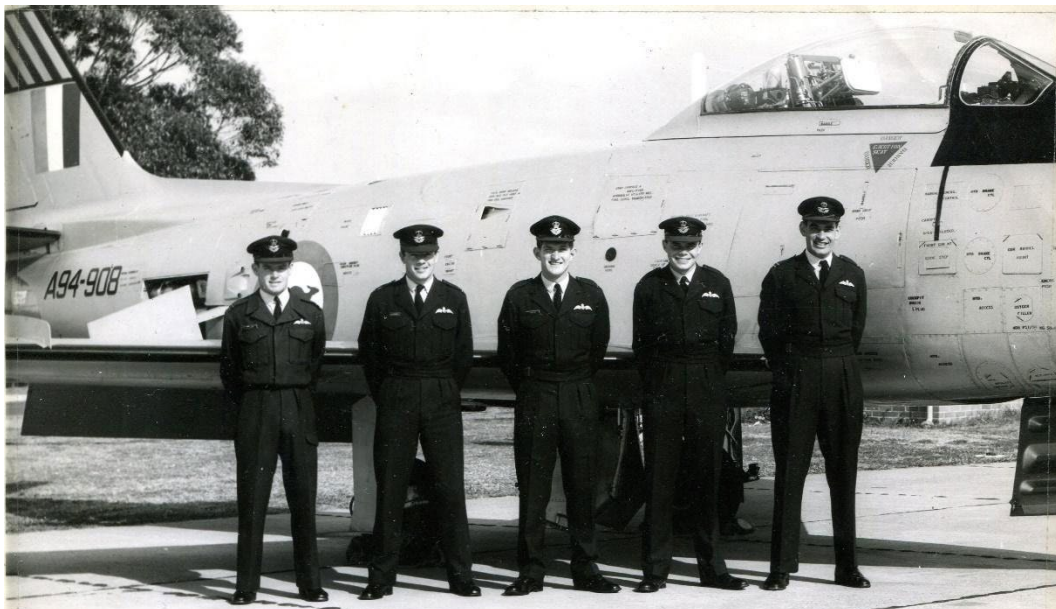


I gained most awards and was posted back to Sale in 1961 for Dakota flying then Darwin with some interesting experiences over about 3 years.



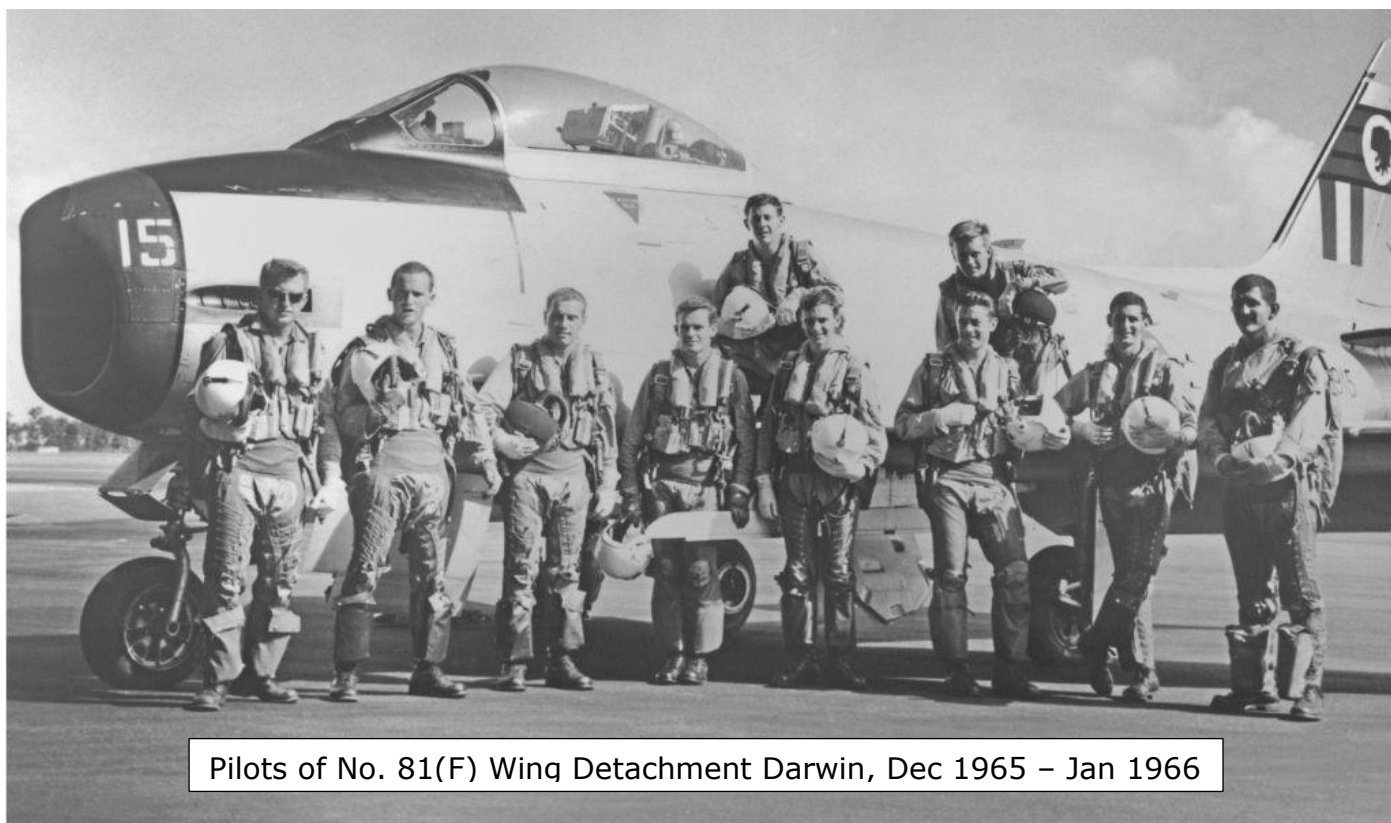
Dakotas at Darwin

Next, a posting to Williamtown in 1964 for Sabre fighter operational conversion and the BD tag may have originated when later serving with 76SQN.



*Brian Dirou, Geoff Peterkin, Al Walsh, Les Dunn, Ray Funnell.
Pilot Officer Doug May was killed in a flypast event near Quirindi NSW during Sabre training.*

Multiple 2 months detachments to Darwin soon followed which ultimately led to marital separation with eventual divorce about 5 years hence.



Pilots of No. 81(F) Wing Detachment Darwin, Dec 1965 – Jan 1966

Charlie Philcox, Brian Fooks, John DeRuyter, Brian Dirou, Peter Condon (on wing), 'Mac' Cottrell, Geoff Peterkin, Jack Smith (on wing), Dick Kelloway, Al Walsh

During Confrontation with Indonesia, detachments of No. 81 (Fighter) Wing were continuously deployed from Williamtown to Darwin between August 1964 and September 1966 providing air defence in northern Australia to counter Indonesian Air Force intrusions into Australian airspace. Aircraft and personnel were drawn from all Williamtown based flying units and the pilots for this detachment (commanded by Brian Dirou) were all from No. 76 Squadron. Brian Fooks, Brian Dirou and 'Mac' Cottrell were each later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross during Vietnam War operations and Dick Kelloway received a Mention in Dispatches.

In 1966, I was offered pilot employment with 4 international airlines and opted for Qantas to fly Lockheed Electras; but the local Warlord OC at Williamtown took a dim view and I was grounded occupying mundane staff jobs for about 10 months. However, I somehow achieved Forward Air Controller qualification.

Early in 1967, I was informed if I wished to return to flying duties, I would have to accept a posting to helicopters for Vietnam service.



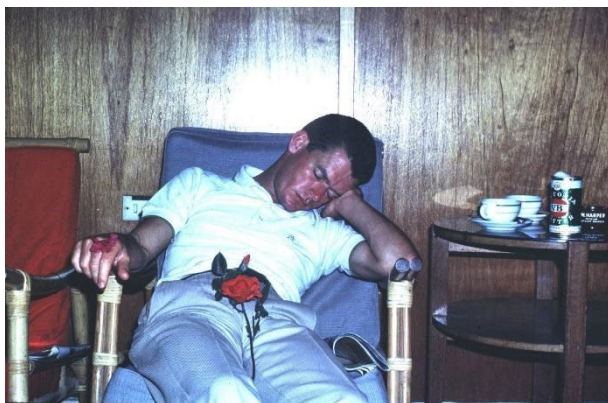
Brian Dirou, Graeme Downs, Bob Rider, Rod Adam, Bob Kendall, John Landale, Don Porter, Lloyd Knight

After Iroquois conversion with 5SQN at Canberra, I was posted to 9SQN Vietnam early March 1968 serving 15 months during the most intensive period of operations for Australian forces.

Within 24 hours of arrival at Vung Tau, I was very surprisingly appointed Unit Air Weapons Officer and Project Officer for UH-1H Iroquois gunship development. These were just tasks secondary to my primary role as an operational pilot.

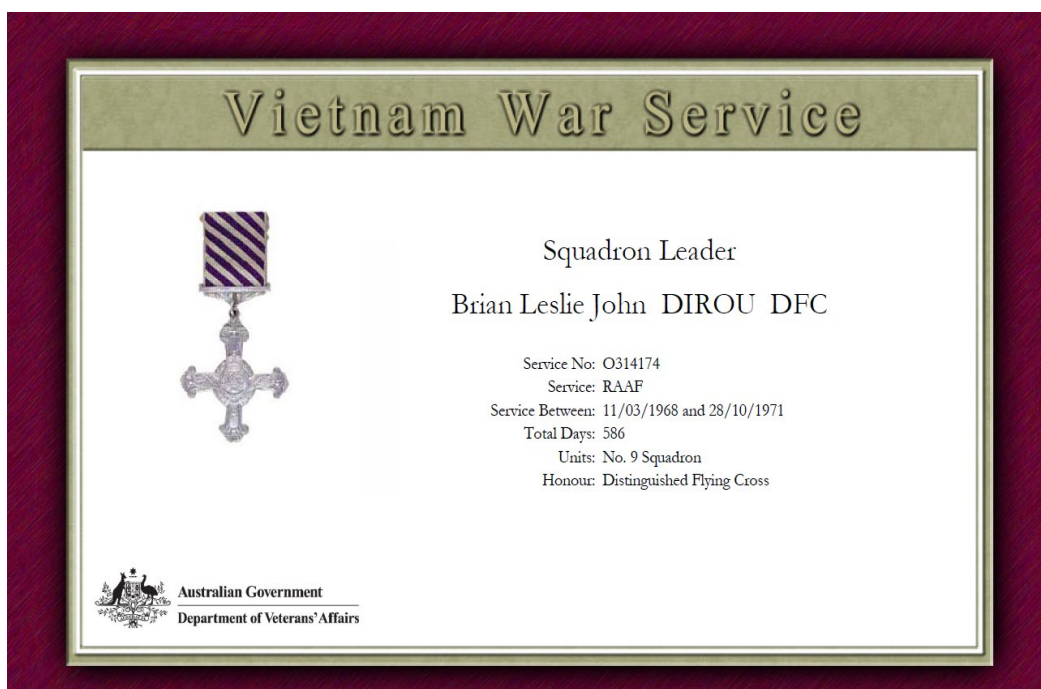
After about 2 months while still performing as a co-pilot, I was involved in a very agonizing incident when flying with Frank Clough that decided me not to record any operational activities. I thus never reported action events to unit executives or Officers performing unit history functions as secondary duties so anything recorded by others about my involvements may not be as I recall.

The operational activity for the first several months of my tour was intense, often beginning and ending days in darkness with perhaps a day off each 8 or 10 days. When I went down to Penang Malaysia for 4 days of rest, I slept the clock twice around for 24 hours due to exhaustion.

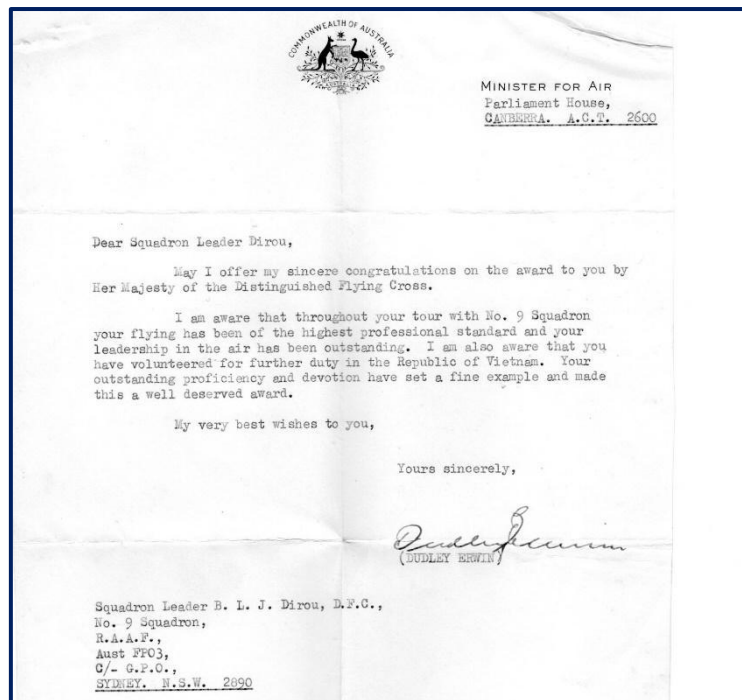


Exhaustion at Officers Mess Vung Tau 1968, then age 30. 'Decorated' by junior pilots.

On 9Jun68, I was unexpectedly designated as mission leader for a night extraction of a SAS patrol without any prior training and thereafter, I was frequently programmed in mission leader roles. Subsequent award of a DFC, invested personally by HRH Queen Elizabeth II, was unrelated to gunship development and operations.



STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE	STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE
<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HONOURS AND AWARDS</u> <u>Christian Names:</u> Brian Leslie John <u>Surname:</u> DIROU <u>Rank:</u> Squadron Leader <u>Official Number:</u> O314174 1. Squadron Leader DIROU joined No 9 Squadron in March this year. Since then he has been employed continuously on operational flying in support of 1ATF. His flying has been of the highest professional standard and his leadership in the air has been outstanding. The four undermentioned instances highlight the circumstances in which his professional handling of a most dangerous situation has "saved the day". 2. Two of these instances were night extractions under enemy fire, of long range reconnaissance patrols. On both occasions the patrols had contact with an unknown size force late in the day. Since they only had a small quantity of ammunition left and the chance of completely breaking contact was remote, they called for extraction by helicopter. Although reaction was prompt in both cases, darkness had fallen before the complete extraction group could be organized. Having assembled his extraction group, Squadron Leader DIROU was then responsible for contact with the patrol, direction of the flareship and artillery flares, control of the light fire team and suppression by the team, leadership of the extraction team and arranging for back up of artillery. He methodically completed these many tasks with special emphasis on accurate suppressive fire from the gunships while the patrols were being extracted to safety. The successful completion of these extractions under most hazardous conditions and the fact that there were no casualties amongst all concerned reflects directly on his professional handling of these dangerous situations. 3. The third instance also concerned the safe extraction of another long range reconnaissance patrol from "under the nose of the enemy". In this case a large, heavily armed enemy force was seen moving in the extraction area just prior to the planned withdrawal of the patrol. Squadron Leader DIROU held off the extraction and immediately called in artillery and air strikes on the enemy position. His timely actions not only resulted in a serious set back to the enemy but also prevented the patrol from being detected and outnumbered by a much larger and more heavily armed group. 4. The fourth instance of his outstanding leadership was in the role he played in the recovery of a gunship which had forced landed in enemy held territory. Here it was a race against the dark in order to recover the aircraft in time. /DIROU STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE	- 2 - DIROU was the first aircraft to respond to the downed aircraft's distress calls. He landed next to the gunship and after taking on board the crew, he made certain no weapons were left on the downed gunship. He then proceeded to organise the lift out of the gunship and this was completed just prior to nightfall. 5. For such professionalism, dedication, valour and outstanding leadership I recommend Squadron Leader DIROU be awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. <u>Date of Unit Commander's Recommendation:</u> 23rd November 1968 <u>Date of Birth:</u> 27th September 1937 <u>Date of Enlistment:</u> 4th March 1957 <u>Decorations and Honours already held:</u> Nil <u>Award Recommended:</u> Distinguished Flying Cross <u>Private Address:</u> 7 Anderson Street, DIMBOOLA VIC <u>Date:</u> 23rd November 1968 Signed (J.A. PAULS) Wing Commander Commanding Officer STAFF-IN-CONFIDENCE



About mid-1968, I was made Acting Squadron Leader but never told why. Rank was irrelevant in any projects assigned and was made substantive at end of 1968. A Flight Lieutenant (formerly RAF) was appointed in a Flight Commander capacity (which offended) but I just focused on my primary operational pilot functions and was never invited to participate in chain of command deliberations.

My record of a 15 month operational tour ending 3Jun69 shows 999:15 hours flown but I was not very religious in logbook keeping and would have easily passed 1,000 hours.

AIRCREW RECORD OF OPERATIONAL TOUR	
(Do not attempt to fill in return without reading instructions inside front cover.)	
Member's Number	0314174 Rank SQN LDR
Name	B.L.J. DIROU
Category	PILOT
Part 1 — RECORD of OPERATIONAL TOUR with No. 9 SQN. in VIETNAM	
Date Tour Commenced	8MAR68 By posting to No. 9 Squadron
Date Tour Finished	3JUN69 By posting from No. 9 Squadron to 55SQN
Part 2 — DETAILS of FLYING on TOUR between ABOVE DATES	
(a) Number of operational sorties performed	(i) Strikes and attacks 3726
(b) Number of operational hours flown	(i) Day 954.20
(c) Number of other hours flown	(ii) Night 21.40
(d) Approximate date of first operational sortie	8MAR68
(e) Approximate date of last operational sortie	2JUN69
(f) Approximate period, if any, non-effective between (d) and (e) due to minor casualties, sickness, or leave beyond the area	25 days
Signature of Member <i>B.L.J. Dirou</i>	
(g) Logbook assessment at Squadron <i>Well above the average and fairly high</i>	
(h) Commanding officer's recommendation as to the subsequent duty for which the member is considered suitable <i>Fighter/ground attack</i>	
Officer Commanding <i>[Signature]</i>	

This space for use by R.A.A.F. HQs. only.

I was burnt out. I felt okay in the cockpit and during air travel but did not want to perform the operational role anymore.

At some stage, I served a few months at RAAF Air Support Unit (ASU) Williamtown generating Joint Service doctrine. ASU eventually became the ADF Warfare Training Centre.

Later in 1969, I was again offered pilot employment with Qantas and accepted after 13 years Air Force service. I figured I could cope okay with sedentary airline flying.

Soon after completing Boeing 707 training, I was aimlessly wandering the streets of Sydney despondent and near broke. I bumped then Group Captain John Chesterfield who was Director of Postings Officers and he asked if I would be willing to re-enlist due to shortage of pilots at my rank and experience level to sustain the Vietnam commitment. Retrenchment of 150 Qantas pilots seemed imminent so I chose to return to RAAF service in August 1970 due to financial necessity.

When back at Canberra for Iroquois refresher training, I met my now wife Diane whose former husband had flown Caribou with 35SQN in Vietnam and was killed in April 1969 when undergoing flying instructor training at RAAF East Sale. She was pregnant at the time and later had an infant daughter.



I was posted back to 9SQN in Vietnam early June 1971 for Flight Commander duties but again not given a chain of command function. I spent a few weeks living at Nui Dat as Task Force Air Commander Representative.

Combat operations virtually ceased at end of October and the CO wanted me to take the Squadron home on HMAS Sydney, but I declined and requested early return to Australia which was approved.

Except for a 3 month period as Gunship Flight Commander, my 586 days in Vietnam were mostly as a supernumerary Squadron Leader, an anomalous situation condoned by unit Commanding Officers.

During overall Vietnam service embracing over 1,279 flying hours/4,360 sorties, I participated in 50 engagements with opposition forces including 15 flying Bushranger gunships in May 1969. I was involved in 211 insertions/extractions of Australian and New Zealand Special Air Service patrols and mission leader for 2 of only 4 night extractions of SAS patrols in contact with enemy forces during Australian involvement in that conflict.

I was posted to Headquarters Operational Command at Glenbrook NSW in 1972 then established and headed the Helicopter Operations cell. During the posting, my former wife died of a cerebral hemorrhage and 3 daughters of that marriage came into our family with the arrival of a new baby making 5 girls in all.



I protested another attempted posting in 1973 and Canberra somewhat grudgingly relented, deferring until early 1974 a posting to 9SQN at Amberley.

In 1975, I was promoted to Wing Commander and posted to RAAF Staff College, then at end of that course back to 9SQN as CO during 1976/77.



Canberra 1975

Then a posting to Defair Canberra in August 1977 where I went unaccompanied due to 5 postings in 6 years while trying to stabilize a composite family. In hindsight, I much regret not resigning at Amberley for family reasons after 20 years of service overall.

I was grateful for having been offered further service enabling qualification for a DFRDB pension but felt very disillusioned and battered after the posting turbulence inflicted while trying to stabilize a composite family.

I finally resigned in September 1978 and surprisingly received a telecall from the Air Commodore Director General of Personnel asking would I consider withdrawing my resignation. I declined his request, but had he asked me to come to his office for dialogue, there could have been a different outcome although bruises and scars incurred from overall service were mentally dominating.

When avidly reading aviation related stuff in my younger days, a Douglas Bader adage in 'Reach for the Sky' became embedded in my mind: *'Rules are made for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men'*.

Throughout life, my disposition became somewhat non-conformist and I leaned toward creativeness. I had no aspirations toward higher rank and was probably not suited for an Air Force career.

After leaving the Air Force in 1978, we moved to Emerald Central Queensland spending 13 years in that region, then in 1990 accepted another Qantas offer of non-flying employment in flight operations training. About 3 years hence, a voluntary retrenchment offer was availed followed by similar roles with international airlines in Austria and Kuwait. Invited back to Qantas for more contract service, then another airline job in Brunei (Borneo).

PTSD manifested within me while working in Brunei near 30 years after Vietnam service. I then retired on medical grounds to Port Douglas Queensland in 1998 and underwent comprehensive psychiatric and psychological evaluations, also involving my wife. Subsequently, Rex Budd and I together accessed the excellent remedial services then available at Cairns via the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service.

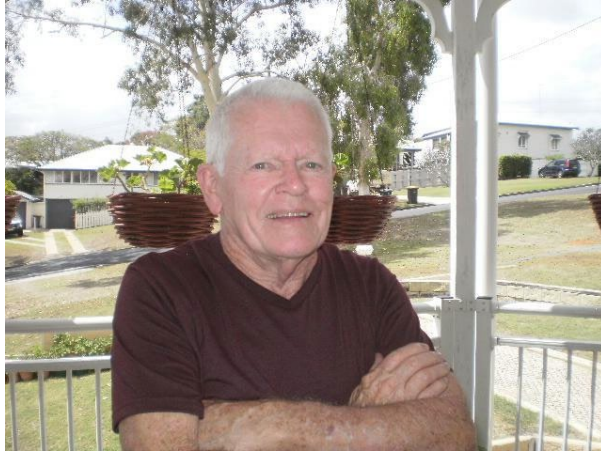
I had developed tremors at end of the 15 month Vietnam tour in 1968/69 that worsened over time adversely impacting drinking eating and writing functions resulting in remedial Deep Brain Stimulation surgery in November 2022, some 53 years later. I have recovered well according to medicos, supposedly having the physical and mental characteristics of a 50 year old!



After Deep Brain Stimulation surgery 10Nov23

My family lost 3 members in WW1 with another badly wounded and decorated. Nevertheless, there was an enduring military lineage and although my own experiences had some adverse consequences, I have maintained a hobby interest in military history.

We now live quietly at Rockhampton Queensland. I socialize occasionally, but prominence has always made me feel uncomfortable and I generally prefer solitude.



BD at 86 years in 2023


BRIAN DIROU, DFC
Rockhampton, Queensland
April 2025